Nicholas Osmond

THE IMAGINARY LOVE-LIFE

OF

GERARD DE NERVAL

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ERRATA

Page 15	line 13	omit new-born
page 18	line 10	for mood read mode
page 1	line 38	for chez read selon
pages 5 and 7	Notes	for psychocritique read psycho-critique
page 28	line 24	for authentic. read authentic
page 30	line 5	for 'Cromwell',(1827)[1] read 'Cromwell', (1827)[1],
page 30	line 11	for poems read poem
page 30	line 26	for ('les Dieux grecs') read ('Les Dieux grecs')
page 66		omit we shall see that
page 94	line 23	for Grandfather's read grandfather's
page 97	line 1	for Fuast's read Faust's
page 99	line 8	for rôle read role
page 115	line 25	for letters, would seem read letters-would seem
page 146	line 19	for Fenchères read Feuchères
page 183	line 8	for passaway read pass away
page 191	line 21	for plusiers read plusieurs
page 197	lines 3 - 4	for a Queen and Goddess read Queen and Goddess
page 202	line 2	for uncommited read uncommitted
page 207	line 11	for "rendezvous manqué" read rendezvous manqué
page 317	line 3	for & read and
page 330	line 1	for a normal read normal
page 343	line 24	for January-April 1948 read April-May 1948
page 376	line 6	for old dream read old fantasy
page 430	last line	(o.c.I,25) read (o.c.I,258)
page 441	lines 20-21	for 3 vols.,(Société read (3 vols., Société
page 447	line 15	for Estéve read Estève

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A R G U M E N T

ARGUMENT

INTRODUCTION

The thesis will develop Mauron's synchronic, Freudian account of the motivation of Nerval's writing into a detailed history of his imagination. Nerval projects into his works his dream of recapturing a disrupted childhood happiness through union with a woman representing his mother. The older rival who challenges this ambition is a complex figure standing not only for the father, but also for Nerval's more successful friends, symbolising his craving for love and his longing for recognition as a writer. The basic pattern forms gradually and is strengthened by the visionary experience of 1841. But from the beginning there are two poles of longing: the accessible village girl, and the remote, glamorous courtesan or actress. Both tend later to merge with the figure of the mother. They may be seen as twin aspects of a single type, the "blonde aux yeux noirs", whose features never take on a definitive individual shape, but are subject to ceaseless renewal, permutation and interchange.

In using literature to create a "second life", Nerval draws his material from the stock-in-trade of the Romantic artist. Yet although the primary motive for writing is entertainment rather than self-expression, the recurrence of certain obsessive patterns makes it clear that his work is shaped, not simply by a wish to provide a dutiful and reassuring mirror of fashionable contemporary themes, but by profound and personal imaginative needs. In his works Nerval creates an image of himself which at once depicts what he would like to become and reveals what he knows himself to be, so that self-projection is limited by the ironical censorship of self-honesty.

CHAPTER I

A review of Romantic themes in Nerval's work substantiates the point that his material is drawn from the stock-in-trade of the contemporary writer.

PART ONE:

LITERATURE AS A SECOND LIFE

CHAPTER II

Even real life is reshaped by fantasy. Casual sexual partners and female acquaintances are identified with the remote yet tender figures of the family of his dreams, whilst he builds up imaginary rivalries with friends whose sexual happiness he envies, setting up a pattern of alternate love and resentment which reproduces his attitude to the paternal figure.

CHAPTER III

The early lyrics already lament a lost adolescent love. The possibility of happiness is abstracted from time and transferred to the realm of the might-have-been, finding vicarious expression in Nerval's translations from the German. These contain the shadowy outline of later situations, in particular the desire to achieve - or to recapture - a simple happiness by marrying an ordinary country girl (Marguerite).

CHAPTER IV

In the late 1830's Jenny Colon replaces Marguerite as the object of Nerval's dream of happiness. 'L'Alchimiste' and 'Piquillo' express his fascination with this remote figure and his hope of eliciting a response. The 'Lettres à Jenny Colon', based on letters written to her during their brief and unsuccessful relationship, impose a subjective interpretation, directed by longing and narcissistic attitudinizing, on the recalcitrant (but deliberately obscured) fact of her indifference. The imaginative rearrangement of an unresolved situation will recur throughout Nerval's work.

CHAPTER V

After Jenny Colon's marriage to another man, Nerval creates a hero, Frantz Lewald, who, having recognised the subjective and illusory nature of his love for a remote aristocratic beauty, transfers his feelings to a childhood sweetheart, realising that it is with her true happiness lies. The 'Sylvie' theme of the return to the lost opportunity of adolescence is already developed, as is also the hero's ambiguous attitude to his successful rival, at once another version of himself and a stern father-figure, the usurper of the younger man's happiness. (This incorporates Nerval's secret feelings about Dumas and Ida Ferrier).

CHAPTER VI

'Corilla' is a further rearrangement, reverting to the time when all things were still possible, before the declaration of love to the actress. The story suggests, without implementing the suggestion, what Nerval will develop in 'Les Confidences de Nicolas' ten years later: that the loss of the actress need not have been tragic if he had only fallen in love with her because her roles reminded him of the village sweetheart. There is a new tendency here (see also 'La Polygamie est un cas pendable') to postulate that all women are facets of the one true love, although so far this only works as a fiction of the theatre. Further, if the actress, like the heroine of 'Un Roman à faire', had died before love had been put to the test of reality, the way would have been open to a purely transcendental relationship.

PART TWO:

LE REVE ET LA VIE

CHAPTER VII

Nerval did not, as Albérès suggests, undergo a sudden intellectual change of life in 1841. Nevertheless, whereas until now his works have represented an imaginative rearrangement of experience which kept within the bounds of normal human relationships in the real world, after the visionary experience Nerval is convinced that his true destiny will be played out in the world of spirit, through a series of actions which are also manifested in the recurrent cycles of history. Two races (corresponding to a good and a bad self) are in conflict; the good self is recognised and reunited with his true family, through union with a young girl resembling his mother. This also works through the delusion of being a noble bastard - here the conditions of the dream-destiny can be fulfilled without recourse to the supernatural.

For the dream is not an easy escape from reality. Privileged stretches of past time may now appear as the incursion of dream into reality (1842 version of Letter V), and, since the mother also represents death, it may be necessary to cross into the other world to reach her. But the sense of 'Polyphile' is that Nerval has compromised his chances of a pure dream-union with the mother goddess, and the theme of 'Le Roman tragique' will be the difficult matching of dream to reality: the hero tries to make his dreams come true by enacting them, taking Nerval's use of the theatre as a backcloth for fantasy to its logical conclusion. He appears either as a god-like hero or a pathetic lunatic. But in 'La Forêt noire' he will get the best of both worlds, since he is united with his family both in a mystical paradise and in this life.

CHAPTERS VIII AND IX

After 1841 Nerval oscillates between the creation of an image of his real life and the re-enactment of his dream-destiny. The invention of a "real" past begins with the ironical portrait of himself as Don Juan (envied by the other self, the ineffectual dreamer), and continues in the Middle East. His (retrospective) exploration of the possibility of establishing a relationship with the slave-girl Zeynab reveals at once his longing for a normal happiness and his sense of sexual inadequacy. But even this image of reality is secretly influenced by Nerval's otherworldly longings, so that beneath the dualism there is an imaginative unity.

CHAPTER X

Thus the three levels which one can discern in the 'Voyage en Orient' - dream (contes), reality (Zeynab) and an intermediate blend (Saléma) - all conform to the same underlying pattern. One would expect the contes, a direct transposition of the visionary experience, to give the greatest freedom, so that the purely mythical hero could achieve the final consummation through union with the goddess. But it is not so. Even here, the hero's dreams have to be transposed into reality. Thus there is a constant interchange, for, as we have seen, reality in its turn tends to conform to the conditions of the dream. The intermediate genre reflects Nerval's position most faithfully, for (like 'Le Roman tragique' and, in its different way, the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon'), it tries to effect the uneasy compromise between the two.

CHAPTER XI

After 1848 the strongest impulse is the idea of a return to the innocence and happiness of childhood by marrying a village sweetheart. In the works of 1849-50 this coincides with the fantasy in which the bastard hero discovers his noble origins, and with the dream of family reunion. The hero of 'Le Marquis de Fayolle', like Nerval himself, can only achieve his ambition through playacting, and the wedding-game he plays with Gabrielle is a substitute celebration of the family tie with the lost mother which both father and son try in vain to renew. In 'Angélique' Nerval establishes a subtle series of parallels between personal memories which revive childhood feelings, and the story of another historical doppelgänger (Bucquoy), which conforms again to the dream-pattern typified by 'La Forêt noire', though here the hero is replaced by his rival and banished from the family home.

CHAPTER XII

In 'Les Confidences' de Nicolas', the most unified vicarious version of Nerval's imaginary love-life to date, we have a rational synthesis: all the hero's loves are facets of the village sweetheart. As in 'Le Marquis de Fayolle' the avowedly maternal figure becomes as cold as death, and only in the somewhat equivocal substitute-figures can the hero find at least a semblance of the warm response he craves. Marguerite is a servant, Zéfire and Sara are girls of easy virtue. Each love-affair is the (unsuccessful) attempt at re-enactment of the unfulfilled love for the village girl whom he dared not approach. The final fulfilment is only partial, since Restif

does not return to her until they are both old - that is when she has become an amalgam of her young self and the venerable mother of the race. In other words, the image of a mundane happiness is made, once again, to conform to the central visionary experience. But at this stage, when Nerval feels that death separates him from the beloved, rather than holding out the promise of reunion, the dream is adjusted to the circumstances of a possible happiness.

CHAPTER XIII

The appropriation of Restif is a two-way process. Nerval imposes his own unity: all the hero's women share the same racial identity, and each love conforms to the same pattern. Yet the idea of the village girl as a prototype came from Restif.

CHAPTER XIV

The incursion of dream into reality, present even in 'Les Confidences de Nicolas', grows stronger in 1852-53, as Nerval's madness is gaining ground. But in proportion as the lure of the dream becomes more insistent, so the compensatory longing for security and normality is felt more deeply. Thus we have an ambiguous dream-figure, at once fascinating and frightening, balanced by a sweet normality. The whole pattern, present in the autobiographical writings of 1852 in a fragmentary state, is organised into a coherent, self-balancing system in 'L'Imagier de Harlem' (1851) and in 'Sylvie' (1852-53). In the first there is a reconciliation of opposites. The hero achieves domestic happiness and success in this world (in a form which realises the dream of family reunion), whilst retaining the protection of the ideal woman (the courtesan transfigured) who has shed her dangerous aspect. But when Nerval transposes this into pseudo-autobiography, no final reconciliation is possible. The hero is left oscillating between the two poles of Nerval's longing. The creation of a second life culminates here in the beautifully organised balance of its conflicting elements. But the mode of the might-have-been, since it entails the expression of desires which are still unsatisfied, can never achieve a final formulation.

CHAPTER XV

After the unresolved balance of 'Sylvie', Nerval, no doubt under the influence of the happy dreams recorded in Letter 275, appears to reach a solution in 'Aurélia' by suggesting that the longing for a normal

happiness was a departure from his true destiny, which is played out in the dream-world. 'Aurélia' gives a coherent and continuous shape to the dream-experience, culminating in mystical union with the transfigured Aurélia who is at once mother, lover and goddess. 'La Pandora' and 'Octavie', intermediate between 'Sylvie' and 'Aurélia', move towards this solution. But this is a retrospective construction of Nerval's sanity, and the mysterious sonnets, with their strongly dualistic structure, give a truer picture of Nerval's visionary experience. For in his last work he reverts to the search for the lost childhood happiness. But whereas 'Sylvie' recalled a period in his life when that happiness might still have been found through an actual person, 'Promenades et souvenirs' seeks the ghost of the past among the living phantoms of the present. The last appearance of the strolling players in Nerval's work symbolises the simple and tragic fact that it is impossible to give "to airy nothing/ A local habitation and a name".[1]

CONCLUSION

A summary of the outlines given above stresses that Nerval's imaginary life is never an easy escape into the never-never-land of dreams but rather a composite creation which struggles to accommodate the conflicting claims of dream and reality.

1. Shakespeare, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', Act V, scene i.

NOTE

For Nerval's principal works, reference is to the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade 'Oeuvres': vol. I, second edition, 1955; vol. II, first edition, 1956. (I refer incidentally to new material in the third edition of vol. I, 1960). References give simply volume and page number, thus: "I, 25".

For Nerval's other works, reference is either to original editions or reprints, or to the currently appearing series: 'Oeuvres complémentaires', published by Minard, referred to as "O.C. I, II," etc.

Details of other works referred to will be found in the Bibliography. Books which are referred to constantly will be designated simply by author's name and page number (e.g. A. Marie, 25) if the author is represented by one work only, and by author's name, short title and page number (e.g. J. Richer, 'Experience et création', 47) if he is represented by more than one.

In quotations, spelling is modernised throughout.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The Nervalian revival of recent years has, in accordance with the critical tendencies of our time, gone beyond the biographical approach whose chief monument is A. Marie's indispensable 'Gérard de Nerval, le poète et l'homme' (1914). 'Sylvie' is no longer read as thinly disguised autobiography. Instead, the critics of this post-Freudian age have probed the works for their latent meanings.[1]

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1. However, even a more sophisticated approach like that of Sébillotte (see below) is still using Nerval's works as documents in an autobiographical case-history, whilst a recent book by Peyrouzet combines a post-Freudian insistence on Nerval's mother-fixation with the traditional biographical treatment (by postulating new biographical models for the characters in Nerval's works). Peyrouzet has made several interesting discoveries about Nerval's relatives (an important field of study which has hitherto been neglected), including the fact that Dr. Labrunie's medical thesis painted a lurid picture of the dangers of sexual excess. The author suggests that what he sees as Nerval's fascinated aversion to sex and his corresponding idealisation of women, may date from reading this at an impressionable age. He traces the search for a mother- substitute in Nerval's relations with his father, with the family of Joseph Bonaparte (who owned the estate at Mortefontaine), his "cousin" Sophie-Françoise Paris de Lamaury (born in 1807), and of course Jenny Colon. The affaire with Sidonie, a Saint-Germain errand-girl later seduced by a Guards officer (?), was an attempt, inspired by Goethe's seduction of Friederike Brion and that of Marguerite in 'Faust', to grow out of the longing for maternal tenderness. The main objection to the book is that the imaginative stuff of Nerval's works is more complex than M. Peyrouzet, treating them virtually as "romans à clé", makes it appear. And it is a great pity that he has mingled fact with hypothesis (sometimes extremely tenuous) by choosing the form of the "vie romancée". Nevertheless, there are valuable insights. In particular, M. Peyrouzet stresses the importance of the sister-figure in Nerval's imaginative life, and key passages from the works are admirably illuminated. (M. Peyrouzet, whom I did not read until this thesis was virtually complete, gives interpretations of 'L'Alchimiste', 'Léo Burckart' and 'L'Histoire du calife Hakem' which at several points coincide with my own).

Some critics, of course, have used Nerval unscrupulously to support their own theories. André Breton, disregarding Nerval's lucidity as an artist, invokes his name when making the famous definition of automatic writing ('Manifeste du surréalisme', 1924) whilst Michel Carrouges praises Nerval's celebration of the communion between man and nature through the union of man and woman, forgetting that he was preoccupied precisely with the impossibility of this union ('Les pouvoirs de la femme chez Nerval et Breton', 'Cahiers du Sud', No. 292, 1948).

For a review of critical approaches, see L. Cellier's chapter, 'La Montée lumineuse', in 'Nerval, l'homme et l'oeuvre' (1956) and R. Jean, 'Nerval par lui-même' (1964), 11 ff.

Jean Richer suggests a three-fold classification of critical approaches, which can be characterised as the Bachelardian, the Jungian and the Freudian.[1]

Bachelard himself has not, as far as I know, made a special study of Nerval, but his approach to the writer's imagination through his imagery has been widely followed.[2]

J.-P. Weber maintains that the theme of ignition in Nerval's work recaptures an essential emotional experience of childhood[3], R. Jean attempts to assign emotive values to the four elements[4], whilst Ross Chambers, more intelligibly, demonstrates the importance of water as a "binding principle" in 'Sylvie'.[5] J.-P. Richard, too, proposes that the deepest meaning of a work will be found in images whose recurrence reveals their obsessive importance.

Nerval's preoccupation with "profondeur", corresponding to his own "identité multiforme", reflects a desire to penetrate beneath the layers of appearance to the centre of the labyrinth where the lost paradise of his and the world's youth may be found. His aim is the reconciliation of opposites,

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1. 'Nerval devant la psychanalyse', 'Cahiers de l'Association internationale des Etudes françaises', June 1955.

2. Bachelard's 'La Terre et les rêveries du repos' (Corti, 1948) has an analysis of a dream in 'Aurélia'.

3. 'Nerval et les "mains pleines de feux"', 'La Table ronde', March 1959.

4. 'Nerval et les visages de la nature', 'Mercure de France', June 1951.

5. "The presence of water in the <u>nouvelle</u> is part of its never formulated but constantly present suggestion that what is really at stake is a conflict between the forces of life and death at work in the world, still water suggesting death, and moving water (replacing fire) acquiring by contrast the value of life". A "quiet synthesis" is achieved in "remous d'eau stagnante". ('Water in <u>Sylvie</u>','Modern Language Review', 1963.)

as in the grotto or the volcano ("profondeur surgie") or in the creative fusion of the elements. At his best, Richard seems to be taking us to the heart of Nerval's imagination, but his higher flights may occasion a dizzy sense of unreality which is not diminished by his use of jargon or his love of paradox. The analysis of metaphor, as in the work of Georges Poulet, can itself turn into a metaphor, as though criticism, forgetting that its duty lies in sober elucidation, were using the literary work as a source of material for creation at second-hand.[1]

The Jungian approach was formulated by M. Richer himself in 1955: Nerval draws on archetypal images which are "le bien commun de l'humanité". This position is restated in 'Nerval, Expérience et création' (1963), though certain formulations now appear to equate the collective unconscious with zeitgeist.[2] For M. Richer, the dynamic and constantly evolving structures of

1. J.-P. Richard, 'Géographie magique de Nerval', in 'Poésie et profondeur', Editions du seuil, 1955. M. Richard's almost primitive faith in words can lead to curious results, as when he says that the word "myosotis" is "l'une des solutions les plus heureuses que Nerval ait jamais trouvées à ses problèmes" (86). Cf G. Poulet, 'Sylvie ou la pensée de Nerval', 'Cahiers du Sud', October 1938, reprinted in 'Etudes sur le temps humain', Plon, 1950, and 'Nerval et le cercle onirique' ('Cahiers du Sud', Autumn 1955), reprinted in 'Les Métamorphoses du cercle', Plon, 1961.

2. See 'Nerval devant la psychanalyse' (1955) and 'Expérience et création', Introduction, passim. See also M. Richer's 'Nerval et ses fantômes', 'Mercure de France', June 1951. Other critics, too, have seen Nerval's works as a repository for the myths of the collective unconscious. Thus R.-M. Albérès can suggest that future generations of critics, if they were confronted with Nerval's major works in ignorance of their authorship, would take them for "un cycle légendaire mystique et amoureux, vraisemblablement élaboré par plusieurs aèdes du début du XIXe siècle" ('Nerval et la rencontre napolitaine', 'Le Figaro littéraire', 15 January 1955). Such a theory could also account for the experience of R. Daumal, who reports having had dreams in which certain details corresponded exactly to those described by Nerval ('Nerval le nyctalope', 'Le Grand Jeu', Autumn 1930). See also O. Nadal, 'Poétique et poésie des chimères', 'Mercure de France', November 1955, and P. Schneider, 'Nerval ou le devoir de pureté','Mercure de France', December 1949.

Nerval's imagination are organised around archetypes which he now calls "le bien commun des hommes du XIXe siècle européen": Napoleon, Faust, Cain, Lilith, Prometheus. These however acquire a private value when they are identified with the types which haunt Nerval's own imagination, so that the collective myths develop into "mythes personnels". Whatever one's reservations about the notion of the collective unconscious, one is bound to concur with the somewhat modified theory put forward by M. Richer in 'Expérience et création': Nerval adapted to his own ends material which was public property, and in doing so he sought an outlet for his craving for love and happiness. The invaluable erudition of M. Richer and of M. François Constans[1] has mapped out the complicated systems of self-identification through which Nerval's longings were projected.

But this erudition has its dangers. It may take us away (to borrow Poulet's metaphor) from the centre of Nerval's imagination towards the endlessly receding concentric circles of allusion and self-identification, dispersing rather than concentrating our understanding of his experience as a human being. Abstruse marginal glosses lead us away from what we, as fellow human beings, can share, into fascinating areas of uncertainty[2].

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1. For the articles of F. Constans (so far uncollected) see Bibliography.

2. See for example M. Richer's 'Nerval dans la nuit du tombeau', 'Mercure de France', November 1952, or G. Le Breton's 'Gérard de Nerval, poète alchimique' ('Fontaine', Summer and October 1945), which find "keys" to 'Les Chimères' outside the poems themselves. Alison Fairlie has protested at the almost impenetrable barrier of expertise which modern criticism has erected between Nerval and the reader ('An Approach to Nerval', in 'Studies presented to Professor Mansell Jones', 1961), whilst Albert Gérard has shown that a satisfying reading of a sonnet like 'El Desdichado' must be made from the inside and that the poem can be enjoyed without the aid of hermeneutics ('Modern Language Review', 1963).

The most convincing attempt to date at giving an account of the unifying motivation of Nerval's work is the controversial "psycho-criticism" of Charles Mauron. The theory is developed from that of L. Sébillotte[1], according to which Nerval, sexually impotent with women he loved, was able to obtain gratification only with prostitutes and "femmes faciles". Sébillotte gives two reasons. The first, which Nerval admitted to himself, is that the beloved is an image of his own mother, so that the relationship becomes incestuous and therefore guilty. The second, deeper and unacknowledged, is Nerval's refusal to identify himself with his father, since he imagined the father's sexual possession of the mother as sadistic and murderous.

Mauron's method is to discover the "personal myth" underlying the network of obsessive images. At the centre of Nerval's neurosis he places, not sexual impotence, but the rivalry between father and son. In Nerval's works the

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1. 'Le Secret de Gérard de Nerval', Corti, 1948. In an extended review, Mauron develops Sébillotte's ideas into a theory of his own ('Nerval et la psychocritique', 'Cahiers du Sud', No. 293, 1949). Mauron criticises the author for his half-hearted and as it were shamefaced use of Freudian analysis. He himself adopts it frankly and boldly, later formulating his views on Nerval more fully in 'Des Métaphores obsédantes au mythe personnel. Introduction à la psychocritique', Corti, 1963. - See also C. Baudouin, 'Gérard de Nerval ou le nouvel Orphée', 'Psyché', January 1947.

   G. Ferdrière, in an article in 'Gavroche' dated 13 June 1946 ('Nerval et l'alchimie intérieure'), shows the typical pattern of manic-depression (cyclothymia) in Nerval's alternation between creative euphoria and sterile depression, while N. Rinsler studies Nerval's works as the product of the psycho-physiological type to which he belonged. But it is noticeable that Dr. Rinsler's illuminating study draws on Freudian techniques to account for the content of Nerval's imaginative experience ('Nerval: The Relationship between his Writings and his Temperament', Ph.D. Thesis, London 1961.)

recurrent situation is that the father appears in the guise of a military figure who tries to prevent the hero's union with a woman representing the mother, just as Dr. Labrunie, a uniformed stranger, had disrupted the happiness of his son's early years by taking him away from the village home where he had been brought up, and just as he had prevented him from enjoying the love of his mother. Since Nerval never knew his mother, she is represented in his imagination by "une espèce de nébuleuse féminine" made up of the women who had surrounded him during his Valois childhood. We may suppose that the most important memories were of cousins of his own age (see I, 49, 155, 352 and Peyrouzet, passim), his mother's sister Eugénie (see I, 165f, 398), his nurse (Gabrielle, "qui avait pris soin de ma jeunesse": see I, 396 and the letters of October 1853) and his grandmother (see 'La Grand'mère, I, 49). An insistent feature of later fantasies and visions is that the female members of the lost family are all facets of the same identity, providing an uninterrupted chain between the generations in which the sense of continuity is more important than the individual links. - It is likely that his young aunt was associated with his mother, since his image of the dead woman must have been formed by her sister's reminiscences.

Thus the image of the mother, for Mauron, is not primarily sexual. Indeed it may take many forms: it may be suppressed altogether by the conscious mind and appear as a symbolic presence, like the image of Saint Rosalia which presides over his union with the Neapolitan girl "qui va se donner à Gérard avec la simplicité maternelle des prostituées"[1]. When the father's embargo is

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1. Mauron, 'Des Métaphores obsédantes ...', 78. See the second version of the fifth 'Lettre à Jenny Colon'.

uppermost, it recedes - the woman becomes a nun, or is possessed by another man. In this case the hero's sense of abandonment may lead to a suicidal remorse, or he may, after a confrontation with the father, immolate himself to the paternal rival. 'Les Chimères' give us different stages in the triangle-situation: "mélancolie du fils vaincu, à qui l'image persécutrice (= le père) a volé son objet d'amour ('El Desdichado'), prière pour qu'on le lui rende ('Myrtho'), assurance du triomphe ('Horus'), rage de la victime et désir de revanche ('Antéros'), attente incertaine ('Delfica'), choix de la communion dans l'abîme et la mort ('Artémis')"[1]. Since the women are forbidden objects "leur image s'estompe, recule dans une lumière de rêve ou de théâtre, devient portrait ou objet de contemplation, prend un vague aspect de divinité, évoque la magie, le trouble et bientôt le malheur; un halo, qui pourrait devenir infernal, les entoure"[2]. Even when the mother becomes a lover, siding with the son against the father, both incur the latter's punishment. Only if the father adopts a passive role and allows the son to take his place can a happy union be consummated[3].

My debt to Mauron will be apparent throughout this thesis. The more one reads Nerval, the more clearly one sees that his works present a series of variations on what is essentially the same basic pattern of fantasy.

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1. Mauron, 'Des Métaphores ...', 76.

2. Mauron, 'Nerval et la psychocritique'.

3. The Saturnin episode in the final chapter of 'Aurélia'.

His hero seeks always, through union with a woman who is representative of the mother, to return to the family life he had known as a child, to the paradise of innocence and security. The father-figure, for all the love and deference which is due to him, is an obstacle to this sacred longing.

Yet Mauron's theory is too schematically Freudian to give a comprehensive account of the workings of Nerval's imagination. The father-figure is not simply a projection of Dr. Labrunie, nor is he only an impediment. Léo Burckart, for example, is at once a father-figure and a maturer, more successful version of Frantz, the young man whose happiness he has blocked. And he represents not only Nerval's father, but also the elder Dumas, the solidly established senior collaborator with whom Nerval affectionately identifies himself[1]. There is a recurrent contrast in Nerval's work between a timid idealist (himself) and a practical, even hard-headed rival who does what the idealist can only dream of doing, who possesses what the idealist impotently longs for. The biographical basis of this is the situation I shall describe in Chapter II: Nerval as the odd-man-out striving to participate in the love-life of his more successful friends. The dreamer is at a disadvantage, yet at the same time it is subtly established that his subjective emotions are finer than the other man's pragmatism. Thus in

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1. For E. Peyrouzet, the eternal triangle in 'Léo Burckart' is based on Nerval's feelings about the marriage of his "cousin" Sophie, a childhood sweetheart, to a man 19 years her senior. The connections are convincingly established, and it is probable that for Nerval this was indeed another example of the typical triangle-situation. Where Peyrouzet goes wrong, in my opinion, is in suggesting that the literary work is a transposition of a single biographical experience (which took place ten years before the play was written). (see Peyrouzet, 228 ff.)

'L'Histoire du calife Hakem' the Caliph is superior to his rival Yousouf because he is in touch with the other world, yet Yousouf effortlessly wins the love of Sétalmulc which Hakem can only imagine. Both are projections of Nerval himself, so that the story simultaneously affirms the validity of visionary experience and expresses more humdrum wishes for practical fulfilment. The practical rival thus represents (to return to the case of Léo Burckart) at once Dr. Labrunie, Dumas and Nerval himself. The literary character is not a mask for a single biographical "model" but a complex projection.

The opponent is always two-sided. In his paternal aspect he may be severe and disapproving, like Dr. Labrunie, or benevolent, like Nerval's beloved great-uncle, Antoine Boucher, who acted as father to him during the crucial early years[1]. In dreams, there is an old man who either presides over the family paradise or excludes Nerval from it, and in 'La Forêt noire' the father-figure alternates between the protective and the hostile roles. In the shape of the more experienced rival, he is both hated (because he possesses what the hero can only dream of possessing) and loved (because the hero can, through his success, enjoy a vicarious happiness). Later, as Nerval gets older, the rival will appear as a younger man with whom the hero himself takes up the paternal role, abdicating his claim to love in favour of the other, who thus, again, realises his longings at second hand.

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1. Peyrouzet maintains that Nerval's "spiritual father", the formative influence of his early life, was not Antoine Boucher but the eccentric Freemason Dr. Vassal, father-in-law of Dr. Labrunie's cousin, Auguste Dublanc.

The value of Mauron's theory is that it isolates the basic pattern of longing and fear of exclusion to which Nerval's imagination constantly reverts. But although the primary motivation is the desire to return to the lost paradise of childhood, life provides additional imaginative material, such as Nerval's triangular relationships with his friends and their wives or mistresses, which at once diversifies and strengthens the pattern. Further, the pattern does not exist, as it were, ready-made, from the beginning of Nerval's career as a creative writer. It develops gradually over the years, showing at first only dimly, in the shadows of the mind. By 1853 Nerval can state that he has loved one "eternal feminine", at once the Mother-Goddess, his own mother and the transfigured person of Aurélia-Jenny Colon, and that he can be united with her only in death ('Aurélia'). But in the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon' (1837-38) there are only tenuous hints of this.[1] In the fifth letter he describes how, too timid to approach the actress, he was reduced to suicidal despair after spending the night with a Neapolitan woman (perhaps a prostitute) who resembled her. This description comes three years after the event, and it is only now that he imagines a more positive version of the experience: he wishes that death would come to him after a night with Jenny herself, so that the moment of consummation would be prolonged and purified in eternity. As yet there is only the merest suggestion that the comfort which death would bring would have a maternal character. Then in the first version of 'Aurélia' (1841) we have only the

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1. The idea shows momentarily in the twelfth Letter: "Oh! nous sommes fiancés dans la vie et dans la mort!" See below, Chapter IV.

discreetest of indications that a prostitute seen in a doorway represents at once death and his dead mother. It is only in the final version twelve years later that the idea reaches its full development.

In any case, Jenny Colon is not originally identified with the mother. In the 1820's and 1830's Nerval's longing to return to the happiness of his Valois childhood finds expression only very vaguely and indirectly: negatively, in the early poems, and positively in a series of variations on Goethe's 'Faust' I, in which the hero marries a simple country girl. Nor does the figure of the father play an important part in the early works. The pattern will be strongly fixed only by the visionary experience of 1841. And in the early period the figure corresponding to the actress is seen as an alternative to the humble marriage which would reintegrate the lost happiness. Further, it is only after 1841 that the simple village girl will appear as the image of the lost mother. And after 1841 the underlying imaginative structure will be overlaid by an ostensible conflict between dream and reality, the actress and the village girl. Although at the deepest level both correspond to Nerval's dream-longings, yet one will be presented as a will-o'-the-wisp leading him into the swamps of madness, while the other stands for the normal, circumscribed happiness which he never ceased to desire[1].

Thus if we are to give a picture of the workings of Nerval's imagination which will have both depth and detail, we shall have to develop Mauron's synchronic account, postulating a single imaginative pattern

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1. See 'Sylvie' (1853). Thus Peyrouzet's book is one-sided because no reference is made to the dualism of Nerval's concept of woman.

existing from infancy, into a diachronic narrative[1]. I shall follow Mauron in indicating that, as Nerval grows older and the imaginative patterns deepen, it becomes increasingly clear that all the feminine figures he creates in his work are images of his lost mother. As a child he was shown an allegorical portrait which resembled his mother: "une gravure du temps, d'après Prud'hon ou Fragonard, qu'on appelait la Modestie"[2]. This was written at the end of Nerval's life. But already in the 1830's he is transposing his own longing to play Pygmalion when he describes how the 15-year-old Jacob in 'Le Prince des Sots' is so captivated by the portrait of his mother that it seems to come alive before his eyes. Nerval's comment ("une mauvaise gravure, au collège, fait plus rêver que la femme ou la fille du concierge"[3]) indicates, surely, that the lad's experience was his own. As so often, the experience finds an indirect expression many years before it is avowed and formulated. From Goethe's Marguerite onwards, the recurring figure of a young girl in the costume of an earlier age reflects

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1. Cf the excellent thesis of Helen Merz who plots the progressive dissolving effect of madness through an analysis of Nerval's style, showing how clarity, gaiety and order give way to a vision which becomes even more dynamic, blurred and shifting, expanding into a limitless emptiness and chaos ('Traum und Wirklichkeit bei Gérard de Nerval', Doctoral Dissertation, Zürich 1929).

2. 'Promenades et souvenirs', I, 159.

3. O.C. VI, 244 (my italics).

Nerval's longing to give life to the image of his mother[1].

The theatre, too, is a place where fantasies are embodied. From his seat in the stalls, Nerval would have seen Jenny Colon as his own dream come true, a subjective image clothed in flesh-and-blood. Plays like 'Léo Burckart', and by extension the whole of Nerval's work, can be seen as an attempt to give body to the shapes of his imagination. Even in real life, a woman may appear as the embodiment of the ideal beauty of his dreams[2].

The figures of Nerval's imagination are never flat and static, and although his heroines belong to the same basic type, yet the type is subject to variations. Thus his feminine creations are at once predictable and elusive.[3] In the early years a simple village girl appears as the foil to the opulent "Venetian" type represented by Jenny Colon. Both are only loosely associated, as yet, with Nerval's longing for a mother: the former because she stands for the tranquil feminine presences surrounding his early childhood; the latter because

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1. The Pygmalion theme may be taken as the central image of Nerval's embodiment of the figures of his fantasy in literary creation. It occurs explicitly in 'Corilla' (1839, I, 331), and may derive from Hoffmann - the mechanical doll in 'Der Sandmann', or the equivocal portrait of Venus/Saint Rosalia in 'Die Elixiere des Teufels', which is the ideal prototype of a series of feminine figures with alternately diabolic and divine attributes, and of which Nerval translated a short fragment. The theme also occurs in Nodier's 'La Fée aux miettes', by which Nerval was certainly influenced (see J. Richer, 'Expérience et création', 169).

2. See Chapter II

3. Cf Charles Baudouin on "les rondes de jeunes filles": "la figure féminine s'y dissout d'ailleurs dans la multiplicité et l'anonymat" ('Gérard de Nerval ou le nouvel Orphée', 'Psyché', January 1947).

Nerval links the idea of sexual possession with the motherly image of death. After 1841 the associations strengthen and the two figures tend to become interchangeable, since each, in Nerval's final analysis, is a facet of the mother's identity.

Both the village girl (of whom the most complete realisation is Sylvie) and the Venetian type are aspects of the "blonde aux yeux noirs" celebrated in 'Fantaisie' (1832). One is a fair-haired beauty with dark eyes, like the allegorical portrait of Modesty. The other is black-eyed and sensual, with luxuriant reddish-blond colouring[1]. In later works there is a variant of the latter in the comfortable, middle-aged figure of Marguerite in 'Les Confidences de Nicolas': based no doubt on Nerval's nurse, she is at once motherly and sensual[2]. But Marguerite responds sexually to Nicolas only when he is using her as a substitute for the pure young girl. Whenever her feelings for the hero are specified as being maternal, his response is chaste and reverential[3]. So, in 'Le Marquis de Fayolle', when the hero meets his mother (who, like Nerval's, abandoned him as a baby), she is utterly cold and remote, like a figure on a tomb. The mother's image arouses a warm response only when it appears, as it were, in disguise.

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1. "L'érotisme de Nerval postule toujours le feu ... la femme aux cheveux blonds ou roux, c'est pour Nerval la femme-flamme, la femme qui brûle et qui peut lui donner son feu" (J.-P. Richard, 'Géographie magique', 44-45).

2. Cf "la mère Yvonne", the hero's nourrice in 'Le Marquis de Fayolle'.

3. See also Mme. Parangon in the same work.

On the other hand, the Venetian type has its purely sensual aspect. In this case it may become semi-bestial: the red hair is replaced by a woolly fleece[1], the opulence thickens into a sort of animal placidity. Again, the type may appear as a femme fatale, like Pandora, or as a siren (at once bestial and mythological) who is both fascinating and frightening. The siren may take on the icy coldness of the avowed mother-figure[2]. The bestialisation of the erotic image is an extension of that strangeness which Nerval, like Baudelaire, found an indispensable ingredient of beauty. Hence his quest for foreign women[3]. But what he seeks is not only the stimulus of novelty. It is also a quest for the family paradise which he feels has been transplanted to another land or even to another world. The theme of the transplanted homeland is a key to Nerval's imagination.

His mother, who had left her new-born baby in order to follow her husband to the wars, died and was buried in Glogow, in central Europe. Thus in later years Nerval sees the crossing of the Rhine as an entry into the other world where she is to be found[4]. The fairy of the Rhine, Lorely (another version of the siren), embodies the call of the mother. And wherever Nerval goes he will look for secret evidence that the lost childhood paradise has been reconstituted. In the end all countries are one, just as all races repeat the identity of the original family. Nerval in Vienna is delighted

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1. "La femme mérinos" in 'Promenades et souvenirs'.
2. The Frisian waitresses at The Hague (II, 832-33).
3. See 'Carnet du Voyage en Orient', II, 706.
4. See especially Letter 311 and the preface to 'Lorély'.

by the cosmopolitan maid, Kathy, because she represents several nations at once.

For the most satisfying situation is one in which the different facets of the ideal mother-figure, whether associated with the actress or with the Gretchen-figure, are present simultaneously. Thus a young girl may combine the fragile chasteness of the village sweetheart with something of the buxom warmth and potential sensuality of the nurse-figure[1]. Better still - for this fulfills the conditions of the original childhood memory - two or three generations of the same family may be present. In one of the dreams of 'Aurélia', his mother appears to him in the guise of death, "(une) dame noire", but after the disrupted homeland has been reconstituted[2] she regains her white complexion and her youth, and in another dream has been transformed into a little girl[3]. In another passage of 'Aurélia' he dreams that he becomes as a little boy again and is cherished by three women, of whom one is appreciably older, whose features are interchangeable and who are all mysteriously the same (I, 376-77)[4]. Thus

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1. Kathy: "des épaules blanches et fermes, où il y a de la force d'Hercule et de la faiblesse et du charme de l'enfant de deux ans" (II, 37). See also Sara in 'Les Confidences de Nicolas' (II, 1071) and Sylvie(I, 274).

2. A reversal of the usual movement, for here a foreign home is re-established in France (I, 421).

3. Cf I, 421 & I, 415. (This will recur in 'La Forêt noire'). The mother's dark complexion is probably a sign that she is dead, and perhaps also that her original purity (which she regains) had been stained by marriage, by becoming Labrunie ("la brunie") or, as Nerval notes, La Brownia.

4. Later, this is transposed into Nerval's account of his visit to a Druse village (see II, 322 & Chapter X).

the most complete expression of Nerval's longing will be the projected marriage with a cousin who is a younger version of the mother, and its logical culmination is marriage to a sister, a feminine alter ego. This theme recurs frequently either directly or in disguised form[1]. We note that the pure happiness of this dream is a-sexual[2], as in the autobiographical hero's feelings for Sylvie. And with time, the dream will be adapted to Nerval's delusions about being a noble bastard: the mother-figure will appear as a great lady, and the village playmate will become a young aristocrat - without, however, losing her homeliness and accessibility.

I shall attempt to trace the interplay of complexity and simplicity, of expansion and contraction. For, whilst the basic pattern of motivation revealed by Mauron becomes ever more strongly marked as Nerval grows older, yet at the same time his whole imaginative effort is towards the invention or discovery of new fictions to provide variations on the recurrent themes.

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1. See 'Léo Burckart', when Frantz says to Marguerite; "ma mère n'est plus, et je n'ai point d'autre soeur que vous" (196); 'L'Histoire du calife Hakem'; 'Soliman', in which the hero's ancestor Cain loses his sister Alclinia to his brother Abel (again, a current theme - Byronic - takes on a private significance); and "Sylvie, que j'avais vue grandir, était pour moi comme une soeur" (I, 290).

2. It is true that there is some interchange between the prostitute and the village girl (see 'Corilla' and Zéfire in 'Les Confidences de Nicolas'), since both act as accessible substitutes for the dream-figure, but the effect is generally the purification of the venal woman.

Mauron, in considering the motivation of Nerval's work, has answered the question why? I shall be concerned with the question of how the patterns of imagination gradually take form, develop and interchange, moving towards the central experience which is formulated in 1841, and afterwards circling always around it, sifting new ingredients into a series of variations on the same theme whose final formulation, since it is a theme of longing, can never be achieved. This will be the history of Nerval's imagination.

Nerval is using his works, then, to construct a second life[1]. His characteristic mood is the conditional might-have-been, his characteristic genre the pseudo-autobiography of later years[2]. But even the earlier and apparently objective works of fiction or drama, translation, adaptation or vulgarisation, are moulded so that they contain the story of his longings. "L'on arrive pour ainsi dire à s'incarner dans le héros de son imagination, si bien que sa vie devienne la vôtre"[3]. Nerval should have added: and your life becomes the hero's, for this is a two-way process involving both borrowing and lending. As Jean Richer points out, self-projection is both self-analysis and self-creation: "par la projection

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1. He himself applies this term to dreaming: "le Rêve est une seconde vie" ('Aurélia', I, 363). But it may equally well be applied to his works, since they incorporate his dreams about his life.

2. I borrow this useful term from Dr. Norma Rinsler. L. Cellier's remark about 'Le Voyage en Orient' applies to Nerval's work as a whole: "il ne cesse de composer un personnage" (Cellier, 'Gérard de Nerval', 213)

3. Preface to 'Les Filles du feu', I, 174.

sur des êtres imaginaires, Gérard essaie de satisfaire un immense besoin de tendresse sans cesse déçu, un désir de communion qui ne fut satisfait, durant sa vie terrestre, par aucune femme, par aucune religion"[1].
The material of the works is invariably second-hand. A plagiarism which seemed blatant even by the laxer standards of Nerval's time[2] is his habitual method of creation. Thus, as J. Richer says, "les souvenirs de lectures ... ont même degré d'intensité et, pour ainsi dire, même valeur d'expérience que les souvenirs des événements de la vie" ('Expérience et création', 168).

Much of the material comes from the stock-in-trade of the Romantic generation[3]. Nerval is a mind steeped in the climate of his time. At one level he is consciously selecting fashionable material because he was determined to become a successful writer, to gain his share of the rapidly growing market for literature that was being exploited by semi-popular writers like Hugo, Dumas and Balzac. Hence, for example, his attempts to vie with Dumas or Hugo, Vigny or Mérimée, in the field of the historical novel[4]. But, as Nerval explains to Dumas in the Preface to 'Les Filles du feu', what he himself seeks in the historical past is a <u>doppelgänger</u> - a hero who mirrors his own experience. No doubt certain subjects come to hand because they are common property. In particular, Nerval shared with

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1. 'Expérience et création', 21.

2. Jules Janin called Nerval "(un) braconnier sur les terres d'autrui" (II, 737).

3. I shall indicate in the next chapter the extent to which Nerval's themes derive from contemporary <u>zeitgeist</u>.

4. None was completed. 'Le Prince des Sots' (O.C. VI) is a draft, while 'Le Marquis de Fayolle', published serially, was never finished.

his friend Gautier not only a wide range of subject-matter, but also a whole set of ideas and assumptions, so that they were able to write under a common signature. Yet Gautier's 'Le Capitaine Fracasse', although like Nerval's 'Le Roman tragique' it exploits the theme of strolling players, does so conventionally and as it were playfully. It has none of the manic urgency of Nerval's work[1]. For Nerval the colourful set theme has taken on a deep private significance: the hero who joins the troupe of strolling players so that he may enact a subjective love on the stage is a projection of his own ambition to realise his dreams about Jenny Colon through the medium of the theatre.

How did Nerval adapt fashionable material so that it became the imaginative projection of his own experience? The question is immensely complicated, and to answer it fully one would have to embark on a detailed study of how each of his sources was handled. It is not enough simply to indicate what these sources were, for what matters is exactly which elements were omitted, which were emphasised and above all which were added. The process can most clearly be revealed by a full study of one source: Nerval's arrangement of the autobiography of Restif de la Bretonne[2]. What emerges is a complex system of interchange involving both mimesis and self-creation. Nerval fashions Restif in his own image, but he also fashions himself in the image of Restif. And it is significant that what one recognises as the characteristically Nervalian passages are precisely those he has added or rewritten. Thus study of the sources confirms that the obsessive patterns

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1. J. Richèr, noting a certain similarity of structure between 'Le Capitaine Fracasse' and 'Sylvie', concludes that "Gautier a épousé certains rêves de son ami" ('Expérience et création, 216).

2. See Chapter XIII.

which give Nerval's work its internal coherence are projections of his own mind, that he is creating from borrowed material something which is essentially his own.[1]

This is not to say that the invention of a second life is the sole aim of Nerval's writing. The longing for wealth and reputation, the desire to emulate others and to prove himself professionally competent, the exigencies of journalism and of his own talent - all these, in varying proportions, would no doubt have constituted the avowed motives for writing. The image of the self does not conform exclusively to personal needs and anxieties: it is also intended to appeal to the taste of a public which expects the writer to be an exhibitionist. The creation of a literary persona obeys the laws of public demand as well as of private emotional needs. Nerval seems always, when writing in the first person, to be acting the part expected of him, whether it be that of the dashing young Fritz in Vienna (his version of Don Juan, that blasé hero of his time), or that of the Romantic traveller who is less interested in his daguerrotype than in seeking the exotic Orient beneath the accretions of modern colonialism. On the surface, Nerval is an admirably skilled entertainer, a journalist fulfilling journalism's traditional function of giving the public what they want.

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1. Cf J.-P. Richard: "Ce thème du double, si fréquent dans la littérature romantique, prend ici une valeur spécialement douloureuse en raison des racines qu'il jette dans l'expérience la plus intime" ('Poésie et profondeur', 60). See also C. Mauron: "Nerval a exploré ses propres rêves. Il y était invité par Hoffmann et le romantisme allemand; surtout il y était conduit par cette nécessité vitale de descendre dans sa propre vie intérieure, d'y combattre le Malin et d'en chasser la folie" ('Nerval et la psycho-critique', 'Cahiers du Sud', No. 292, 1949). For an excellent analysis of the way in which personal emotion combines with the procedures of an established tradition to produce the literary work, see G. Gadoffre, 'Ronsard par lui-même', Eds. du Seuil, 1960, 53ff.

Yet though the immediate motive is not self-expression[1], the sensitive and alert reading of Nerval to which critics like J.-P. Richard have accustomed us reveals the essence of his literary enterprise: a profound self-exploration. 'Le Voyage en Orient' may be written, one one level, to show the world that he is restored to sanity and competence, but it is also the vehicle for his most intimate, most insidious longings. The picture of Nerval as a sophisticated man of letters skilfully turning out a judiciously pleasant literary product, whilst containing an element of truth, is misleading. Even when he is at his most flippant, he touches themes about which he cares deeply. In a work like 'Le Marquis de Fayolle', although he and Gorges, his collaborator, are making capital out of the demand for the popular historical novel, Nerval's longings are strikingly formulated[2]. Indeed, one can see how his peculiarly close self-identification with the hero tends to work against the Revolutionary theme which was presumably one of the popular elements in this work published the year after 1848.

As M. Richer says, "le personnel rejoint le collectif"[3]. The

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1. E. Peyrouzet suggests simple compensation as an initial motive for Nerval's writing ('Nerval inconnu', 179 ff).

2. M. Richer says of this novel: "de naïfs procédés se chargent de significations secrètes" ('Expérience', 234).

3. 'Expérience et création', 647. The point has been made by others: "'L'Histoire du calife Hakem' est celle de la propre vie de Nerval" (K. Haedens, 'Nerval ou la Sagesse romantique', 101); "instinctivement, dans ce qu'il voit, entend ou lit, il choisit, et il choisit toujours lui-même" (M.J. Durry, 'Nerval ou le Mythe', 101); "Nerval même dans l'oeuvre en apparence la plus objective et la plus étrangère à lui-même ('Le Marquis de Fayolle') est amené à déplacer des figures sur l'échiquier de sa propre expérience ... c'est toujours à soi qu'il fait allusion" (R. Jean, 'Nerval romancier', 'Cahiers du Sud', October 1955).

imaginative patterns of Nerval's works are internally, not externally, determined. They belong, as Valéry says of 'Les Chimères', "sur les confins de la fausse mémoire et de la création poétique"[1], and the very recurrence of certain key figures and situations reveals their private significance.

At the simplest level, this is literature as an extension of day-dreaming, allowing the imaginary satisfaction of a longing for love which reality has failed to meet[2]. Thus Nerval, a small man who was treated patronisingly by Marie Pleyel[3], casts himself as the heroic Achilles, "trop beau, trop grand, trop superbe" (I, 178), who is masterful where Nerval was timid. 'Le Roman tragique' appears in the first place as a fantasy compensating for a humiliating experience.

But Nerval's works transcend crude fantasy. It is not even quite true that he was writing to gratify desires which reality had frustrated. The evidence is that even in the conduct of real-life relationships, fantasy encroached on reality. There is a tendency to dream his life rather than live it, to impose a subjective vision on the facts[4]. The hazy frontier between his real life and the imaginary second life does not separate the man from the writer, is not crossed at the moment he sets pen to paper. Nerval

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1. 'Souvenir de Nerval', 'Oeuvres', Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, vol. i, 596.

2. See Freud, 'The Relation of the Poet to Day-dreaming', 'Collected Papers', Hogarth Press, iv.

3. In 1854 Nerval was 1.68 metres (5' 6") tall (see his passport in the Chantilly collection). Marie Pleyel refers to him as "ce bon petit Gérard" (Letter II bis), while Maxime du Camp calls him "un petit homme à demi chauve" ('Souvenirs littéraires', 1882-83, Hachette, 2 vols.). At the age of seventeen, Nerval was clearly conscious of his lack of inches (see the humourous autobiographical sketch given in A. Marie's 'Bibliographie', Introduction, xi).

4. See Chapters II and IV.

is one of those people in whom the tendency to imagine their actions is stronger than the ability to plan them according to objective observation, for whom the image of the self is created rather than copied. The image is a complex one, embracing fears as well as hopes, self-criticism and irony[1] as well as self-aggrandizement and narcissism. And there is after all a strict relation between fact and fantasy. Nerval is never merely self-indulgent. The heroes he creates in his own image are never vulgarly successful. In rewriting his life he remains faithful to its general outlines, in creating his own image he is at pains not to distort it. And in literary projections of his own affaire with Jenny Colon, such as 'Corilla', the tendency is always to revert to the moment before he declared his love when all things were still possible. Wishful thinking runs into the censorship of honesty. What might have happened is limited by what did happen. Thus recreation can never reach a resolution of the situation. Hopes and desires which failed to find satisfaction persist in the imagination. The past is endlessly rearranged into situations which never attain a climax either of success or failure but which, just because they never settle into a final definitive pattern, obviously prolong irrational hopes[2].

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1. The ironical and critical presentation of Romantic aspiration is again, of course, a commonplace of the time (see Hoffmann, Heine, Gautier, Baudelaire).

2. Thus I cannot endorse Peyrouzet's theory that the story 'La Paysanne de Montmorency' (1832) is by Nerval. Peyrouzet would have us believe that the tale is a step-by-step correction of reality in which a (hypothetical) humiliation at the hands of Sidonie turns into a resounding triumph ('Gerard de Nerval inconnu', 216-227). But Nerval's stories never end, as 'La Paysanne de Montmorency' does, in sexual conquest. J. Richer is surely nearer the truth about Nerval's creative processes when he writes: "Nous pouvons nous demander si le caractère inachevé de toute une partie de l'oeuvre n'est pas en relation avec l'inaccomplissement de la passion pour Jenny Colon. Un paralysant sentiment de frustration se trouvait peut-être à l'origine de certaines inhibitions créatrices. Seuls seraient parvenus à maturation les ouvrages qui offraient valeur de 'compensation'. Là encore on relève bien des aveux implicites: 'Le dénouement vous échappe', dit Aurélie au narrateur de Sylvie" ('Expérience et création', 338).

The notion that Nerval's works represent an imaginary second life, of course, invites us to compare the image with reality. The difficulty here is that there is scarcely any reliable biographical evidence. Information about Nerval's actual experience has to be deduced, for the most part, from literary transpositions of it. We cannot study the process of how life changes into literature. This leads to the temptation of constructing a circular argument in which life is deduced from literature in order to show how literature derives from life. It will be difficult to avoid this vicious circle altogether. Two principles, however, will be observed. Firstly, that the object of study is Nerval's image of himself as projected into the works, and not the ways in which that image differs from the reality. Secondly, that when comparison between the image and the reality is unavoidable, our picture of Nerval's actual experience shall be limited to indisputable facts[1] and to assumptions that are confirmed <u>both</u> by the direct evidence of the correspondence <u>and</u> by what can be deduced from the literary transpositions[2].

In a thesis concerned with the imaginative content of literature rather than with questions of value, there will be no essential distinction between the good and the mediocre. Indeed, the patterns of fantasy come out most clearly in a crude play like 'l'Alchimiste', intended as a money-spinner, or in a sketch like 'La Forêt noire' which represents the raw material of Nerval's imagination. There is an imaginative unity in the products of Nerval's mind which extends across the spectrum of literary

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1. For example that Nerval's <u>affaire</u> with Jenny Colon ended in failure.

2. For example that Nerval's rôle <u>vis-à-vis</u> Marie Pleyel was that of humble go-between.

excellence from the pot-boiler to the masterpiece. My concern is to show this imaginative unity. Thus, while I shall try to retain a perspective of value, considerations of literary merit will not be of primary importance. Some apology is therefore necessary at the outset for concentrating on works which are not worth reading for their own sake[1]. Yet I believe this study will throw light on the intricate workings of the imagination, with its constancies and contradictions, its blend of honesty and wishful thinking, its trick of giving unavowed expression to secret desires, its ambiguities and its evasions, which should be of interest to students of literary creation. For these operations are not peculiar to Nerval. We find them in any writing of average complexity, and in ourselves.

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1. Not all the lesser-known works, however, fall under this heading. The best chapters of 'Les Confidences de Nicolas', for example, have a deftness of execution in establishing a scene, a sureness in controlling complex material, which show us (much more than a pot-boiler like 'Le Marquis de Fayolle') the fine novelist Nerval might have been.

CHAPTER ONE

NERVAL AND HIS TIME

CHAPTER I

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As I pointed out in the Introduction, Nerval is a mind steeped in the climate of his time. His literary persona combines personal experience with elements borrowed from the lives or works of his contemporaries. 'Aurélia', for example, is both a primary autobiographical document and a tissue of "sources".[1] The "ville mystérieuse" of Part One, chapter v is based partly on Nerval's memories of the Lebanon (see below, Chapter X) and of Montmartre (I, 145f), partly on literary texts such as Heine's 'La Paix', translated by Nerval in 1848, in which there is a vision of a resplendent city inhabited by a serene, white-clad people whose looks of secret intelligence mark them as a race apart.[2] Again, critics are no doubt correct in supposing that one of the dreams described in 'La Pandora' is a reminiscence of Nerval's esoteric reading on the subject of the Horned Goddess,[3] but it derives also from his actual memory of the "femme mérinos" at Meaux, with her horn-like tufts of fleecy hair ('Les Nuits d'octobre'). There is no reason to disbelieve that, as Nerval takes pleasure in pointing out, the most fantastic feature of this dream-like

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1. See J. Richer, 'Nerval et les doctrines ésotériques' and 'Expérience et création', chapter xiii, section 3.
2. See Richer, 'Expérience', 470ff for a complete list of possible sources.
3. See F. Constans, 'Nerval et l'amour platonique', 'Mercure de France', May 1955.

experience was a verifiable fact.[1]

The reminiscence of a work of art or literature can take on a vividness which makes it seem actual. In 1844 the Diorama's spectacular representation of the Flood prompted him to wonder what the papers would say if Paris were to share the fate of Enochia (II, 1233). By 1853 the prospect had become a terrifying reality ('Aurélia', Part Two, chapter V). Nerval's imagination forms a single and continuous pattern from things read and things remembered.[2]

It is not the purpose of this Chapter to show how Nerval converts his material. By a detailed study of his use of a single source, the autobiography of Restif de la Bretonne, I shall show later (Chapter XIII) that, as one would have expected, he takes from other men only what is essentially his own. But for the time being my intention is simply to reveal something of the extent of Nerval's use of the literary themes popular at the time.

It is impossible, of course, to fix limits to this kind of enquiry. Although the experienced reader will easily recognise in Nerval's themes the characteristic flavour of Romantic writing, many go back much further. We may think we have identified the source of the metaphor likening girls besieged by suitors to towns surrounded by soldiers ('Les Amours de

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1. He tells us that the poster advertising her appearance has been deposited as a piece of tangible evidence at the offices of the journal in which his article is being published. In any case the fairground style of the poster is surely authentic. ('Les Nuits d'octobre', I, 127-28).

2. "Des réminiscences livresques s'emparent par moments de l'esprit de l'écrivain. Leur déroulement sur le theâtre intérieur de la conscience leur procure une fusion parfaite avec les souvenirs proprement dits" (J. Richer, 'Notes sur Aurélia', 'Cahiers du Sud', N°. 292, 1948).

Vienne', II, 61) in the song from Nerval's translation of Goethe's 'Faust',[1] until we come across it in Ronsard's 'Rencontre de Genèvre'.[2] "La nuit du tombeau", which in context had seemed an integral part of the verbal music of 'Les Chimères', is a set phrase of which examples can be found in any good dictionary. We may connect 'Vers dorés' with the Pythagorean doctrines of Lamartine and Hugo until we find that a character in Chaucer considers it a truism:

> "But sooth is seyd, gon sithen many yeres,
> That 'feeld hath eyen, and the wode hath eres'"[3].

The famous "portes d'ivoire ou de corne" first occur, of course, in the 'Odyssey'. Behind the Romantic themes are the great literary commonplaces.

Having made the above proviso, it is true to say that Nerval's work, if one considers only the pure subject-matter, appears as duly, even dully, representative of his age. Indeed, he can be presented, not as a great writer who gave an authentic personal resonance to the vogue subjects of his day, but as a literary hack peddling fashionable goods. Auriant, understandably impatient with the excessive reverence accorded to Nerval by recent critics, has conducted a campaign along these lines.[4]

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1. "Villes entourées
De murs et de tours;
Fillettes parées
D'attraits et d'atours..." ('Faust', Gibert, 83-85).

2. In this chapter references will not normally give the page numbers of specific editions. The bibliography lists all works mentioned either in standard editions or in modern reprints.

3. 'The Knight's Tale', lines 1521f.

4. See the articles by Auriant and "Mythophilacte" in the 1953 numbers of 'Quo Vadis'. R. Montel argues that Nerval, since he repeated himself from one work to another, can have had no powers of invention: 'Péquillo (sic), opéra-comique d' A. Dumas et Gérard de Nerval', 'Le Thyrse', October 1960, 406-13.

"Braconnier sur les terres d'autrui": Janin's urbane periphrasis contains a shrewd barb, for Nerval, despite his concern about "la propriété littéraire", counted plagiarism a normal source of copy. Thus the famous "inventer, au fond, c'est se ressouvenir" (I, 174-75), ascribed vaguely to "un moraliste", is a misquotation from Hugo's Preface to 'Cromwell', (1827)[1] and M. Richer shows how the pantoum quoted by Hugo in the notes to 'Les Orientales' provides imagery not only, as M. Gilbert Rouger had pointed out, for the hermetic sonnet 'Erythréa' but also for a song in 'Le Chariot d'enfant'.[2] Did not Hugo also supply the germ of a famous image in 'El Desdichado' with Job's line from 'Les Burgraves': "Ma famille est captive et ma tour est tombée"? The "soleil noir" of Nerval's poems, if it does not come from an incorrect memory of Dürer's 'Angel of Melancholy', may be a reminiscence of Heine's 'Le Naufrage' translated in 1848: "dans son doux et pâle visage, grand et puissant, rayonne son oeil, semblable à un soleil noir", whilst 'Horus' is partly inspired by 'Les Dieux grecs'.[5]

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1. "Imaginer, dit La Harpe avec son assurance naive, ce n'est au fond que se ressouvenir" (Hugo's italics). The context, of course, is different, since Hugo is talking about the neo-classical doctrine of literature as imitation of famous predecessors.

2. 'Expérience et création', 192f.

3. 'Les Burgraves', Part III, scene iii (my italics). Cf "Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la Tour abolie".

4. See below, p.17.

5. 'Les Poésies de Henri Heine', 'La Revue des deux mondes', 15 July 1848. Cf the quatrains of 'Horus' with "les hivers ont neigé sur les boucles de ses cheveux ... il tient à sa main la foudre éteinte" ('les Dieux grecs'). Apart from direct verbal influence, Heine's poem contributes to the formulation of revolt in the first quatrain of 'Antéros': Nerval's "rage" against "le dieu vainqueur" echoes the "sombre colère" inspired in Heine by the "nouveaux et tristes dieux". See N. Rinsler, 'Nerval and Heinrich Heine', 'Revue de littérature comparée', January-March 1959, and G. Rouger, 'Nerval à Cythère', 'Revue d'histoire littéraire', October-December 1948.

Lamartine's 'Bonaparte' ('Nouvelles Méditations', 1823) should be added to Nerval's own Juvenilia[1] as a source of 'La Tête armée'. Although the line "Un jeune homme, un héros d'un sang pur inondé" refers to the execution of the duc d'Enghien, whereas Nerval's refers to the duc de Reichstadt, this is probably a case of unconscious reminiscence: "Un jeune homme inondé des pleurs de la Victoire". There are several verbal borrowings from Nodier. As Nerval wrote: "je crois que l'imagination humaine n'a rien inventé qui ne soit vrai, dans ce monde ou dans les autres" (I, 385) he was surely thinking of a passage from 'Inès de las Sierras': "l'homme est incapable de rien inventer ... l'invention n'est en lui qu'une perception innée des faits réels", and of the opening sentence of 'La Fée aux miettes', chapter xxvi, when he warns us, in 'Les Amours de Vienne': "voici où mon Iliade commence à tourner à l'Odyssée" (II, 38).[2] Evoking his adolescent loves, Nerval writes of "une sorte d'amour sans préférence et sans désir" ('Aurélia', I, 375), echoing the words used by Nodier in 'La Neuvaine de la Chandeleur' to describe just this situation: "j'aimais ces belles jeunes filles sans fièvre, sans inquiétude et presque sans préférence".[3] And when he writes in 'Sylvie': "bien des coeurs me comprendront" (I, 295), he is discreetly placing himself in the same sentimental élite as the author of 'La Neuvaine'.[4]

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1. See Richer, 'Expérience', 80f.

2. Cf "Si mon Iliade vous a coûté beaucoup d'ennui, monsieur, ne craignez pas que je mette votre patience à une nouvelle épreuve par la longue narration de mon Odyssée" ('Contes', Garnier, 318).

3. 'Contes', Garnier, 802.

4. "Les coeurs qui ressemblent au mien n'auront pas de peine à me comprendre" ('Contes' 821). Cf Letter XLIX for the insincere reaction of a collector of autograph letters to Nerval's phrase.

There is also wholesale borrowing of scenes, of anecdotes and indeed of whole plots. We can safely say that there is a source, even if it has not been identified yet, for every one of Nerval's works. His eclecticism embraces George Sand and Shakespeare, Goethe and Henry Hart Milman. Sometimes there is a compound influence,[1] but very often borrowing is direct. The story about the bibliophile who is interested in politics only insofar as they affect rare books ('Angélique', I, 241) is modelled on Nodier's 'Le Bibliomane' ('Contes', Garnier, especially 503 and 510),[2] whilst Brisacier's fantasy about setting the theatre on fire and carrying off his beloved through the flames in Nerval's 'Le Roman tragique' (I, 179) is taken from Nodier's early story 'Une Heure ou la Vision' ('Contes', Garnier, 18). The enchanted castle with its family portraits in Nerval's 'La Forêt noire' is modelled on Nodier's 'Inès de las Sierras' (1837), whilst Nerval also has in mind the story of Esmeralda in Hugo's 'Notre-Dame de Paris'.[3] The secret tribunal in the fifth <u>journée</u> of 'Léo Burckart' (published version) has obvious antecedents in Act IV, scene iii of Hugo's 'Hernani',[4]

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1. 'Le Marquis de Fayolle' (1849), for example, owes the historical setting and the basic situation of love cutting across political loyalties to Balzac's 'Les Chouans' (1829- see Richer, 'Expérience', 236) and at least one character, the Marquis de la Rouërie, to Chateaubriand's 'Mémoires d'outre-tombe' which was appearing while Nerval was working on the novel (e.g. Mémoires d'outre-tombe', Book V, chapter xv), though the primary source remains to be discovered.

2. Nerval states that he <u>heard</u> the story from "un bibliophile fort connu" in whom we are clearly intended to recognise Nodier himself.

3. Like the heroine of 'La Forêt noire', Esmeralda belongs to a troupe of itinerant entertainers ("bohémiens") whose leader is a self-styled Duke or Count of Egypt. Nerval refers to her in 1844 as an example in fiction of the "vraies bohémiennes de Paris" (O.C. VIII, 70). J. Richer also points to the influence of Nodier's 'Jean Sbogar' (1818 - see 'Expérience', 107).

4. Frantz, like Hernani, draws lots to assassinate the man who is his superior and his rival in love.

and in Goethe's 'Götz von Berlichingen'.[1] On occasion it is the manner rather than the content which is borrowed. The blend of insouciance and melancholy in 'Corilla', as J. Gaulmier indicates in passing(105), comes from Musset's 'Comédies et proverbes', and at least three minor works are pastiches of Hoffmann - or, more probably, of Egmont's translation, since they all appear after its publication in 1836: 'Soirée d'automne', 'Portrait du diable' and 'Le Magnétiseur '.[2]

"Gérard est avant tout non un érudit mais un journaliste perméable aux milles influences éparses dans son temps", writes J. Gaulmier.[3] His sources are invariably second-hand.[4] In spite of 'Faust', he is hardly an innovator. Mme de Staël's 'De l'Allemagne' (from which he quotes at length in his preface to 'Les Poètes allemands') had appeared in 1810, and in any

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1. See Richer, 'Expérience', 384 and also 96 (influence of Schiller).

2. 'Soirée d'automne', traditionally attributed to Nerval, is an accomplished pastiche published in the same year as the four volumes of the Egmont translation and based on the stories they contain. M. Richer thinks that the text should be attributed to Gautier, but one at least of his arguments can be disproved. There is a reference to dining with "la présidente" - "or c'est Gautier, et non pas Nerval, qui fréquenta chez Mme Sabatier" ('Notes et documents', 'Revue d'histoire littéraire', 1961, 251ff). But surely the reference is to the wife of one of Hoffmann's civic dignitaries rather than to Mme Sabatier, and in any case it is clear from an unpublished letter to Nerval from Ernesta Grisi that Nerval did, in fact, know Mme Sabatier (Chantilly, Fonds Lovenjoul, D740, F°.77-8). The authorship of 'Soirée d'automne' remains in doubt. I note in passing that the reading of the text by A. Marie (129) and C. Dédéyan ('Nerval et l'Allemagne', Vol. II, 372) is perfunctory.

3. J. Gaulmier, 'Le dernier espoir de Nerval', 'Les Nouvelles littéraires', 29 May 1958.

4. See N. Rinsler, 'Nerval and Sir Walter Scott's Antiquary', 'Revue de littérature comparée', July-September 1960.

case he was not the first translator in the field (O.C. I, 3). His contribution to the popularisation of Hoffmann comes modestly in the wake of Toussenel, Loève-Veimars and Egmont.[1] P. Audiat shows that there was a vogue for magnetism in the 1820's, long before Nerval's interest in the subject.[2] It was Sainte-Beuve's 'Tableau ... de la poésie française ... au 16e Siècle' (1828) and not Nerval's anthology (1830), which inaugurated the Romantic generation's fruitful acquaintance with Ronsard and the Pléiade poets.

Certain images which might appear at first sight to be characteristically Nervalian, are in fact common at the time. We find fantasies about literal brainwashing similar to that of 'Les Nuits d'octobre', chapter xviii, in Nodier's 'La Fée aux miettes' ('Contes, Garnier, 254f), Gautier's 'Le Club des hachichins', ('Contes fantastiques', Corti, 210) and Vigny's 'Stello' ('Oeuvres complètes', Eds. du Seuil, 288). So, too, the idea that happiness is to be found, not by running after it but by waiting quietly at home, is found in Nodier and Gautier as well as Nerval.[4] Musset's occasional piece, 'A Madame [redacted]', dated 1835 ('Poésies nouvelles') refers to the kiss bestowed by Marguerite of Scotland on Alain Chartier, which may be the inspiration for the tenth line of 'El Desdichado': "Mon front est rouge encore du baiser de la Reine", though a more likely source is Hugo's 'Ruy Blas' (1838), Act III, scene iv: Ruy Blas - another social outcast - receives the consecration of the Queen's love by a kiss on the brow. Nerval's Orientalism

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1. See E. Teichman and L. Reynaud.

2. P. Audiat, 'L'Aurélia de Gérard de Nerval'.

3. Pointed out by J. Richer, 'Expérience', 407f.

4. Nerval, Letter to Janin of November 1843; Nodier, 'Paul ou la ressemblance', 'Contes', Garnier, 653; Gautier, 'Mademoiselle de Maupin', Garnier, 60. The common source is perhaps La Fontaine, 'Les Deux Pigeons', 'Fables', Book IX, No. 2.

is a commonplace of the time, whether we are thinking of the Byronic and faded Oriental colour of Musset's 'Namouna', of Hugo's 'Orientales', or of the Oriental tale as cultivated by Nodier and Gautier. Even aspects which might have been thought personal to Nerval crop up, sometimes surprisingly, elsewhere. For Nodier, too, the Orient was a "pays d'enchantement",[1] and Enfantin, like Nerval, sought his predestined bride in the East. The inconsequential narrative in the manner of Sterne, which seems so perfectly adapted to Nerval's free-ranging fantasy, is also used by Nodier (e.g. 'Le Roi de Bohême') and Vigny ('Stello'). 'Les Nuits d'octobre' reflects the interest in Parisian low-life catered for in the novels of Balzac, Hugo and Eugène Sue.

But this is only one side of the picture. For in fact certain striking poetic motifs are initiated rather than adopted by Nerval. The setting of Hugo's poem 'Passé' ('Les Voix intérieures') is incontestably a reminiscence of 'Fantaisie'.[2] A. Béguin has shown that the image of "l'orbite vide d'où rayonne la nuit", borrowed from Nerval's 'Christ aux oliviers', becomes a stock image in Hugo's work. 'Vers dorés' almost certainly contributed towards the Pythagorean doctrines of the later Hugo (e.g. 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre', in 'Les Contemplations'), whilst Nerval's "pendu de Cythère" provides the starting-point, not only

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1. 'La Fée aux miettes', Contes, Garnier, 187. Cf below, Chapter X.

2. It is true that in Hugo's 'Marion de Lorme', which antedates 'Fantaisie', the décor of Act III is a park with a "maison haute en briques à coins de pierre", but the details of the first ten lines of 'Passé' clearly derive from Nerval's poem.

for Hugo's 'Cérigo' ('Les Contemplations'), but also for Baudelaire's 'Voyage à Cythère'.[1] A hemistich from Baudelaire's 'Le Balcon' ("ô douceur! ô poison!") may have been inspired by Nerval's 'Artémis' ("O délice! ô tourment!"),[2] and there is no doubt that Baudelaire's 'A une passante' owes a good deal to 'Une Allée du Luxembourg'. Finally, Nerval may be said to have originated the modern trend towards poetry in which incantation and suggestion are more highly valued than clarity or rhetoric.[3]

The identification of sources is in any case fraught with dangers. A. Béguin has a timely warning against those "graves exégètes" who think they have explained everything by the sources, both biographical and literary, from which Nerval drew his material, and G. Rouger, who has himself made some most interesting discoveries, admits that source-seeking derives from "une curiosité au reste assez vaine".[4] Above all, it is impossible to distinguish here between giving and taking, to decide whether Nerval is building a tradition or is parasitic on it. Some themes are so prevalent that it is

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1. See A. Béguin, 'Le Songe de Jean-Paul et Victor Hugo', 'Revue de littérature comparée', 1934, 703-713; J.-B. Barrère, 'La Fantaisie de Victor Hugo', I (1949), 367-74; G. Rouger, 'Nerval à Cythère', 'Revue d'histoire littéraire', October-December 1948. There are also three possible borrowings from Nerval in Hugo's 'Les Misérables' (1862): Valjean's confrontation in court with his double, when "il crut se voir lui-même" (Part One, Book vii, chapter ix); the description of the Parisian faubourg as "les limbes" (Part Three, Book i, chapter v) which could be a reminiscence of 'Les Nuits d'octobre' (passim); and the momentary confusion between "vous" and "tu" when Valjean, estranged from his adoptive daughter Cosette, is reconciled with her (Part Five, Book ix, chapter v - see below, Chapter V).

2. If, as MM. Crépet and Blim suppose, Baudelaire's poem was composed in 1856 ('Les Fleurs du Mal', édition critique', Corti, 1942, 357).

3. R.Lalou sees Nerval as liberating poetry from "le joug de l'éloquence" ('Vers une alchimie lyrique', Les Arts et le Livre, 1927), whilst Rémy de Gourmont had already hailed him as "frère de Baudelaire, de Verlaine et de Mallarmé" (edition of 'Les Chimères et les Cydalises', Mercure de France, 1897.)

4. See 'Cahiers du Sud', N°. 292, 1948, 395 & 432.

really misleading to think of Nerval as having borrowed them from one source rather than another. The most that can be said is that they were "in the air", and would have been absorbed by any intellectual as naturally and unconsciously as oxygen. J. Richer shows how "Gérard semble puiser dans un fonds d'idées communes à tout un groupe d'écrivains" ('Expérience', 286-88), though his demonstration of the richness and multiplicity of intellectual exchange could be taken further, for example in the case of the "nobles et valets" theme as it occurs in the work of Nerval and Hugo.[1] It would be more accurate to talk of interchange than of borrowing.

Even when an image is manifestly borrowed from an identifiable source, its import may be profoundly modified. Nerval uses La Harpe's banal neo-classical aphorism to focus his very important and highly personal transcendental theory of memory. And in considering the community of themes in which Nerval as a writer of the Romantic generation was working, we should always bear in mind that, when we consider a borrowing in the context of his work as a whole, it invariably takes on a resonance which is private rather than merely fashionable. The point need not be reiterated, for it should emerge constantly from the review of Nerval's use of Romantic themes which follows.[2]

It is tempting to work out the extent of Nerval's debt to individual writers. With his elders, we frequently find him taking up the posture of protégé or disciple. Nodier is "un de mes tuteurs littéraires (I,200f).

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1. M.Richer is of course correct to say that the lines he quotes from 'Le Roi s'amuse' (1832) are like a paraphrase of Nerval, but it is only fair to add that the older writer had already expounded a closely similar theme in 'Hernani' (1830), Act I, scene iii.

2. See L. Cellier, 'Nerval, l'homme et l'oeuvre', chapter viii; J. Gaulmier, 'Nerval et les Filles du Feu', 128ff.

Janin "m'a mis la plume et le pain à la main" (Letter 85 bis in the third edition of I). The example of Dumas has made him "un prosateur énergique et un conteur facile" (Letter 266). And to Hugo he writes: "mon peu de feu s'allume à vos autels" (I,70). The influence of Chateaubriand, on the other hand, is unimportant, while Lamartine's is felt mainly in the genre of the sentimental autobiographical novel. There is a stronger (though not profound) affinity with Musset; but despite the near-coincidence of publication of 'Le Christ aux Oliviers' and 'Le Mont des Oliviers', Nerval has little in common with Vigny. Of the "tuteurs littéraires", Nodier had by far the deepest effect. The influence of Hoffmann is more important and more various than critics have yet demonstrated.[1]

The extraordinary "camaraderie littéraire" that existed between Nerval and Gautier has been shrewdly characterised by M. Richer as a case of common themes reflected through two very different temperaments ('Expérience', 169). Not that their styles are interchangeable: the sumptuous minutiae of Gautier's descriptions are very different from Nerval's less ostentatious writing, though Nerval's deeper and sometimes harsher tone can thrill us as Gautier never does. But the numerous occasions on which they sign each other's copy, sometimes even using a common signature,

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1. Constans deals only with 'Les Elixirs du diable' ('Artémis ou les Fleurs du désespoir', 'Revue de littérature comparée', April-June 1934), Dédéyan's review is confined to Nerval's translations, pastiches and adaptations ('Nerval et l'Allemagne', II, 352-80), whilst Dubruck is frankly disappointing('Nerval and the German Heritage', Mouton and Co., The Hague, 1965). Yet, as will be clear from the frequent recurrence of Hoffmann's name in the rest of this chapter, nearly all the central themes of Nerval's work are traceable in the German writer's 'Tales'.

shows how sure they were of their community of material.[1]

Some idea of the extent of common material, in terms of sheer detail, can be gained from the following list:

Gautier	Nerval
"Ma raison était revenue, ou du moins ce que j'appelle ainsi, faute d'autre terme" ('Le Club des hachichins', 1846)	"J'ai recouvré ce que l'on est convenu d'appeler raison" (Letter 86, 1841)
"Un amour ... qui devait être le premier et le dernier" ('La Morte amoureuse', 1836)	"Car es-tu Reine, ô Toi! la première ou dernière?" ('Artémis', 1854)
"Portraits jaunis des belles du vieux temps" ('Pastel', 1835)	"Qui n'a dans ses souvenirs de jeunesse un portrait de ce genre à moitié effacé?" (Article on Heine, 1848)
"Comme en un palimpseste, à travers d'autres signes, D'un ancien manuscript ressuscitent les lignes; Le roman de l'enfance à travers le présent Reparaît tout entier, - calme, pur, innocent" ('Le Retour', in 'Premières poésies', 1832)	"Les souvenirs d'enfance se ravivent quand on a atteint la moitié de la vie. - C'est comme un manuscrit palimpseste dont on fait reparaître les lignes par des procédés chimiques" ('Angélique', 1850)

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1. 1837-38: joint signature "G.G." for the drama criticism of 'La Presse' (Senelier, N°s. 380 bis-391). 1846: Gautier writes, and signs, a preface based on copy supplied by Nerval ('La Turquie', by Camille Rogier - see Senelier, N°.609 & Richer, 'Archives nervaliennes', N°. 3, 24). 1848: again, Nerval supplies copy for Gautier's articles on Chenavard's projected decorations for the Panthéon ('Archives nervaliennes', N°. 3). The reverse process operates for Nerval's articles on Heine, also published in 1848 (O.C. I, 72-92 & Richer, 'Une collaboration Gautier-Gérard', 'Revue d'histoire littéraire' April-June 1955). A manuscript in Gautier's hand shows that he produced a substantial part of the copy for the first article, and this is confirmed when one observes that the passage on Heine's conception of the ambiguous nature of women is echoed in a poem by Gautier, 'Le Sphinx'. 1850-51: Gautier's article on the plans for Pétin's airship ('La Presse', 4 July, 1850) was followed by Nerval's study of experiments in aerial navigation ('Les Successeurs d'Icare', II, 1245), though the latter is far less technical.

"Chaque mont de la chaîne, immense cimetière,
Cache un corps monstrueux dans son ventre de pierre,
Et ses blocs de granit sont des os de Titan!"
("J'étais monté plus haut", in 'Espana', 1845)

"Ce roc de Tarascon hébergeait autrefois
Les géants descendus des montagnes de Foix,
.....
La neige règne au front de leurs pics infranchis,
Et ce sont, m'a-t-on dit, les ossements blanchis
Des anciens monts rongés par la mer du déluge"
('A Madame Sand', 1853?)

"Je me trouvai dans une salle basse dallée de blanc et noir ... une figure couchée, que je pris d'abord pour une statue comme celles qui dorment les mains jointes, un levrier aux pieds, dans les cathédrales gothiques" ('La Pipe d'opium', 1838)

"Un fantôme glissant sans bruit sur les losanges noirs et blancs ... ... cette insensibilité de statue" ('Le Marquis de Fayolle', 1849)
"Mme Parangon ... dormait sévèrement drapée comme une statue de matrone romaine ... l'impression d'une figure austère sculptée sur un tombeau" ('Les Confidences de Nicolas', 1850)

"Pressant sous le satin et les fourrures le bras potelé de la jolie Viennoise" (Katy)

"Elle m'a permis seulement de lui toucher le bras un instant ... encore un très beau bras parmi toutes sortes de soieries et de poils de chat ou fourrures"

... "une de ces bienheureuses caves célébrées par Hoffmann, dont les marches sont si usées, si onctueuses et si glissantes, qu'on ne peut poser le pied sur la première sans se trouver tout de suite au fond ... entre un pot de bière et une mesure de vin nouveau" etc. etc. ('Deux acteurs pour un rôle', July, 1841)

... "cette cave fantastique (d'Hoffmann) dont les marches étaient si usées, qu'à peine avait-on le pied sur la première, qu'on se sentait sans le vouloir tout porté en bas, puis assis à une table entre un pot de vin vieux et un pot de vin nouveau" ('Vers l'Orient', passages first published March 1840 and March 1841)

"Tu t'es peint, ô Dürer! dans ta Mélancolie
.....
Son vêtement, drapé d'une façon austère,
Jusqu'au bout de son pied s'allonge avec mystère
.....
Le vieux père Océan lève sa face morne,

"Vêtu d'une longue robe à plis antiques, il ressemblait à l'Ange de la Mélancolie, d'Albrecht Dürer' ('Aurélia', 1841 or 1853)
"le Soleil noir de la Mélancolie" ('El Desdichado', 1853)

Et dans le bleu cristal de son profond miroir Réfléchit les rayons d'un grand soleil tout noir" ('Melancholia', 1834)	NB: Both Nerval and Gautier are mistaken: there is no black sun in Dürer's picture. See Hélène Tuzet, 'L'Image du soleil noir', 'Revue des Sciences humaines', October-December 1957.
"Les danses espagnoles n'existent qu'à Paris" ('Voyage en Espagne' 1843)	"Ce n'est qu'à Paris que l'on trouve des cafés si orientaux" (Letter 100, written to Gautier from Constantinople in 1843)
"Angoulême ... un faux air italien" ('Voyage en Espagne', 1843)	"Constance est une petite Constantinople" ('Vers l'Orient', first published in 1840).

Gautier and Nerval were professional journalists who shared their ideas and their copy. 'Mademoiselle de Maupin' (1835) and 'Tiburce ou la Toison d'or' (1837-39) offer a veritable compendium of Nervalian themes.[1] At the same time, these themes are also the stock themes of the Romantic generation.

Although as a young man Nerval associated himself humorously with the fate of Malfilâtre and Gilbert, poets who died for lack of recognition, it was in his life rather than in his writing that he contributed to the myth of the failed genius.[2] Nevertheless, we do find in the work of "le bon et doux Gérard"[3] an example of the sombre, doom-laden Romantic hero.

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1. In the former we have the "blonde aux yeux noirs" at the window of a "château de briques et de pierres", the ideal woman for whom the hero seeks an earthly counterpart, the theme of being in love with love, and a host of ideas and images which also belong to Nerval (see especially 'Mademoiselle de Maupin', Garnier, 54-61). I shall discuss 'Tiburce' later.

2. 'Epître première', quoted by Richer, 'Expérience', 643. Compare Vigny's heroes, Gilbert and Chatterton.

3. Heine, quoted in O.C. I,91.

Frantz in 'Léo Burckart', is an outcast like Hernani, an orphan like Didier in 'Marion Delorme', and one of Nerval's recurring themes is that of the disinherited hero who longs to be restored to his birthright. Frantz is the hero who has sworn to assassinate the tyrant in the name of liberty, a man cut off from fulfilment and dedicated to death, like Musset's Lorenzaccio. According to J. Richer, there are numerous analogies between 'Lorenzaccio' and 'Léo Burckart' ('Expérience', 412). Certainly both plays betray their author's longing for the tender love of a mother or a sister. But Frantz's idealism has not turned sour, like Lorenzaccio's, nor is his faith in the goodness of things staked on the outcome of his desperate act. Above all, Frantz is only separated from Marguerite by circumstance, whereas Lorenzaccio is cut off from human affection by his own warped second nature. On the other hand, Lelio in 'L'Alchimiste', the young man who is burning himself out in frantic pleasure-seeking prior to committing suicide, is modelled on Musset's Rolla.

An interesting comparative study could be made of the relation between the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon' to 'Léo Burckart' on the one hand, and that between Dumas' letters to Mélanie Waldor and 'Antony' (1831) on the other. Dumas' affaire with Mélanie was not very edifying, and the letters, especially the earlier ones, represent a very much inflated and dramatised image of it. Dumas presents himself as the unbridled Romantic lover, desperate, sombre and even consumptive. Feverish and over-written, with their alternation of imperious demand and total self-abnegation, they have much in common with the 'Lettres à Jenny', though

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1. See below, Chapter V11.

Nerval's letters lack Dumas' exuberant vulgarity. (There is perhaps a closer affinity with the love-letters written to Pauline Villenoix by Balzac's Louis Lambert, which also oscillate between violent emotion and abject self-sacrifice). At least one passage from Nerval's letters closely recalls the manuscript of 'Antony', which forms an intermediate stage between his letters to Mélanie and the final version of the play.[1]

'Antony', as Dumas invited his readers to assume,[2] is a direct transposition of the affaire with Mélanie. The feelings of the illegitimate Dumas vis-à-vis a respectable married woman swell into an extended diatribe against social injustice. In the manuscript of 'Antony' there are textual borrowings from the letters.[3] Frantz in 'Léo Burckart' - and we should remember that the play was written in collaboration with Dumas - is, like Antony, the sombre Romantic lover, the orphan whose rival is a respected member of society. But the play is shaped more by Nerval than by Dumas. Certain passages bear a striking resemblance to the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon' and (in the first version) Frantz's hopeless love for Diane de Waldeck is cast in the image of Nerval's unhappy affaire.[4]

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1. Dumas: "Ne sais-je pas renfermer la douleur dans mon âme comme un cadavre dans un tombeau? Ne sais-je pas sourire, le coeur tout saignant?" (Parigot, 'Le Drame d'Alexandre Dumas', Lévy, 1899, 317). Compare Nerval: "Je vous ai raconté mes angoisses le sourire sur les lèvres, de peur de vous effrayer; je vous ai dit avec calme des choses dont vous n'avez pas frémi et qui me tenaient tellement au coeur qu'il me semblait que j'en arrachais des fibres en vous parlant" (I, 724).

2. See the epigraph and dedicatory verses.

3. See Parigot, 301, Note 2 and 316-17.

4. See below, Chapter V.

The origin of the basic situation (the hero returns after an absence of three years to find the woman he loves married to another man) may have been transferred to 'Léo Burckart' from 'Antony' (Act I, scene vi), but Nerval clearly applies it to himself, and it will recur, with modifications, in 'Sylvie'. Again, Léo's speech in praise of family life ("la patrie, c'est la famille"), may derive from 'Antony',[1] but it expresses feelings which Nerval holds dear. Here we can see Nerval participating in and then continuing the process initiated by Dumas of projecting an emotional crisis into a work of literature.

This process is, of course, a familiar feature of Romantic literature. René is Chateaubriand in the guise of a Saint-Preux or a Werther, the hero of Nodier's 'Une heure ou la vision' reflects the author's unhappy passion for Lucile Franque, Joseph Delorme is a projection of Sainte-Beuve, Louise Colet's <u>liaisons</u> with Musset and Flaubert are transcribed in the autobiographical 'Lui'. Above all, there can be no doubt that Lamartine's autobiographical 'Confidences' (including 'Graziella') and his autobiographical novel 'Raphaël', both published in 1849, were an immediate formative influence on works like 'Sylvie' and 'Octavie'. Nerval, like Lamartine, consciously models his own life, or a fictionalised version of it, on the example of Rousseau.[2]

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1. Cf 'Léo Burckart', 151 and 'Antony', II, v.

2. See Nerval's 'Le Marquis de Fayolle' and 'Sylvie'. Lamartine's 'Confidences' tells us how, as an adolescent, he fell in love with the heroines of books he was reading (Book VI, chapter v), and then, like Rousseau, transferred his feeling to a real person.

close similarity between Nerval's account of his father's return from the wars (I, 159) and Musset's sentence: "De temps en temps leurs pères ensanglantés apparaissaient, les soulevaient sur leurs poitrines chamarrées d'or, puis les posaient à terre et remontaient à cheval" ('Confession d'un enfant du siècle', chapter ii).

Nerval himself insists that he is a standard product of his generation. Everybody knew Pandora, he tells us, (I, 351), and everyone was susceptible to her charm ('Aurélia', I, 364). The Preface to 'Lorely' presents him as only one of the circle of Marie Pleyel's admirers (II, 742), and the first chapter of 'Sylvie' attributes the "paradoxe platonique" to his contemporaries in general (I, 266). Everyone, he implies, has the faded memory of a lost childhood love in his heart (article on Heine, O.C. I, 87), and the famous dictum "la vie d'un poète est celle de tous" (I, 89) means not only that his private life is public property, but also that his experience is the <u>same</u> as that of all men - and indeed it is this sense which is developed by Hugo in the Preface to 'Les Contemplations' (1856) when he takes up the observation from Nerval, and which is fixed in Baudelaire's "Hypocrite lecteur, - mon semblable, - mon frère!" Thus it is not surprising to find intriguing indications that Nerval may have modelled, if not his actual living, at least the story of his life, on the example of famous contemporaries. George Mead has defined impersonation as one of the Romantics' most important discoveries: self-creation by imitation is almost indistinguishable from self-exploration and self-discovery.[1]

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1. Quoted by Lionel Trilling in 'The Pelican Guide to English Literature' Vol. V, 1957, 121. See also L. Cellier, 'Où en sont les recherches sur Gérard de Nerval?', 20.

In 'Raphaël', the hero and his Julie visit Les Charmettes and imagine re-enacting the love-story of Jean-Jacques and Mme de Warens, whose shades still linger there.[1] More precisely, 'Graziella' helped to shape 'Sylvie' and 'Octavie' - not so much in the detail of the girl biting into the orange,[2] since Nerval had been the first to note the sight of a girl eating a lemon,[3] as in the general outline: Graziella is a simple working girl with whose family the hero lives in all simplicity. He does not desire her: she is like a comrade or a sister. Returning years later he finds the house in ruins, and in Book XII, chapter xxvii we find him wishing he had married her and lived the life of a Neapolitan fisherman. The theme of "là était le bonheur peut-être" (I, 297) is clearly indicated, and the parallel with 'Sylvie' and 'Octavie' is close. (We notice, though, that Lamartine's heroine, who achieves maturity through a reading of 'Paul et Virginie' and the final beatification by dying of love, is much more implausibly Romantic than Nerval's pert little Sylvie).

Finally, Musset's 'Confession d'un enfant du siècle' (1836) has a (comparatively delayed) effect on Nerval's pseudo-autobiographical work: the first chapter of 'Sylvie' recalls Musset's famous analysis of the sickness of the Post-Napoleonic generation, and, as M. Richer points out,[4] there is a

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1. But I cannot agree with Peyrouzet that Nerval is the likely author of the anonymous review of 'Raphaël' published in the 'Revue comique à l'usage des gens sérieux': the pontificating, space-wasting style and the reviewer's complacent boasting about his own sensitivity, are hardly characteristic of Nerval. See Peyrouzet, 295-98.

2. See Richer, 'Expérience', 342.

3. 'Voyage d'Italie', I, 428 and 'Delfica', published in 1845.

4. 'Expérience', 53f.

close similarity between Nerval's account of his father's return from the wars (I, 159) and Musset's sentence: "De temps en temps leurs pères ensanglantés apparaissaient, les soulevaient sur leurs poitrines chamarrées d'or, puis les posaient à terre et remontaient à cheval" ('Confession d'un enfant du siècle', chapter ii).

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1. Quoted by Lionel Trilling in 'The Pelican Guide to English Literature' Vol. V, 1957, 121. See also L. Cellier, 'Où en sont les recherches sur Gérard de Nerval?', 20.

Thus N. Rinsler suggests that Nerval's account of the capital influence of his uncle's library of occultist literature may owe something to Heine's Memoirs, though one could equally point to Balzac's 'Louis Lambert' as the source of this idea.[1] A complex form of mimesis may be the explanation of the close parallel between the development of Dumas' letters to Mélanie into 'Antony' and that of Nerval's 'Lettres à Jenny Colon' into 'Léo Burckart', and Nerval's insistence in the 'Lettres' that he has contributed to the future career of Jenny (e.g. Letter V11) may constitute an unconscious attempt to vie with Dumas who, according to a famous anecdote, received a warm accolade from Ida Ferrier after having procured her (modest) success in 'Teresa' (1832), accompanied by the words "vous avez assuré mon avenir".[2]

Impersonation extends also to fictional or historical characters, whence the search for glamorous doppelgänger in the historical past. When Chateaubriand in 'Les Mémoires d'outre-tombe' tells us how, having read the story of Bassompierre and "la belle lingère", he visited the scene and half hoped to meet this intriguing person who had died two hundred years before, we are immediately reminded of Nerval's Prefaces to 'Faust' II and 'Les Filles du feu' and a host of other passages.[3]

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1. See N. Rinsler, 'Gérard de Nerval and Heinrich Heine', 'Revue de littérature comparée', January-March 1959. Louis Lambert's vast knowledge, especially of mystical doctrines, is also acquired in his uncle's library.

2. See A. Maurois, 'Les trois Dumas', 116 and A. Craig Bell, 'Alexandre Dumas, a Biography and Study', Cassell, 1950.

3. 'Les Mémoires d'outre-tombe', Book IV, chapter viii. See also Book IV, chapter ix: "J'étais trop plein de mes lectures pour ne pas voir partout des comtesses de Chateaubriand, des duchesses d'Etampes, des Gabrielle d'Estrées, des La Vallière, des Montespan".

The wish to project oneself into the heroic epochs of the past, beautifully exemplified in Stendhal's sublimely ridiculous Mathilde de la Mole, no doubt accounts in part for the vogue of the historical drama and novel. Vigny's Cinq-Mars, struggling disdainfully with a power which will inevitably defeat him, is clearly an image of the author, and we are strongly reminded of Nerval when Vigny writes of Julian the Apostate: "Si la métempsychose existe, j'ai été cet homme".[1]

Like Hugo and the rest, Nerval follows the trend set by Scott.[2] 'La Main de gloire' and 'Le Prince des Sots' use Hugo's technique of peopling familiar Parisian scenes with the figures of the past.

Contemporary interest in the ambiguous relation between reality and theatrical illusion reflects the same faith in the truth of what is imagined. Many of the 'Tales' of Hoffmann, for example, are based on the interchange between the two. In the amusing 'Salvator Rosa' (Egmont translation, Vol.I) an old man is shown a playlet in which he himself is impersonated. Unable to bear the sight of himself giving away the hand of his niece to a young painter, he leaps onto the stage to prevent it while the real niece goes off with the real painter. In 'La Princesse Brambilla', an actor suffering from delusions of grandeur and "dualisme chronique"[3] is transformed on stage into the noble prince he dreams he is. Nerval's "j'aime à conduire ma vie comme un roman" (II, 342) is a well-worn theme, and the image of the tunic of Nessus occurs frequently to denote the dramatic transformation of man into mask.[4]

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1. 1833 - quoted in Vigny, 'Oeuvres complètes', Eds. du Seuil, 412.

2. See Richer, 'Expérience', 103, 556 & 573f.

3. Baudelaire, 'De l'Essence du rire' (1855). The story was translated by Toussenel in 1830.

4. See a variant ("la tunique de Néron") in Nerval's own 'Roman tragique', I, 180; Musset's 'Lorenzaccio', Act III, scene iii and the hero's monologue which closes Act IV, scene v; and Dumas' 'Kean'.

The hero of Dumas' 'Kean ou Désordre et génie', like Brisacier in 'Le Roman tragique' (1844), puts all the passion of a real-life love into the acting of his role. Kean's playacting suddenly becomes real when he turns towards the boxes and denounces his rival, and like Brisacier's, his is "une royauté qu'un bon petit coup de sifflet fait évanouir" (Act II, scene iv). The theme appears briefly in Hugo's 'Marion de Lorme' (1831) when Didier, having escaped from prison (compare Brisacier's situation in 'Le Roman tragique'), joins a troupe of strolling players, with Marion, to escape pursuit. At a mock-audition she speaks a speech from 'Le Cid' which has some bearing on their situation (ActIII, scene x). This suggests a very faint link in the mind of Hugo between the troupe of players and the idea of enacting situations which run parallel to real life, a link which, as I shall suggest in the Appendix to Chapter Vll, is strongly developed by Nerval. The situation in 'As You Like It', performed by the main characters in Gautier's 'Mademoiselle de Maupin' (1835) defines the actors' relationships and underlines the novel's central theme of transvestism. Yet here illusion is a mirror of reality, not a substitute for it as in 'Le Roman tragique'.

Just as theatrical illusion may merge with reality, so too the Romantics exploit the uncertainty of the line which divides dreaming from waking experience. The main formative influence on Nerval here is that of Nodier. There can be no doubt that the author of 'Aurélia' had absorbed the lesson of 'La Fée aux miettes' (1832): "mes impressions de la veille et du sommeil se sont quelquefois confondues, et je ne me suis jamais fort inquiété de les démêler, parce que je ne saurais décider au juste quelles sont les plus raisonnables et les meilleures. J'imagine seulement qu'à la fin cela revient

à peu près au même" (Chapter xiv).[1] Nerval's analysis of the transition from waking to sleeping (I, 363) recalls many similar passages by Nodier, e.g. in 'Smarra' (1821) or 'Lydie' (1839).

He who takes his dreams more seriously than his rational apprehensions may have access to a higher truth. Nodier's gentle lunatics consistently embody this view, clearly formulated in 'La Fée aux miettes': "qui empêche que cet état indéfinissable de l'esprit, que l'ignorance appelle folie, ne le conduise à son tour à la suprême sagesse par quelque route inconnue qui n'est pas encore marquée dans la carte grossière de vos sciences imparfaites".[2] The dream-world is superior to the world of reality, and Nerval's whole work could well be placed under the sign of Hugo's famous statement in the 1822 preface to 'Odes et ballades': "Sous le monde réel, il existe un monde idéal, qui se montre resplendissant à l'oeil de ceux que des méditations graves ont accountumés à voir dans les choses plus que les choses", or of the line from 'A mes amis L.B. et S.-B.' ('Les Feuilles d'automne', 1831): "L'idéal tombe en poudre au toucher du réel".[3]

Hence man's dualism, his central and ambiguous position as the link

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1. Cf Nerval, 'Aurélia', I, 367. See also the beginning of chapter xv of Nodier's story, and Gautier's 'La Morte amoureuse' (1826) in which dream and waking life are equal equivalents (especially 'Contes fantastiques', Corti, 108). J. Richer also points to the influence of Nodier's 'De quelques phénomènes du sommeil' (1831 - see 'Expérience', 448).

2. Chapter xxiv (see also 'Une heure ou la vision' and 'Lydie'). Compare the ending of Balzac's 'Louis Lambert', and see Richer, 'Expérience', chapter xiii, section 3, for further indications.

3. Cf Baudelaire, 'Le Voyage'. For F. Mauriac, Nerval exemplifies "le péché mortel du romantisme ... il préfère ce qui n'est pas à ce qui est" ('La vie n'est pas un songe', 'Figaro littéraire', 8 September 1956.

between mind and matter in the chain of being, becomes a major theme. The quotation from Nerval's 1828 translation of 'Faust' which he was later to place at the head of 'La Pandora' (I, 351), is echoed in Nodier's 'Jean-François les bas-bleus' (1832). The narrator wonders "s'il ne serait pas possible que Jean-François eût deux âmes, l'une qui appartenait au monde grossier où nous vivons, et l'autre qui s'épurait dans le subtil espace où il croyait pénétrer par la pensée". Mind/body dualism also plays an important part in Balzac's mystical scheme of things as outlined in 'Louis Lambert' (1832). There is a whole line of heroes who are at war with themselves. The theme is treated in Gautier's 'Le Chevalier double' (1840), for example, with an almost finicking neatness. In Hoffmann's 'Elixiere des Teufels', a capital influence on Nerval,[1] the two sides of the hero's personality are projected into two separate characters, and the theme of "les frères ennemis" is a stock feature of Romantic writing, whether it be in Mérimée's 'Chronique du règne de Charles IX' (1829) or in Hugo's 'Les Burgraves' (1843), where, as in Hoffmann, the struggle between the good brother and the bad is continued from one generation to the next, so that the 'Oresteian' trilogy of Aeschylus is transposed into the Romantic mode. All this Nerval will make his own.

A more subtle variant on the theme of the "frères ennemis", and one which holds a central position in Nerval's imaginative scheme, is that of the two contrasting types, the dreamer and the man of action, such as we find in Nodier's 'Inès de las Sierras' (1837), or in Musset's 'Namouna' (1833 - Hassan and Don Juan), 'Idylle' (1839 - Rodolphe and Albert) and 'Les Caprices

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1. See below, Chapter Vll.

de Marianne' (1833 - Octave and Coelio). The two are fraternal, but often find themselves rivals in love. In 'Confession d'un enfant du siècle' (1836) the hero's dualism, his alternation between a cruel irony and a too-vulnerable idealism, is resolved when he abdicates his claim on Brigitte in favour of the man who represents his good self. This too we shall find is a frequent ressort of Nerval's stories.[1]

The vogue of the historical novel not only reflects the use of the past as a source of glamorous doppelgänger, but also exemplifies what I take to be one of the central concerns of the Romantic generation: the idea of a return to the source of life, of history, of religion and of art, the "retour aux origines". In art, Nerval is only following an established article of faith when he collects or copies folk-songs and folk-stories. Nodier's fairy-tales like 'Trésor des Fèves et Fleur des Pois' (1833), in which the magic is given a familiar country setting, set the tone for Nerval's 'La Reine des poissons', and the author of 'Chansons et légendes du Valois' certainly knew the preamble to Nodier's 'Légende de Soeur Béatrix' (1837), which extolls the virtues of spontaneous popular story-telling as against the artificiality of an imported tradition. George Sand and Balzac[2] share Nerval's predilection for the simple folk-song, and some of the best of Musset's and Hugo's verse is consciously modelled on it. The hero of Hoffmann's 'Le Majorat' (Egmont translation of 1836, Vol. II) is moved to tears by a simple folk melody, and we remember the frequency of this situation in Nerval's later work.

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1. 'Hakem' is the most obviously important example here, but there are many others.

2. See Richer, 'Expérience', 324 and Note 82, 332.

One should note, though, that in some respects Nerval's view of art is not typical of his generation. Adoniram in 'L'Histoire de Soliman' no doubt represents the Romantic image of the artist as demiurge, but Nerval never publicly associates himself with this image. Nor does he share the view proclaimed by poets like Lamartine, Vigny, Gautier, Musset and Baudelaire that genius is purchased at the price of a suffering which consecrates the artist's immense superiority. Despite an insignificant borrowing from Gautier's 'Le Club des hachichins' (1846),[1] Nerval does not share the interest in intoxicants reflected by such works as Musset's adaptation of De Quincey (1828), 'Du hachich et de l'aliénation mentale' (1845) by Moreau de Tours, Gautier's 'La Pipe d'opium' (1838) and 'Le Club des hachichins', and Baudelaire's 'Paradis artificiels' (1860). The fact is that for Nerval suffering and the divine afflatus were too real and too frightening to be paraded, and it is in a tone almost of apology that he offers his sonnets "composés dans (un) état de rêverie super-naturaliste" (I, 182). His adherence to Nodier's doctrine of "le fantastique sérieux" is all the deeper for not being too openly avowed, and this is perhaps the sense in which we should understand K. Haedens' remark that Nerval is the only true French Romantic.[2]

In the interpretation of history, the millenary fantasies of Nerval's generation, whilst looking with confidence to the future, at the same time look back with nostalgia to a lost golden age. Nerval's ironical and perfunctory comments on the prophets and visionaries of his day (II, 1220 - 1244) are in line with Chateaubriand's strictures on contemporary "political

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1. See II, 1339, Note 8.

2. The idea, incidentally, surely derives from A. Béguin's 'L'Ame romantique et le rêve'.

heresies", and the latter's diagnosis of the decadence of the age coincides with that of Nerval as well as of Musset.[1] But for all his scepticism, Nerval was clearly open to mystico-socialist visions of Utopia, for at certain points they meet, and may indeed have helped to form, his private dream-experience. The idea of steady progress through recurrent cycles of history, and of archetypal individuals who ensure continuity by reappearing in successive incarnations informs Nerval's own mystic scheme of things. Leroux's vision of the orgnanic unity of the human race provides a pertinent commentary for 'Aurélia', Part One, chapter iv: "Nous sommes non seulement les fils et la postérité de ceux qui ont déjà vécu, mais au fond et réellement ces générations antérieures elles-mêmes".[2] And Nerval would agree with Lamennais that 'les hommes ... auraient dû ne former qu'une seule grande famille" (chapter i, 'Le Livre du peuple', 1837). Nerval's feeling for the Valois region as a place where the original purity of ancient ways has been retained, recalls the opening passage of Vigny's 'Cing-Mars' (1826), which celebrates the inhabitants of Touraine in terms which are close to those which Nerval will use later in 'Angélique': "leur langage est le plus pur français ... le berceau de la langue est là, près du berceau de la monarchie". Nerval's "la vieille Allemagne, notre mère à tous" (II, 743) recalls the race theories of Michelet: "la France allemande sympathise d'ailleurs avec l'Allemagne sa mère" ('Tableau de la France'), and Nerval's "issu, par ma mère, des paysans des premières communes franches, situées au nord de Paris"

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1. See 'Les Mémoires d'outre-tombe', Book 44, chapter ii.

2. P. Leroux, 'De l'humanité' (1840), quoted by D.G. Charlton, 'Secular Religions in France, 1815 - 1870, 86. Compare Nerval, I, 372.

(I, 456) will be paralleled in Michelet's 'Préface à l'histoire de France' (1869): "moi-même enfant de Meuse par ma mère". So too Lamartine sees Italy as "Source des nations, reine, mère commune".[1] Nerval's dream of a family paradise where he will be restored to a profoundly innocent happiness is intimately linked with current views.

On a more personal level, Nerval shares with Gautier the fascinating idea of reliving significant stretches of past time. First formulated in Nerval's 1840 preface to Goethe's 'Faust' (from which it derives), it is expressed in Nerval's work by the recurring image of the stopped clock which begins to work again at the accelerated tempo of the dream.[2] Gautier, literal-minded as ever, tells us of a clock which, it is claimed, will point eternally to 9.15 ('Le Club des hachichins', 1846). 'La Cafetière' (1831), a Hoffmannesque fantasy, contains the faintest suggestion of Nerval's later preoccupation with the idea of a simulated wedding-ceremony which resuscitates a vanished ancestral happiness. 'Omphale' (1834), too, contains a suggestion for 'Sylvie' and one or two details from 'Le Pied de momie' (1840) will be used later by Nerval, in 'L'Histoire de Soliman'. Finally, Gautier's 'Arria Marcella' (1852) is built round the crucial idea from Nerval's preface to Faust, and recalls in some respects his 'Isis' of 1845.[3]

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1. 'La Perte de l'Anio', in 'Les Harmonies poétiques et religieuses'. Compare similar passages by Nerval on Germany, Greece, Egypt and the Lebanon (see below, Chapter X).

2. See preface to 'Faust' II, 'Voyage en Orient' (II, 425), 'Le Marquis de Fayolle', 'L'Imagier de Harlem', 'Sylvie', 'Artémis'.

3. Gautier had paraphrased the passage from the preface to 'Faust' in the article on Chenavard in 1848 (see J. Richer, 'Archives nervaliennes', No. 3, 13-14).

The idea of a primaeval race surviving through history, which, as I shall show in Chapter Vll, is a most important part of Nerval's scheme of things, is linked with that of perennial conflict, and Nerval's theories are similar to the doctrines of Augustin Thierry (following Boulainvilliers) according to whom, after the conquest of England by the Normans, the Anglo-Saxon demand for freedom, culminating in the English system of representative government, causes a continuing rivalry between conquerors and conquered.[1]

The idea of a nation, as it were, within the nation, preserving its independence of purpose and its separate identity, at once characteristically serene because they remember a Golden Age, and potentially rebellious because the Golden Age has been dispelled by the wickedness of a secular power whose claim to government is dubious, is thus simultaneously a feature of Nerval's most intense personal convictions and a commonplace of contemporary political theory. The dreaming, wish-forming part of the mind draws its material from what is automatically accepted.

Nerval's self-identification with an opposition race shades off into "Cainism" the cult of a race of defeated heroes surviving from a legendary or heroic past, found in Byron, Ballanche, Balzac and Baudelaire, and into the Romantic

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1. 'La Conquête de l'Angleterre par les Normands' (1825). Cf Boulainvilliers' theory about the conquering Franks and their ascendancy over the defeated Gallo-Romans as the natural basis for French social and political organisation ('Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France', 1727).

cult of the idealistic rebel. In particular there are striking similarities between a sonnet like 'Antéros' and Hugo's 'Les Burgraves' (1843). Job represents the cursed race, criminal yet defiant, whose power is being usurped by degenerate descendants.[1] The conflict between him and his brother, Barberousse, continues in the next generation between Otbert and Hatto.

The splendid, forbidden cities of Nerval's 'Histoire de Soliman' recall the 'Neuvième vision' of Lamartine's 'La Chute d'un ange' (1838), the description of Sodom and Gomorrha in Hugo's 'Le Feu du ciel', section vii, ('Les Orientales', 1829) and Leconte de Lisle's Hénokhia in 'Qaïn' ('Poèmes barbares', 1862). So too the revolt of Hakem and the potential revolt of Adoniram at the head of an organised labour force may be linked, in inspiration, to the socialist doctrines of Leroux, Fourier, Saint-Simon and Lamennais.[2]

In terms of the individual and the family, the Romantic quest for the source of things takes the form of a nostalgia for childhood innocence. For Nerval as for Lamartine the family is "l'abrégé du monde".[3]

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1. Richer points out that Hugo may have taken the idea for a similar theme in 'Le Roi s'amuse' (1832) from Nerval's poem 'Nobles et valets' ('Expérience', 288). The point is convincing, though it might be mentioned that Hugo had already expressed similar sentiments through the mouth of Don Ruy Gomez in 'Hernani' (1830), Act I, scene iii.

2. "C'est le 'libéral' Gérard, aussi farouchement hostile aux institutions monarchiques que Victor Hugo ou Michelet; c'est le contemporain du saint-simonisme et du socialisme naissant, le futur auteur des Illuminés, qui exprime l'idéal révolutionnaire et les espoirs messianiques de sa génération" - F. Constans, 'Deux enfants du feu', 'Mercure de France', May 1948. Compare the social protest in the novels of Hugo, whether it be 'Le Dernier jour d'un condamné' or 'Notre-Dame de Paris' (e.g. Book II, chapter iv).

3. 'Jocelyn' (1835), 'Neuvième époque'.

In the 'Harmonies poétiques et religieuses' (1830) poems like 'Souvenir d'enfance' and 'Milly ou la terre natale' celebrate with an almost religious veneration the tranquillity and order of home, and 'La Vigne et la maison' (1857) describes the poet's return, recalling a famous passage in Chateaubriand's 'René' (1802) which Nerval must have had in mind when he wrote the ninth chapter of 'Sylvie'. Chateaubriand's 'Mémoires d'outre-tombe' (1849-50) begins with a review of his noble antecedents, and we find that it is not uncommon for writers of the period to claim a nobility which existed only in their imagination: Balzac and Hugo were examples for Nerval in this, and in 'Mardoche' Musset makes fun of the Jeune-France hero "(qui) avait la pucelle/D'Orléans pour aïeule en ligne maternelle".

The nostalgia for childhood is also a feature of the Romantic experience of love, and Baudelaire's famous line "Et le vert paradis des amours enfantines" finds countless echoes in the writing of the time. Like Auguste Brizeux, the Sainte-Beuve of 'Joseph Delorme' (1829) and the 'Consolations' (1830) is a poet of childhood love, and we find here the same half-remembered phantoms as in Nerval's 'Promenades et souvenirs'. Even the marriage-game, so integral a part of Nerval's imaginary love-life, appears elsewhere: in Heine's 'Intermezzo',[1] or, as far as the dressing-up goes, in Musset's 'Confession d'un enfant du siècle' (Part IV, chapter vi), which also incorporates Musset's favourite theme of the innocent country childhood: "j'avais regardé durant des heures danser en rond des petites filles; j'écoutais battre mon coeur naïf aux refrains de leurs chansons enfantines"

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1. "Nous avons souvent joué au mari et à la femme" (XXIV, 'Revue des deux mondes', 15 September 1848). 'Intermezzo' probably played a part in precipitating what critics have called Nerval's "retour au Valois" - see Chapter XI.

(Part Two, chapter iv). The libertine's longing for a lost purity is concentrated in these idyllic memories.[1] The young man who returns to the childhood sweetheart with whom he has been brought up provides the theme for 'On ne badine pas avec l'amour' (1834) and 'Carmosine' (1850).[2] And Musset, following Nerval, takes Goethe's Marguerite as the symbol of the innocent attachments of childhood.[3]

Some of Hoffmann's stories are even closer to Nerval. His translation of 'Die Abenteuer des Sylvesterabends' is the first intimation of the Sylvie-theme (see Chapter III), and the hero of 'Doge et Dogaresse', translated by Egmont in 1836 (vol. I) has faint memories of a happy childhood. He remembers a beautiful young girl, and a night of terror from which he was rescued by the woman who is now his nurse. Eventually he meets the girl again, their love is instantaneously rekindled, and he discovers that she is the daughter of his adoptive father. All the essential ingredients for 'La Forêt noitre' are here. The scene in 'Le Magnétiseur', also translated by Egmont (vol. II) in which Théobald restores the alienated affection of his <u>fiancée</u> by making her relive their childhood experience under hypnosis (they are cousins and were brought up together) recalls the <u>tableau vivant</u> of 'La Forêt noire'.

More profoundly still, Nerval must have been affected by the opening pages of Nodier's 'Trilby' (1822) and the idyllic picture, in 'La Neuvaine de

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1. See also 'Rolla' and 'Lorenzaccio', Act IV, scene ix.

2. See especially 'Carmosine' Act I, scene ii and Act III, scene v. Cf also 'Louison' (1849).

3. See 'Lucie', in 'Poésies nouvelles'.

la Chandeleur', of love between adolescents who, having been brought up in the country, have not yet learnt "la funeste science des passions". Nodier concludes: "c'est cela qui est le bonheur! Je sais le reste, ou à peu près; mais c'est cela que je voudrais recommencer, si on recommençait.

On ne recommence plus; mais se souvenir, c'est presque recommencer".[1] We note that 'La Neuvaine de la Chandeleur' was published in July and August 1838, just before Nerval wrote 'Léo Burckart' which, as I shall show in Chapter V, develops for the first time the theme of the return to a childhood love. Above all, J. Richer shows us that the "ronde des jeunes filles" in 'Sylvie', chapter ii, is modelled on a scene from 'Thérèse Aubert' (1819).[2]

The theme of the lost love is one of those held in common by Nerval and Gautier,[3] and it must be seen in the context of the Romantic generation's recognition that love is an essentially illusory, subjective and therefore solitary experience. Rousseau and Chateaubriand spend days on end in absorbed daydreaming about their "fantasques amours".[4] Chateaubriand's

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1. Compare Chateaubriand's overpowering excitement as he remembers a crucial moment in his childhood ('Mémoires d'outre-tombe', Book One, chapter vii). The theme of the childhood love also appears in 'René'.

2. 'Expérience', 304 -06.

3. Nerval associates himself with the cult of the "défunt amour" for La Cydalise in Gautier's 'Château du souvenir' (1861) when he writes in 'Petits Châteaux de Bohême' of "ma Cydalise, à moi, perdue, à jamais perdue!" (I, 99).

4. See Rousseau's 'Confessions', Book IX and 'Mémoires d'outre-tombe', Book III, chapters x and xi.

hero René, overflowing with unused feeling, wishes he had "une Eve tirée de moi-même". Nodier, too, tells of his protracted reveries about delicious phantoms.[1] The "love-poems" of Lamartine's 'Méditations' (1820) could be given as epigraph Nerval's "j'ai emporté mon amour comme une proie dans la solitude" (II, 350), and Nerval could have signed this formulation by Coelio in Musset's 'Les Caprices de Marianne' (1833): "La réalité n'est qu'une ombre. Appelle imagination ou folie ce qui la divinise".[2] "Tout devint passion chez moi", writes Chateaubriand, "en attendant les passions mêmes" (Mémoires d'outre-tombe', Book III, chapter v). The lover is Pygmalion.[3] For the hero of Sainte-Beuve's 'Volupté ' (1834) the image of love matters more than the real thing.

Hence the "paradoxe platonique" enunciated in the first chapter of 'Sylvie': "Vue de près, la femme réelle révoltait notre ingénuité; il fallait qu'elle apparût reine ou déesse, et surtout n'en pas approcher" (I, 266). A woman's beauty is a function of her untouchability, and the most sublime love is the one which cannot be fulfilled. One of the most common themes is that of the grand passion which is thwarted by fatal circumstances.[4] Nodier's Franciscus Columna feels that to look at Polia closely would be to profane their love, and their union "commençait par le

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1. In 'M. Cazotte' (1836) and 'La Neuvaine de la Chandeleur': "mon imagination commençait à se former, dans la solitude, un type qui ne ressemblait à aucune femme, et auquel une seule femme devait complètement ressembler".

2. Act I, scene i. Compare a more frivolous version of the same idea: "Quand même on ne ferait que s'imaginer qu'on aime, est-ce que ce n'est pas une chose charmante?" ('Il faut qu'une porte soit ouverte ou fermée', (1845).

3. See Rousseau, 'Confession', Book IX and Hoffmann's 'L'Homme au sable' (cf Richer, 'Expérience', 268).

4. E.g. Hugo's Hernani or Didier in 'Marion de Lorme' (1831).

veuvage pour aboutir à la possession". Hence Nodier's favourite theme of the lovers whose union is preserved for a higher existence by being prevented in this one.[1] Life becomes a period of waiting during which the postulant to eternal felicity in the after-life is subjected to trials. The hero of 'La Fée aux miettes' (1832) is condemned to death and only reprieved after he has shown himself willing to die for his true love. Similarly in works like 'La Forêt noire' or 'Hakem' the lover's fidelity unto death is proved by a near-execution or simulated execution. To be in love is to be in love with death. The beauty of a Romantic heroine like the Elvire of Lamartine's 'Méditations' or the Julie of 'Raphaël' is at once sickly and angelic. The ecstasy of love is a foretaste of the soul's swooning abandonment to infinity. When Nerval writes: "elle m'appartenait bien plus dans sa mort que dans sa vie" (I, 378), he is focussing a widely held belief as well as expressing a profound personal conviction.

The dualism between soul and body is thus repeated in the relationship of love. The temptation is to seek a living counterpart to the ideal woman of one's dreams. Sometimes this can be accomplished, as when the hero of 'La Neuvaine de la Chandeleur' meets the <u>fiancée</u> whom so far he had only seen in a vision: "mon illusion prenait un corps, ma chimère devenait une réalité". But the girl dies. Only rarely can the fusion of ideal and réal be achieved, as for example in 'La Fée aux miettes', when it is revealed that the wrinkled

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1. 'Une heure ou la vision' (1806), 'Trilby' (1822), 'Jean-François les bas-bleus' (1832), 'Baptiste Montauban' (1833), 'Les Fiancés' (1837), 'La Neuvaine de la Chandeleur' (1838), 'Lydie ou la résurrection' (1839). As J. Richer points out, 'Aurélia' Part One, chapters ii-iii may have been inspired by 'Une heure', in which the hero fancies that his dead beloved is now dwelling in a star ('Expérience', 451).

old fairy is the same person as the beautiful princess who visits Michel every night in dreams (chapter xxv). This story had a considerable effect on Nerval, for not only does he make it the basis for a retrospective fantasy about his "double amour" for the actress, in 'Petits Châteaux de Bohême', but it also helps to fix in his imagination the dream of possessing a young girl who is at the same time the venerable Spirit of the race. Thus when Sylvie dresses up in her aunt's wedding finery she cries: "Ah! je vais avoir l'air d'une vieille fée", which prompts the reflection: "la fée des légendes éternellement jeune" (I, 279).[1]

But the more usual theme is that the real must be sacrificed in favour of the ideal. This is the moral of many of the stories by Hoffmann which are based on the choice between the artist's ideal inspiration and the humdrum woman who is the cause of it.[2] Nerval's (?) pastiche of Hoffmann, 'Soirée d'automne', is based on the opposition between an accessible girl and the ideal beauty, and that published by Léon de Wailly in 'La Revue des deux mondes' ('L'Autre chambre', October 1831) has the Hoffmanesque message that since marriage would have stifled the hero's genius, it is fortunate that he neglects his <u>fiancée</u> for the Princess of his dreams.[3]

Gautier's story 'Tiburce ou la Toison d'or' has the same message. The hero might be seen as a composite projection of both Nerval and Gautier, as the work is based on the visit to Belgium which the two friends made together

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1. See also stanza xx of Gautier's 'Albertus', describing the transformation of an old witch into a beautiful young girl.

2. E.g. 'Aventures de la nuit de la Saint-Sylvestre', 'La Cour d'Artus', 'L'Eglise des Jésuites', 'Maître Martin', 'Les Elixirs du diable'.

3. See E. Teichmann.

in 1836,[1] and its theme is obviously related to the novel for which they were at that time under contract to write in collaboration: 'Confessions galantes de deux gentilshommes périgourdins'.[2] Like the two friends, Tiburce is in love with an ideal of beauty, and goes to Brussels and Antwerp in search of a Flemish woman who would reproduce the luxuriant colouring and opulent countours of the figures in Rubens' paintings. But the ideal existed only in the imagination of the artist, and Tiburce falls in love, not with a real woman, but with the Magdelene in Rubens' 'Descent from the Cross' in Antwerp Cathedral - a figure that Nerval must have had in mind when writing the part of La Maddelena in 'L'Alchimiste' (1836).[3] Now, La Maddelena corresponds in Nerval's imagination to Jenny Colon, who also represents the "Flemish" ideal.[4] Indeed, we shall find many striking similarities of detail in the feminine portraits which appear in the two friends' works,[5] although Gautier's of course are much more highly visualised. The Flemish ideal is, at it were, common property.

Tiburce then meets Gretchen, borrowed wholesale from Nerval's translation of the first part of Goethe's 'Faust'. She is a "Rubens woman" scaled down

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1. See A. Marie, 125f.

2. In Letter 22, dated September 1836, Nerval says that the book is "assez avancé", but we gather that his own contribution has been slight. May we not conclude that Gautier, never a man to waste copy, used what he had written for 'Tiburce'? (cf Richer, 'Expérience et création', 215).

3. See Chapter IV.

4. He claims later (discrepancies in the names of the painters invoked can be discounted as the result of artistic licence) to have found the type in Kathy, the polyglot lady's-maid encountered in Vienna (II, 37).

5. Gautier, like Nerval, frequently states that features such as long, tapering fingers or an aquiline nose are signs of racial purity.

to pretty, life-size dimensions. Like Goethe's heroine, she is simple, commonsensical and undemanding, belonging to a wholesome tradition of domestic tranquillity and order. In this false resemblance between a statuesque ideal and an accessible reality we find, surely, the germ of Nerval's 'Corilla' (1839), and a link with the persistent pattern in Nerval's works which contrasts a humble village girl with the remote actress or courtesan.[1]

In Nerval's life, this contrast can be traced, on the one hand, to the fancy that Jenny Colon represents his and Gautier's ideal and, on the other, to some childhood sweetheart. It is interesting to note here a similar contrast in Gautier's own life: Gautier lived with the warm-hearted Ernesta Grisi, who bore him two daughters, but it was to her sister Carlotta that he devoted a life-long love which amounted almost to a cult. Nerval's imaginative patterns, by the familiar process of mimesis, may be modelled on his friend's actual situation. Compare Musset's 'La Coupe et les lèvres' whose hero, following an evolution similar to the one which Nerval, at least in his imagination, was to undergo in 1838-39 (see below, Chapter V), having been disillusioned by an affaire with a courtesan, returns to his native village to marry the simple girl he left behind.

The theme of the courtesan reformed by love, of course, is a common one.[2] That is to say that an accessible reality may take on something of the colouring of the ideal. Or again, the standard opposition between the dangerous courtesan and the sweet little girl one marries (Nerval's 'L'Alchimiste') gives way to the ambiguous situation in which the young girl resembles the courtesan (Nerval's 'Corilla').

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1. The theme of the humble accessible love appears also in 'Mademoiselle de Maupin' and in 'Fortunio'.

2. See Hugo's 'Marion de Lorme', Gautier's 'La Morte amoureuse' and Nerval's 'Piquillo', the latter two both dating from 1836.

The theme of "ressemblances" which has come to be almost automatically associated with Nerval, is in fact quite widespread in the first half of the century. Octave, in Musset's 'Confession d'un enfant du siècle', takes home a prostitute who resembles his faithless mistress - she seems to him the very image of his humiliation (Part I, chapter x). We are reminded of Nerval in Naples. Vigny's 'Servitude et grandeur militaires' (1835) has an episode in which Pierrette, a milkmaid, is apparently impersonated by a famous actress. Hoffmann's stories are full of ressemblances and déjà-vu situations. The portrait which comes to life, crossing the line between dream and reality, is also a theme which haunts Hoffmann, as it does Nodier and Nerval.

The tendency in the end is to reduce all individuals to a single ideal identity, so that the Romantic lover searches for a woman, who, like Brigitte in Musset's 'Confession' will be "ma maîtresse, ma mère et ma soeur".[1] Like Chateaubriand's 'René', he may feel that the purest and deepest love is that of brother and sister, and we shall see that this will be the logic of Nerval's dreams also.[2] Nerval's vision of a sort of family identity shared between the individual members is also found in Lamartine's 'Raphaël', where we are told that Antonine (Graziella) is like "l'enfance naïve de Julie", whilst the saintliness which she achieves with maturity makes her resemble the narrator's mother. In Nodier's 'La Neuvaine' the hero resembles his father and Cécile her mother, whose portrait the hero sees. Finally, Gautier gives us a rather mechanical version of Nerval's dream of common features which as it were fluctuate from face to face.[3]

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1. Part IV, chapter iii. Cf Frantz in 'Léo Burckart'.
2. See especially 'L'Histoire du calife Hakem'.
3. Compare 'Aurélia', I, 376 (& II, 322) with 'La Pipe d'opium' (1838).

For Nodier and Lamartine as well as for Nerval, the ideal woman belongs to the hierarchy of angels and love is a facet of religion. Yet for Nerval's generation, faith does not come easily: "Aurélia reste un document irrécusable sur le vide creusé dans les âmes religieuses de l'âge romantique par le philosophisme du siècle précédent".[1] Nerval's 'Christ aux Oliviers', like Vigny's 'Mont des Oliviers' or Musset's 'Rolla', presents the desolation of a world abandoned by god.[2] But Nerval never reached the facile solution of Musset's 'L'Espoir en Dieu'.[3] As D.G. Charlton shows, his ideas reflect the occult or neo-pagan beliefs current during the period.[4] Nerval would have endorsed Cousin's statement that "l'Orient est le berceau de la civilisation et de la philosophie".

Even the celebrated Nervalian syncretism is common among his contemporaries. Vigny's 'Daphné' was not published in his lifetime, but one wonders whether Nerval knew of it, at any rate at second hand, since it could have inspired 'Delfica' and the article on 'Le Boeuf gras', both written in 1845. Nerval would have agreed with Balzac that "l'homme n'a jamais eu qu'une religion" (Louis Lambert, 1832-35) whilst the passage on "l'universelle Passion de tant de dieux" in Michelet's 'Preface à l'Histoire de France' (1869) might be directly inspired by Nerval's 'Isis'. The cell of Claude Frollo in

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1. F. Constans, 'Sophie, Aurélia, Artémis', 'Mercure de France', June 1951.
2. As M. Richer points out ('Expérience', 628 and Note 56), Nerval quotes the famous line from 'Rolla', "Qui de nous, qui de nous va devenir un dieu?"
3. "Pour que Dieu nous réponde, adressons-nous à lui" - which is followed, incidentally, by a phrase which sounds like an echo of the epigraph of 'Le Christ aux Oliviers': "Si le ciel est désert...": cf "Dieu est mort! le ciel est vide" (I, 36).
4. D.G. Charlton, 'Secular Religions in France 1815-1870', O.U.P. 1963. See J. Richer, 'Nerval et les doctrines ésotériques'.

Hugo's 'Notre-Dame de Paris', with its tangle of inscriptions from every tongue and every faith (Book Vll, chapter iv) is like a symbol of Nerval's religious eclecticism, though it may be inspired by the Gothic laboratory of 'Faust' which Nerval recreated in the clinic at Passy ('Aurélia', I, 409). Nerval must have approved of Nodier's 'Trilby' with its message that the gods of pre-Christian religions have as much right to our love and veneration as those who have superseded them, and of Leroux's notion that Christianity is only a facet of the truth, a link in the chain of tradition.

PART ONE

LITERATURE AS A SECOND LIFE

CHAPTER II

A FANTASY LIFE

There is little reliable evidence about Nerval's love-life, since both his own "autobiographical" works and his friends' memoirs are more fanciful than factual. "Inventer, au fond, c'est se ressouvenir", he wrote in 1853 (I, 174-75) - but the inverse is also true: "se ressouvenir, c'est inventer". As for the memoirs of littérateurs like Houssaye, they are no more than a tissue of anecdote whose object is not to inform, but to entertain the simple-minded. To study them would be an exercise in the correlation of conflicting statements, for which Jean Richer's promised 'Nerval devant ses contemporains' will no doubt provide a useful basis[1]. In the meanwhile, one can get a good idea from A. Marie's summary of what the principal memoir-writers have to say about Nerval's affaire with Jenny Colon. This evidence is, as Sébillotte says, "à peu près inutilisable"[2].

If one turns to Nerval's Correspondence, it soon becomes apparent that there was no "woman in his life". Of the 503 letters we possess, only 16 are from or to women.[3] There are no love-letters - the Pléiade

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1. Announced in 'Nouvelles littéraires', 29 May 1958 and by Senelier, n°2,315. M. Richer remarks judiciously: "Il y aurait ... lieu d'affecter chaque témoignage d'un coefficient variant suivant la faculté de compréhension ou le don de sympathie du témoin" ('Expérience et création', 646).

2. A. Marie, 118-124; Sébillotte, 81.

3. Of these, 5 are to or from his aunts, 1 to Gautier's mother, 3 to a lady novelist with whom he was desultorily collaborating, 1 to George Sand, 2 to Mme. de Solms, and the rest to or from wives or mistresses of friends. (Reference is to the second edition of I).

editors are right in publishing the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon' apart from the main Correspondence, since the manuscripts we possess were clearly never sent (I shall discuss these in Chapter IV).

This is, of course, negative evidence. The possibility remains that Nerval did write love-letters which we do not possess. But it is incredible that, if this were so, no echo of the affaire should have come down to us. Again, it is possible that Nerval had a mistress whom, either from shame or indifference, he never mentioned in letters to his friends. Yet here too, would not the memoir-writers, avid for gossip, have given us at least a hint? In any case, such a liaison could hardly constitute a satisfying relationship. Nerval's frequent changes of address point also to the fact that there was no stabilising influence in his life.[1]

There were, no doubt, casual sexual encounters. There is no reason to disbelieve Nerval's account of the night spent with a Neapolitan working-girl.[2] In his correspondence with Gautier it seems to be understood that easy sexual conquests are one of the ordinary accomplishments of the sophisticated traveller.[3] True, it is Gautier, that master of

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1. Behind this point lies the whole difficulty of trying to reconstruct a man's life from what remains of his correspondence etc. (clearly many, perhaps most, letters are lost or thrown away). Some, like Sartre's Roquentin, may find the task impossible to reconcile with honesty. Fortunately, though, we are not concerned here with Nerval's biography, but with his imaginative response to experience.

2. See the fifth 'Lettre à Jenny Colon'.

3. See Letters 102 & XI; compare Letters 96 & 97; see also Letters 100 & II, and the letter from Gautier quoted in the Notes to Letter 21. A passage in Letter VII, from Francis Wey, suggests that Nerval was party to his friends' purely sexual pursuits.

sexual fantasy, who sets the pace, whilst Nerval's contributions have a rather dutiful air. But the convincing description, in 'Les Amours de Vienne', of the autobiographical hero's success in accosting women, indicates that Nerval was not unpractised in this art.

However, the available evidence suggests that if Nerval did have recourse to "easy women", it was in order to use them as instruments of fantasy. In the original text of the fifth 'Lettre à Jenny Colon' he says simply that he was attracted by the Neapolitan girl because she resembled the actress[1], but in the later version we have a more explicit admission: "il me prit fantaisie de m'étourdir pour tout un soir, et de m'imaginer que cette femme, dont je comprenais à peine le langage, était vous-même, descendue à moi par enchantement!" (I, 1259). The cheap conquest is used as a substitute for the woman of whom he is always dreaming, but whom he dare not approach. We shall see later how, in the two versions of 'Aurélia', a prostitute reminds him, first of his mother, and later of Aurélia herself[2]. In Nerval's literary transposition of the Neapolitan adventure, 'Corilla', he uses a story about the Colombe sisters, of whom one was a singer at the <u>opéra-comique</u> (like Jenny Colon), whilst the other, who resembled her exactly, was apparently a prostitute "qui faisait la parade sur les boulevards"[3].

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1. The hollowness of pleasure without love left him in a state of suicidal melancholy. The theme of love and death will arise later.

2. That is, of the dream-figure based on Jenny Colon. Here too the experience gives rise to a longing for death.

3. Letter 300. Note that, but for the final syllable, Colom(be) = Colon.

The prostitute, then, could act as a substitute for the most revered figures of Nerval's dreams. She can also stand for the village sweetheart. The flower-girl in 'Corilla' is both the easy woman and "la fleur sauvage des champs" (I, 344). F. Constans tells us that in a variant version of 'Sylvie', the village sweetheart "tombait au rang de fille entretenue"[1]. In his adaptation of the autobiography of Restif, Nerval emphasises and develops the point that Zéfire, a young prostitute, pretends to be the hero's country cousin: "une fée bienfaisante ... montait à lui de l'abîme"[2]. It may be that 'Artémis', in exalting "la sainte de l'abîme", celebrates the Great Prostitute at the expense of the "fantômes blancs" who are perhaps the transfigured forms of the pure young 'Cydalises' to whom an earlier poem is addressed[3]. - It is probable then that for Nerval the sexual act celebrated the possession by proxy of the ideal images of his imagination. The evidence suggests that this involves the idealisation of the prostitute rather than the degradation of the ideal. As in Genêt's 'Le Balcon', the brothel becomes a house of illusion. The act of love is always a simulacrum, a mock-union with a person who stands for someone else. Some of the implications of this will be explored when we come to Nerval's relations with Jenny Colon (Chapter IV).

Similarly, a woman with whom Nerval was simply acquainted can become the centre of a system of fantasy. The notorious Mme de Solms is called

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1. 'Sur la pelouse de Mortefontaine', 'Cahiers du Sud', N° 292, 1948.
2. See below, p. 296 and Note 1.
3. 'Les Cydalises' (1852), I, 56.

upon to play the part of Lady Bountiful that Nerval has invented for her. "La Princesse Brouhaha", as she was later to be called, is transformed into "une fée bienfaisante"[1]. We remember that the same phrase had been applied, two years earlier, to Zéfire, the prostitute who was metamorphosed by her charitable heart into a facsimile of the pure village sweetheart. Literature is shaping life, just as life had shaped literature.

Nothing is known of the relations between the forty-four-year-old Nerval and this notorious person who was young enough to be his daughter. From the two letters and the two poems, we deduce that she was kind to him in a period of distress, but that he deliberately exhausted her good-will. The poem 'Madame et souveraine' refers to some private agreement between them according to which he is to send her a packet of manuscripts and letters. These presumably included the precious letters to his father, or copies thereof, which Mme de Solms was later to publish[2]. As in certain of the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon', Nerval is sacrificing himself to the woman's happiness, in a spirit of total self-abnegation. But here the mood is one of real despair. Utterly disillusioned and dejected, he prepares himself for death.

But this withdrawal from the real relationship is balanced by the invention of an imaginary one. As in the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon', he

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1. See Letters 222 & 223 & Notes. The two poems included in the first letter are given in I, 72-73.

2. This is probably the answer to J. Richer's question: "comment l'ensemble des lettres de Gérard à son père tomba-t-il entre ses mains?" ('Expérience et création', 93).

quotes from 'Le Mariage de Figaro'[1]. 'Madame et souveraine' is the romance sung by Chérubin to the Countess in Act II, and evidently contains the answer to the enigma mentioned in the covering letter. Is Nerval saying that as Chérubin is to the Countess, so he is to Mme de Solms? If so, it is curious to find this inversion of the situation in the play, and to see the middle-aged man identifying himself with an adolescent[2]. Yet there are parallels. Chérubin, like Nerval, is being sent away from the lady he loves hopelessly despite their difference in rank. (But whereas Chérubin is destined for a career in the army, Nerval's destination is death). Nerval, like Chérubin, worships this lady whose love he feels too inadequate to win. The enigma may be a typical play on words: Nerval calls Mme de Solms "une reine" (Letter 223), whilst Chérubin sings of "une reine" who agrees to replace the "marraine" (i.e. "ma reine") he has lost. Does this mean that for Nerval, Mme de Solms is a replacement for the Queen of his dreams, the dead Jenny Colon? When Chérubin receives a kiss on the brow from the Countess (Act IV), we are reminded of "Mon front est rouge encore du baiser de la Reine"[3]. Further, since Mme de Solms was the grand-daughter of Napoleon's brother Lucien, and since Nerval himself had the delusion that he was the son of another brother, Joseph[4], we may suppose that he fancied himself related to her, just as the Countess is

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1. See Letter VI to Jenny (a misquotation). Pointed out by J. Richer, O.C. I, 214 & 217, Note 9.
2. Yet he has done so before: cf. the scene from 'Le Prince des Sots' quoted below, p. 171.
3. 'El Desdichado', I, 33.
4. See below, p. 169 and Note 2.

related to Chérubin (Act I, scene x)[1]. Thus the withdrawal occasioned by the thought that she is far beyond him, is compensated by the fancy that at a deeper level they belong to the same family. Hence, he entrusts her with his letters to Dr. Labrunie. Mme de Solms is a Queen to whom in his dejection he may not aspire. But she is also at the same time a niece and a protective mother-figure. By a combination of private fantasy and self-identification with a fictional character, we can see how Nerval created a whole imaginary system around the unlikely person of Mme de Solms. And the system, as we shall see later, is the very substance of Nerval's dreams.

So it is, almost a year later, with George Sand. Nerval's letter of 22 November 1853 has now been found and published, with a full commentary, by M. Richer[2]. Like Mme de Solms, George Sand is obviously associated in Nerval's mind with beautiful fragments of poetry which are haunting him. She too is a Queen, and M. Richer shows how the network of associations, some historical, others connected with private anniversaries (and in particular with Nerval's memory of his mother which was clearly very much in his mind at the time[3]), is built up. The original purpose of the letter was to enlist the help of G. Sand's son Maurice, and we remember that in an earlier attack of madness Nerval had stated that he wished to

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1. Further parallels exist between Nerval's imaginary system and 'Le Mariage de Figaro': Chérubin treats Suzanne as an accessible substitute for the Countess (II, i - see also the exchange of clothes in the last act). And Chérubin, like Nerval in Vienna (II, 43) is in love with love (I, vii).

2. 'Expérience et création', 539-48.

3. See Letters 270 & 273.

talk to her (or to the legendary figure she had become in his imagination) "pr affr de famille"[1]. Like Mme de Solms, she is transformed into an august member of the mystic family of Nerval's dreams[2]. She too is associated with the world of 'El Desdichado', for the letter is signed Gaston Phoebus d'Aquitaine.

Similarly, Nerval's love and affection are often aroused, not by an individual woman but by imaginative involvement in the relationship of a couple. Most of the women he corresponded with, or mentioned in his letters, are the wives or mistresses of his friends. Unable, or unwilling, to form a relationship on his own account, he became emotionally implicated with those who had. He is the odd man out, the devoted friend of a united couple, like Dr. Rank in Ibsen's 'A Doll's House'[3]. But despite the devotion, love is bound to be soured by envy. Identification with the man's happiness may release a generous flow of feeling; the shared happiness (or supposed happiness) may afford a glimpse of the total security and warmth of family love; but at the same time Nerval feels himself a rival. Over the years, the conflicting attitudes grow and strengthen in the mind: the later letters to Blanche, Dumas and Janin are full of love, but the latent envy revives a half-remembered, half-invented rivalry, and breaks out intermittently in resentment and revolt against

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1. Letter 83 (sic). My italics. The letter is dated 14 March 1841.

2. M. Richer suggests that when Nerval writes of "les paroles entendues hier", he means that he heard them in a dream or day-dream ('Expérience et création', 545). The implication is that he can communicate with G. Sand in the spirit.

3. A situation common enough in literature, as in life. I am greatly indebted here to Norma Rinsler's thesis (see especially 273-4).

these men who have been more successful in the practical sphere than himself. And in literary transpositions of the situation, Nerval's wish to supplant his rival may appear as the hero's conviction that he himself has been supplanted. I shall show later how this works in the case of 'Léo Burckart'.

The process can be seen even in minor episodes which, over the years, are stored and transformed in the imagination. A good example is the "dame de Marseilles". Her eccentric husband was childishly jealous of Nerval, who insists that he had no reason to be. Nerval is very much on the defensive about this (Letter 17). In 1840, six years later, Nerval used the story in a travel article (II, 22). Marseilles has become Constance and the couple have been made English (no doubt because of the husband's eccentricity); but apart from these changes and a little streamlining, the incident is faithfully reported. Then in 1853 it becomes the basis for the framework narrative of 'Octavie'. Here it has changed out of all recognition; all that remains of the original story is Marseilles and the jealousy of the husband, which has now assumed mythical proportions (I, 315-316). The amusing after-dinner story of 1834 has, in Nerval's imagination, twisted into a grim shape. The merest suggestion of a madman's jealousy, a suggestion which he himself did not take seriously at the time, has swollen into a black, threatening presence, a strange amalgam of impotence and power, warning him off a woman in whom (in real life twenty years before and indeed in the fictional version) he had shown no special interest.

There are signs of the same imaginative re-shaping of reality in the letters relating to a newspaper owner, Cornelius Holf or Holff, alias Comte Charles de Villedeuil.

Villedeuil, like the husband of Octavie, becomes a sort of legendary monster, twisted and jealous, always on the look-out for attacks on the virtue of his womenfolk. One can see how Nerval's (probably only slight) acquaintance with the wife and daughter of a man towards whom he felt irrationally aggressive because he owed Villedeuil money, provides material for the delusion that the man regards him as a potential rival[1]. The situation is given an almost universal significance by the reference to the twisted jealousy of Vulcan. At the same time, it remains deeply personal: the fact that both these real-life situations are clothed in the same myth shows that the shaping agent is Nerval's imagination: Villedeuil and the "English" girl's husband both represent the forbidding father-figure who puts an embargo on Nerval's desire for love.

These are examples of how fantasy transforms and inflates relatively unimportant episodes, which may become the basis for pseudo-autobiographical stories. In the case of Dumas and Blanche (and to a lesser extent of Janin), Nerval's imagination is much more deeply and painfully committed. Both men are called on to play a protective, almost paternal, rôle in his life, one as the doctor who accepted total responsibility for him, the other as the more experienced senior partner in a literary collaboration.

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[1] See Letters 277 (Note), 309, 314, 322, 325.

Nerval's feelings about Dumas are first projected into a work of literature, 'Léo Burckart', before emerging a dozen years later in the curious 'Projet de duel' (Letter 221). It will be necessary to study 'Léo Burckart' before showing how the literary work is an extension of the imaginative manipulation of real-life feelings[1]. The case of Blanche may be taken as exemplifying to a marked degree the pattern which is also present in the other relationships.

The typical tone of the letters to Blanche is one of deference, gratitude and love[2]. I use the word "love" advisedly: the relationship between the two men as it is revealed by these courageous and moving letters, is extremely deep, especially on Nerval's side. Blanche was like a father to him and, especially in the early stages of his treatment at the clinic in 1853, Nerval defers completely to the Doctor's authority. Blanche censored all his letters, prevented him from going out, arranged the visits of such friends who were still seeing him and in general took over the conduct of his life. For a time it appears that Nerval accepted this and put his whole trust in the other man. "Je suis comme un enfant", he tells his father soon after his installation as Passy, which Blanche wanted to be permanent (Letter 257). "Oserai-je vous prier de me permettre d'aller demain dimanche voir mon père?" he begs Blanche (Letter 282). The arrangements for moving his furniture, and for receiving some money which had been allocated to him, were made by Blanche and two

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1. See below, Chapter V.

2. The tone of some of the letters to Blanche is strikingly similar to that of contemporaneous letters to Dr. Labrunie.

devoted friends, Stadler and Bell (Letters LIV and LV), while Nerval was writing a pathetic half-mad, half-humorous note which shows him to be completely out of touch with what is going on (Letter 255).

In his saner moments, Nerval realises the magnitude of his debt to Blanche and is warmheartedly grateful (Letter 322). His madness was often too much for him to bear and he turned to Blanche as to an infallible father to bear it for him. What he sought at Passy was a family where he was accepted for what he was and had the unconditional support and acceptance that only a family can be expected to provide: "Oui, je le disais hier sincèrement, je vous aime comme un parent, comme un frère. Votre voix a réveillé en moi le souvenir des Dublanc[1], que j'ai toujours chéris, ainsi que mon oncle, leur père ... J'ai besoin aujourd'hui non seulement d'un conseil d'amis, mais d'un conseil de famille ..." (Letter 270). Ostensibly, and primarily, this letter expresses his desire for the renewal of a long-forgotten family life. But what has awakened this desire is life at Passy, and Blanche's voice. When he left the clinic, Nerval felt as though he had been excluded from his family (Letter 349). To his fellow-patient Antony Deschamps, whose dream-world seems to have had some ground in common with Nerval's, and who found a permanent home at Passy just as Blanche wished Nerval to, he writes that he has been banished

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[1] Relatives on his father's side. Compare a passage in a letter written six months later on the power of <u>voices</u> to revive happy memories of childhood (Letter 313) - also 'Aurélia' Part One, chapter vi (I, 377).

from Paradise (Letter 345)[1]; and paradise, for Nerval, is a place where one is re-united with one's true family (see 'Aurélia', chapter iv, and 'La Forêt noire').

When Blanche married, Nerval's affection and gratitude was extended to both him and his wife: "Dites, je vous prie, à votre chère mariée combien je m'unis à son bonheur. Elle si courageuse, si bonne, si préoccupée des intérêts de votre maison et de la santé de tous, c'est vraiment celle que vous deviez choisir, car elle est un second médecin affectueux et doux qui tempère et affermit votre autorité nécessaire" (Letter 333). To Blanche's paternal authority at the clinic is added the gentler, more affectionate, but no less pervasive influence of his wife. Do not these words of respect, almost of piety, contain something of Nerval's longing for the mother he had never known? "Je m'unis à son bonheur": he desires to be implicated in the happiness of the couple, to be part of it, to belong to it as a son belongs to the happiness of home[2].

But there is another side to the picture. Throughout Nerval's letters to Blanche, and even in the passages where his gratitude is at its most humble, there is a current of resentment. From the preceding pages it would no doubt be thought that Blanche was a good deal older than Nerval; but in fact the opposite is true, and there were times when Nerval felt the humiliation of being dominated so completely by a younger man

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1. In 1841 he had the same idea about the clinic at Montmartre run by Blanche's father (Letter 85 ter, third ed. of I). The Blanches, father and son, tried to create a peaceful family atmosphere in their clinics. See Jacques Le Breton, 'La Maison de Santé du Docteur Blanche. Ses médecins, ses malades' (Thèse pour le doctorat en médicine, Paris, 1937).

2. Cf his reaction to Dumas' marriage, below, p. 140.

(Letter 341). Even at a moment when he recognises the Doctor's good faith, he simultaneously casts doubt on it, writing to his cousin: "Mon père a pu se tromper en pensant qu'il (Blanche) m'en avait voulu de l'appeler mon cher Emile ... C'est un esprit au-dessus de ces petits détails. Je suis consigné depuis avant-hier jeudi. Je vous attends donc avec impatience afin de sortir définitivement et de mettre ordre à mes affaires qui périclitent par suite de cette détention que je continue à croire bienveillante" (Letter 340). He starts by denying that Blanche lacks good faith. But the suggestion remains, and develops into the hint that Blanche is keeping him prisoner with some secretly hostile intention. The resentment is suppressed; but it is there. Even at periods when Nerval was most under the Doctor's influence, protest and revolt were never far away. They came to a head in October 1854 when, against Blanche's express wishes, he obtained his release from the clinic.

This revolt is accompanied by what is clearly a partly imaginary sexual rivalry, which comes out in a curious passage in Letter 341: "Je vous ai vu si jeune chez votre père que j'abusais même de quelques avantages et de mon état présumé de folie pour aspirer à l'amitié d'une jeune dame dont le chat, qu'elle portait toujours dans un panier, m'attirait invinciblement. - Un jour que je l'avais embrassée par surprise, elle m'a dit, comme le général Barthélemy, en pareille occasion: Aspetta! traduction française: Nous n'en sommes par encore là! Voulez-vous que je pense et laisse penser que, dès cette époque, une sourde jalousie vous a rendu injuste à mon égard ... Peut-être même ce sentiment cruel se

sera-t-il de nouveau manifesté ici... Je tremble d'aller trop loin et j'ai besoin, pour vous rassurer, de faire appel à toute ma vie. N'ayant jamais aspiré aux femmes ni aux maîtresses de mes amis, je veux toujours vous ranger parmi eux..."[1].

Blanche has been "unjust" and "cruel", which may mean that he has been exercising an increasingly resented and challenged authority. To correct the disagreeable impression of inferiority that this leaves in his mind, Nerval's imagination provides him with an incident from the past, suitably transformed and embellished no doubt, which proves that he is not only the equal but the potential superior of Blanche as a man. The imagination is cunning. The incident is related obliquely: Nerval does not say that this young lady found him more attractive than Blanche - he does not even say that Blanche was interested in her: he only implies these things, with "quelques avantages" (he was more attractive than Blanche) and "nous ne sommes pas <u>encore</u> là" implying willingness on her part, perhaps later love-making. But how these implications are veiled! If the reader of this letter likes, he can take the whole incident as a madman's fancy. The cat belongs almost to hallucination. The imagination wants the best of both worlds: it wants to demonstrate that he, Nerval, was a redoubtable rival[2], by showing that Blanche has been jealous

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1. The same remark occurs in Letter 221 to Dumas: "J'ai toujours respecté les épouses de mes amis". One finds in this letter the same lack of focus, the same building up of a rivalry-situation by implication and innuendo, as here.

2. But in 1834 Nerval could only claim, defensively, that "aux yeux <u>d'un mari et d'un fou</u> je puis <u>paraître</u> encore redoutable". (Letter 17). (My italics).

of him, and has had good reason to be jealous, all these years; on the other hand, "Je tremble d'aller trop loin", and he hastens to re-assure him (but really he himself wants re-assuring) that they are still friends. The humour partially conceals the underlying challenge.

In Nerval's feelings for Dumas and Ida Ferrier we will find the same deep emotional involvement with the couple on the occasion of their marriage, the same sense that the woman is more warm and sympathetic than her sterner husband, the same retrospective fantasy about having been the man's rival years before, the same alternation between hostility and remorse, between resentment and a profound, deferential love, and above all the same sense that the couple are his true kinsfolk.

The same pattern, especially the alternation between affectionate respect and resentment, occurs too in Nerval's letters to Jules Janin. There is nothing to support the widely accepted theory that Nerval had an <u>affaire</u> with Janin's friend Marie Pleyel. It would appear that, on the contrary, when he did pluck up the courage to admit to having a letter of introduction for her from the other man, most of their time was spent talking about Janin. Marie Pleyel's note to Janin of May 1840 refers patronisingly to "ce bon petit Gérard qui vous est si tendrement attaché" (Letters 48 and II <u>bis</u>). In 'Les Amours de Vienne', published in March 1841, it is probable that Marie Pleyel is the original for the dark Italian lady who, sending her other suitors away, asks Fritz to stay behind so that she can give him a letter to deliver. But when they are alone: "Je n'ai pas de lettre à vous donner; causons un peu; c'est si

ennuyeux de causer à plusieurs" (II, 64). Does not this reflect Nerval's wish that, instead of simply using him to carry messages to Janin, Marie Pleyel had secretly taken a personal interest in him? In this article, such a possibility is only hinted at, and the conversation was evidently perfectly anodine. But the last words are: "passons à d'autres sujets de conversation"[1], which gives the merest suggestion of an increase in intimacy, especially if one postulates an association in Nerval's mind with the words Gautier had used in exhorting him to get to closer grips with the ladies of Vienna - words connected, precisely, with the name of Marie Pleyel: "tu prétends ne connaître les Viennoises que de vue, ce qui est bien immatériel, tu dois maintenant être passé à d'autres exercices: La contremarque que J.J. t'avait donnée pour la déesse du piano t'a-t-elle servi" (Letter II). And when he rearranged the articles in 1849, Nerval added a strong hint that the initial conversation had led to a love-affair, one which turned out badly, it is true, but which was serious enough to make him consider staying in Vienna for good[2]. It is only in retrospect that Nerval fancies that he might have had a love-affair with the famous pianist.

At the French Embassy in Vienna, Nerval joined with Marie Pleyel in amateur theatricals before a distinguished audience: "je ne sais pas mes rôles devant un parterre de princes et de souverains" (Letter 54). His subsequent imaginative re-shaping of this evidently humiliating incident

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1. Note 10 to 'Vers l'Orient', chapter X.

2. See the last paragraph of 'Vers l'Orient', chapter X, and paragraphs two and three of chapter XI.

becomes the basis of 'La Pandora' in 1841[1] and of 'Le Roman tragique'. The process is one of manic inflation. From 'La Pandora' we learn simply that Nerval was so humiliated by his own lamentable performance and its icy reception, that he rushed blindly out of the room, knocking over a screen that was acting as a piece of scenery. But in 'Le Roman tragique', the icy silence of the audience has turned into an overt insult, and Nerval's stumbling exit has been transformed into the hero's impulse to burn down the theatre and carry off his beloved through the flames. The basic impetus behind the process of literary creation here is a daydream whose purpose is to correct abject behaviour of which Nerval is ashamed, turning it into a vengeful triumph.

Not that the Embassy charades with Marie Pleyel provide the only imaginative material for 'Le Roman tragique'. The particular memory fuses with Nerval's general retrospective feelings about his unhappy

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1. It is likely that parts of 'La Pandora' were written in 1841 as a continuation of 'Les Amours de Vienne' (Richer, 'Expérience et création', 267-68). But Nerval was overtaken by madness, and kept the ms until 1853 when it was extended and offered as a sequel to 'Les Amours de Vienne' - he notes in a fragment: "voilà ce que j'écrivais, il y a treize ans" (I, 1215). The account of the Embassy charades occurs in Note 15 and continues with "De colère je renversai le paravent" (I, 358). Certain common features make it virtually certain that the same experience provides the basis for 'Le Roman tragique' as well as 'La Pandora'. In both texts Nerval compares himself with Scarron's Le Destin joining a troupe of actors for love of his "froide étoile" (cf I, 178 etc. and I, 1217). In 'La Pandora', one of the charades depicts the suicide of Vatel, who kills himself with "une épée de gala" (I, 1216); in 'Le Roman tragique', this becomes a point of reference for the hero's thwarted suicidal impulse: "on ne se perce pas le coeur avec une épée de comédie, on n'imite pas le cuisinier Vatel" (I, 176). - We note that La Pandora's teasing and patronising attitude to the hero is consistent with the impression given by Marie Pleyel's letter to Janin.

affaire with Jenny Colon. Indeed it is clear that he attempted, in his imagination, to transfer his feelings from one woman to the other. We gather from the first version of 'Aurélia' that when he met Marie Pleyel in Brussels in 1840, he confided to her the story of his tragic love, and that she gave him a sympathetic hearing[1]. But in the final version, he fancies himself in love with her, and writes her a letter using the very terms of those he had recently written to the actress.[2] However, the pretence soon collapses: he is forced to admit that he is deceiving her and himself, and soon afterwards she brings about a reconciliation with his first, true love. The woman to whom the unhappy love is confided gradually becomes a substitute for that love. We shall see the same pattern in 'Léo Burckart', where it is connected with Nerval's feelings about Ida Ferrier (Chapter V). But in the end the illusory and subjective nature of transferred emotion is recognised.

Over against this we must place Nerval's attitude to Jules Janin, the man who introduced him to Marie Pleyel. Once again, it is profoundly ambivalent. On the one hand there is his reaction to Janin's "obituary" article of 1 March 1841, which at one stroke furthered Nerval's literary reputation and cut it short by announcing that he was incurably mad:

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1. "Elle était bonne et indulgente pour cette ancienne passion parisienne" (Richer, 'Expérience et création', 421).

2. I, 364. In 'La Pandora', he goes away after the charades to get drunk in a tavern, where he writes a letter "d'un style abracadabrant" (I, 358). This is probably closer to what really happened. One can imagine Nerval, after this painful experience, pouring out his confused feelings in a letter which most probably, like some at least of the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon', was never sent off. In the second version of 'Aurélia', however, the evening has been a pleasant one (I, 364).

initial gratitude is ousted by a swelling resentment. Begging Janin to publish a retraction (which was not forthcoming), Nerval claims bitterly that, thanks to the way Janin and others have broadcast the news of his madness, his career as a writer, as well as his hopes for a happy marriage, are ruined: "je ne pourrai jamais me présenter nulle part, jamais me marier, jamais me faire écouter sérieusement" (Letter 85 quintum, in the third edition of I). On the other hand, especially in the later letters, he thinks of Janin with almost a family feeling (Letter 106), and there is a warm regard in Nerval's humble solicitations of favourable critiques, in which the desire for good publicity mingles with the longing to be respected and taken seriously again. But towards the end of Nerval's life there are signs that irritation with the complacent Janin is creeping back (Letters 326, 344, 346). And the bitter accusation that Janin had ruined his chances of getting married comes again in the Preface to 'Lorely' of 1852.

There is no direct rivalry here. But on the one hand there is the belief that it is Janin who has prevented him from marrying; and on the other, the wish that he had done something more than play second string to the older man with Marie Pleyel, exacerbated by the memory of his humiliation at the Embassy, swells into Brisacier's manic longing to carry off Aurélie through the flames.

We may suppose, too - though there is not enough evidence to establish this in detail - that Nerval entertained similar feelings for

other couples: Gautier and Ernesta Grisi[1], the Girardins[2], the Heines[3], perhaps Liszt and Princess Caroline of Sayn-Wittgenstein[4].

Thus even real-life relationships are informed and shaped by fantasy, initiating the Nervalian process of "rewriting his life" which will be continued in the literary works. Women Nerval knew, including those with whom he had sexual encounters, are given the attributes of his dream-figures. Feelings of semi-imaginary and retrospective sexual rivalry towards his friends lead to an ambivalent attitude which repeats the alternate affection and aggression he felt for his father. The other man's success in the practical sphere is contrasted with his own dreamy timidity, although at the same time the woman's sympathy for his dreams may establish a temporary complicity between them from which the other man is excluded. On the one hand there is the desire that the other man should recognise his adult status, accepting him as a professional equal. Just as he tries earnestly to persuade his father that his literary

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1. See Letters XII bis, XXXIV, 116, 136, 138, 143, 325 and a manuscript letter at Chantilly which has been omitted from the Pléiade collection - this last typically ill-spelt, direct and warm-heartedly practical (Chantilly, D 740, F° 77-78).

2. See Letters XII, 85 bis, 116, 197, 208; also Note to Letter IX, Letter 128 and Note. Mme Girardin was obviously good to Nerval. He wrote an enthusiastic piece about her for the Vienna 'Allgemeine Theaterzeitung', praising her surprising combination of beauty and practicality (O.C. I, 171).

3. See Letter 255 and the verses written in Mme Heine's honour (I, 72). Also Letter 137 and Note to Letter 227. For Nerval's visits to the Heine's during the years of madness, see 'Aurélia', I, 402 and Rhodes, 'The Friendship between Nerval and Heine'.

4. See Letters 20, 162 bis, 171, 327, 328, 339 and XXXIX bis.

vocation is solid and respectable (Letter 51), so he asks the influential Janin to give him favourable notices which will cancel out the damage to his reputation caused by the "obituary" article of 1841 (Letter 192). This is accompanied by an affectionate identification with the other man's happiness in the sexual relationship. On the other hand, because of the sympathy between himself and the wife or mistress, there is the sense that this happiness has been usurped. This corresponds to the secret resentment he feels towards his father for having separated him, both from his real mother, and from the loving, motherly women who surrounded him in childhood.

CHAPTER III

MARGUERITE

The only direct evidence that Nerval had an adolescent love-affair is the statement: "Ton jeune coeur brillant de l'amour de la gloire,/ D'un autre amour aussi vient de sentir les feux", which occurs in some conventional verses addressed to him by an admirer, Hippolyte Tampucci, while he was still at school (A. Marie, 34-35). In 'Promenades et souvenirs' (I, 162) Nerval claims that some of his juvenile verse-translations were inspired by a creole girl, for whom he produced versions of Horace's 'Ode to Tyndaris', Byron's "Maid of Athens, ere we part" and one of the 'Irish Melodies' of Thomas Moore[1]. As regards the girl's identity, it would be unwise to take 'Promenades et souvenirs' as a reliable document. But, slender though the direct evidence is, there is every reason to suppose that the later nostalgia for a lost sweetheart had some basis in fact, even if it was no more than a passing juvenile[2] infatuation. And it is legitimate to ask what echo this experience found in Nerval's early writing.

Clearly, the early lyrics derive at least as much from literature as from life. Many of the poems of Nerval's teens and early twenties are imitations or adaptations; others are no doubt pastiches of works as yet

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1. 'A Tindaris' figures in the lovingly preserved MSS of Nerval's juvenilia: 'Poésies diverses' (G. Marie's 'Inédits', 73) and 'Poésies et poèmes' (see Senelier, Nos. 56, 57 and 144). 'Mélodie (imitée de Thomas Moore)' is a free adaptation of <u>two</u> 'Irish Melodies': "Whene'er I see those smiling eyes", and "Believe me, if all those endearing young charms", published in 1828 (I, 63 - see Note in third edition of I).

2. Perhaps as early as the age of 16, since 'Poésies et poèmes' is dated 1824 (Senelier, No. 57).

unidentified. In 'Promenades et souvenirs' he implies that the verses translated for the creole girl were no more than an extension of his school exercises (I, 162). From the very beginning of his career as a writer, Nerval is making use of other men's experience, tamed and formalised in literature. But this does not mean that these productions are impersonal or merely fashionable. Nerval chooses what meets his own case, borrowing material which corresponds to his own situation. The remarkable continuity of themes in the early lyrics is enough to convince us that they were not chosen at random.

None of them are straightforward love-poems. In 'Mélodie (imitée de Thomas Moore)', the girl's beauty makes him sad, for it confuses him with those who only love her for her physical charms. Thus, paradoxically, his love will only triumph when those charms have faded. This is a love abstracted from the vicissitudes of time. He writes of "mon amour, vainqueur du Temps et du Destin", and "un coeur en qui le temps ne pourra rien changer" (I, 63-64). It is significant that these phrases, as well as "elle est à moi seul", expressing the special exclusiveness of this non-contingent love, are Nerval's own invention. The idea of a love which is exclusively his because it is redeemed from the ordinary conditions of life, which will recur again and again[1], is already firmly stated. The additions to Moore's poem show clearly that Nerval had selected it, and was shaping it, to fit his own preoccupations. Here, love is preserved

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1. "C'est pour toi seule ..." (Fragment of a drama based on 'Faust', 1828?); "ce plaisir de tous (Corilla's singing) qui pour moi seul était le bonheur et la vie" ('Corilla', 1839); "elle vivait pour moi seul" ('Sylvie', 1853); "C'est toujours la Seule ... toi le seul ou le dernier amant" ('Artemis', 1853 or 1854).

for a hypothetical future, whereas 'Maid of Athens', the other poem said to have been addressed to the creole girl, looks back, at the moment of parting, on a love whose memory will linger on in the poet's heart.

Other poems, too, refer back to an unhappy love. 'Pensée de Byron', which reads like a reply to Hippolyte Tampucci's verses, is about an unsuccessful courtship which has cast a blight over his whole life. Hope has vanished, leaving only a persistent longing which throws a shadow between him and happiness[1]. 'Stances élégiaques' (1829, I, 64) has the same message. At the age of 22, he writes that his chance of happiness is past. When fresh opportunities present themselves, he cannot take them. The burden of 'Laisse-moi' (1831, I, 66), of 'Une Allée du Luxembourg' (1832, I, 46) and of the second 'Mélodie irlandaise' (1830, I, 65) is that youth is over, his capacity for feeling has been withered by suffering. If only he had met the girl sooner, he could have responded. But now her swift passage can be no more than a gleam in the night of his despondency[2]. Present opportunities are referred back to a past which, when it was present, offered only vague hopes for the future.

The present is never right for love, and the mood of these poems is always conditional. Nerval is already the poet of the might-have-been. We do not have to wait until 'Sylvie' for the vein of nostalgia to be

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1. 1827, I, 50. Compare the last lines ("Gloire! amour! vous eûtes mon coeur") with Hippolyte Tampucci's lines quoted by A. Marie, 34-35. H. Tampucci also imitated Thomas Moore (J. Richer, 'Expérience et création', 284) - could he have been Nerval's earliest collaborator?

2. The image and the subject of 'Une Allée du Luxembourg' strikingly prefigure Baudelaire's 'A une passante'. 'Laisse-moi' is also an adaptation of a poem by Moore ("No, leave my heart to rest") while the second 'Mélodie irlandaise' is based on Moore's "I saw from the beach". J.Richer points out that Nerval may have used the prose translations of Louise Swanton-Belloc (Richer, 'Expérience et création', 283-285).

exploited. It has already been opened before Nerval is twenty, at a time when the lost happiness he laments so melodiously is still within his grasp. Emotion is already a function of memory rather than a living product of the present moment. That he himself understood this very well can be seen from 'La Grand'mère', probably written as early as 1831, which Proust must surely have loved, and which has been given its due importance by Mme Durry[1]. It is almost as though Nerval is abdicating his youth in anticipation of a later longing to recapture it.

For the effect of these poems is not to deny the possibility of love absolutely. It is rather to rescue Love from Time. (We recall that the phrase "mon amour vainqueur du Temps" is original). The process is continued in the beautiful 'Fantaisie' (1832, I, 48-49), which describes how, in a previous existence, he may have loved "une dame, à sa haute fenêtre,/ Blonde aux yeux noirs". This is the logical continuation of the movement begun in the other poems: the movement away from immediate experience towards an experience refracted by the imagination. In them, there was the transfer of attention to a point in the past or the future, but still within the bounds of his own life; here, those bounds are lifted and a virtually inexhaustible field of vicarious experience - the historical past - is opened up. He can assume any historical identity he will[2].

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1. The poem claims to have been written three years after the death of his grandmother, which took place in 1828. Nerval probably kept it until his Grandfather's death (1834) before publishing it in 1835. See M.-J. Durry, 9 ff.

2. The search for <u>doppelgänger</u> in the past is undoubtedly one of the reasons why Nerval developed an interest in the fashionable historical novel.

At the same time, the "blonde aux yeux noirs" is like an idealised version of dark-eyed Sylvie, the little village girl. The yearnings which have found no outlet in reality are directed towards an imaginary equivalent of the lost adolescent love. And in Nerval's contemporaneous translations from the German, he is already finding literary doppelgänger for the village sweetheart. It is as though an experience which he failed to realise in his own life, but for which the hankering remains, is realised vicariously by identifying himself with other men's experience.

All writers begin with derivative work, but this is most marked in the case of Nerval. Most of the early work is translation or adaptation. In translating the German Romantics, of course, he had his eye on the market. "Le fantastique" is popular in the thirties, so "vive le fantastique!"[1]. But in catering for current taste, he is also satisfying his own bent. These writings are already vicarious, It is as though the channels in which his mind will later run are already being lightly traced. By choosing these works, he is storing experience for later use. This is an unconscious assimilation of other men's experience shaped by his own predilections. The early lyrics reveal a bankruptcy in love. Nerval's problematical adolescent affaire was never avowed, never found a direct expression in his writing. But even while he is lamenting the lost love of a little girl from Saint-Germain or Mortefontaine (?), he is finding parallel literary situations in which the loss is recuperated. For at the same time as he is writing 'Laisse-moi', 'Une Allée du Luxembourg' and the others, he is translating Jean-Paul, Hoffmann and above all Goethe.

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[1] I, 481. The attribution of this text to Nerval is uncertain, but he would certainly not have disowned it, and he himself contributed modestly to "le succès encyclopédique d'Hoffmann" (480).

In his preface to 'Faust I' (1828) Nerval draws a comparison between three of the heroes of the Romantic generation: Don Juan, the disreputable and demoralised womaniser; Byron's Manfred, whose love is for an imaginary creature and whose existence, charged with a greater intensity than that of lesser mortals, seems to move on an otherworldly plane; and Faust, who loves a simple village girl who could have offered him a life of sweet unsophistication in the world of here-and-now. Admittedly, Nerval is struck by Faust's striving after other-worldly knowledge[1], and later, in 'Les Amours de Vienne', he will cast himself in the rôle of Don Juan, but here above all he is touched by the sweet and tragic figure of Gretchen: "Trouverait-on sur la scène quelque chose de comparable à ses entretiens naïfs avec Faust...?" (11).

This is not the place to discuss Nerval's interpretation of 'Faust', severely limited as it was by the fact that he lacked the overall view afforded by the publication of the Second Part. In general, he seems to have correctly interpreted the aims of Mephisto, but to have overestimated his chances of securing Faust's damnation[2]. For Nerval, Faust hoped to redeem the powers illicitly obtained from his pact with the devil, by devoting them to the advancement of science and the betterment of the human lot. But this hope is frustrated by his fascination with Marguerite, who brings him only "la jouissance d'un moment et l'éternité des

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1. See Preface: "Quelle âme généreuse n'a éprouvé quelque chose de cet état de l'esprit humain", etc (9) - a passage that is echoed three years later in the dramatic fragment, 'Nicolas Flamel'.

2. Goethe's devil is "Ein Teil von jener Kraft,/Die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft" (lines 1335-1336). So far from achieving his purpose of extinguishing man's creative striving, he unwittingly stimulates it (see the 'Prolog im Himmel', lines 340-343). Nerval revealingly mistranslates "stets" in line 1336 by "tantôt", although elsewhere he gives it the correct meaning of "always" (e.g. line 1338).

supplices" (9). Fuast's tragedy is that he brings about the death of Marguerite and the ruin of her simple happiness to no avail, since her love prevents the realisation of his otherworldly strivings (10).

Nevertheless, Faust is strongly attracted to the simple domestic happiness that union with Marguerite would have given him. As he sits alone in her room, he muses over the rustic tradition to which she belongs, over the goodness of customs handed down from one generation to another and sanctified by a long acceptance. What strikes him is the unself-consciousness, the lack of sophistication, of her traditional way of life[1]. And Nerval in his turn is moved by the thought of this beautiful, unaffected existence which Faust's restless yearning destroys in vain. The following passage is quoted in the Preface, so it must have stuck in his mind: "Mais elle, innocente, simple, une petite cabane, un petit champ des Alpes, et elle aurait passé toute sa vie dans ce petit monde au milieu d'occupations domestiques"[2].

Twenty-five years later, in 'Sylvie', Nerval will apply this longing for domestic happiness, as opposed to otherworldly yearnings, to himself. Sylvie, like Marguerite, is fascinating precisely in the degree to which she represents an unadulterated rustic tradition, and she is spoiled by becoming sophisticated. Like Sylvie, Marguerite sings folksongs: the beautiful 'Meine Ruh' ist hin', and 'Der König von Thule', which Nerval translated four times. As with Sylvie, Marguerite's appeal lies in her combination of childishness and maturity: when she plays "He loves me,

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1. 207,237.

2. Preface, 10, quoted from 256-57.

he loves me not" (243), she is like a little girl; but she has had a hard life and is broken in to the responsibility of bringing up her little sister (237-39). What Nerval finds most attractive about her is not so much that she is unique, but that on the contrary she is a very ordinary village girl: "une femme comme il en existe beaucoup" (11). She is no heroine of melodrama, but a simple, accessible country girl, a type rather than an individual. And in 1853, will not this be just the point about Sylvie? The whole complex of feeling associated with Sylvie centres round the idea of settling down with someone quite unexceptional.

In the incomplete manuscript of a "Faust-drama", which probably dates from the same period, the rôle of Marguerite is shaped as much by Nerval's imagination as by his originals.[1] True, he follows his models closely. From Klinger he takes the situation of the impoverished inventor who tries to sell his printing machine to the Frankfurt council and, when they refuse, makes a fool of them with the help of Mephisto. This is combined

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[1] Printed in 'Les Deux Faust de Goethe', this is evidently an early attempt to adapt the translation for the French stage. Rhodes' theory that it pre-dates the translation ('Gérard de Nerval', 35-36) involves the assumption that Nerval abandoned the work (because he realised he could not vie with Goethe), whereas all we know for certain is that part of the manuscript is missing (A. Marie, 229). But Rhodes is surely correct in dating the piece early. Baldensperger shows that there was a demand for palatable versions of 'Faust' from Parisian theatres around this time. J. Richer's arguments for dating the play after 1846 are not strong, being chiefly dependent on a rather implausible anecdote of Monselet, according to which Nerval would not have been able to consult Klinger's 'Faust', one of his sources, until he found it in Monselet's library (see Richer, 'Expérience et création', 99 ff and A. Marie, 228-29). This is unlikely: Nerval could have consulted Klinger in a library. In any case the primary source is Goethe's 'Faust I', and after 1840 it was the second 'Faust' that interested Nerval. A. Marie's case for supposing that the missing part of the manuscript would have dealt with the multiple avatars of the "amour de rêve et de folie" rests on a quotation taken out of context, for Faust rejects the devil's offer to procure him "les beautés les plus renommées de l'antiquité": he prefers Marguerite (see A. Marie, 230; the full quotation is given below, p.101).

with a good deal of Goethe's text and the same sequence of happenings as in 'Faust' I: Faust's longing is followed by disillusion and he is about to take poison when his hand is stayed by the Easter hymns, whereupon Mephisto arrives and the pact is signed. In fact, as Baldensperger remarks, "(Nerval) témoigne de plus de dévotion à ces modèles que de hardiesse originale" (501).

But it seems likely that in the missing portion of the manuscript Marguerite would have played a more important rôle than in Goethe's version, and indeed, in this doubly plagiarised situation it is significant that what Nerval has added from his own invention is precisely the part of the young girl.

In 'Faust I' the hero is cast unequivocally in the role of seducer, and we are aware all the time that he will abandon Marguerite; there is no question of his marrying her. In Klinger's version, on the other hand, Faust is already married and it is to feed his starving children that he wants to sell his invention. Nerval fuses these two situations into one of his own: his Faust is officially betrothed to Marguerite. Nor is this a superficial change. The whole orientation has in fact been altered. Faust's immortal longings are only perfunctorily referred to (520 ff); and when Nerval's Faust says "Le Grand-Esprit m'a dédaigné" (522), this does not even make sense because Nerval has omitted the vital scene from Goethe's 'Faust' in which Faust's longing and his impotence are symbolised by the humiliating appearance of the <u>Erdgeist</u>. In the 'Fragment' Faust's immortal longings are subordinated to the hero's desire to marry Marguerite.

Faust, the inventor of printing, wants money so that he can marry the girl he loves and settle down. This is his driving motive, and in his opening speech he says that it is not the desire to win fame or to better the lot of mankind that makes his life worth living, but Marguerite. She alone has inspired his efforts (504), and he hopes his invention will make him rich only because this would enable him to marry her and achieve "tout le bonheur qu'on peut espérer dans ce monde" (506).

But his invention, and with it his chances of marrying Marguerite, is rejected by the Senate - by the disapproving older generation. As in Goethe's 'Faust', the hero is only saved from suicide by the Easter hymns which recall his childhood, the adolescent consolations of religion and the joys of spring ('Faust', Gibert, 75-76). But Nerval introduces a significant modification: "Eh bien! ce souvenir, tout plein de sentiments d'enfance, me rappelle à la terre que je voulais quitter, à la terre où des liens plus doux me retiennent encore ... O Marguerite!..." (514)[1].

There is more to Nerval's Marguerite than the simplicity and innocence which attracted Goethe's hero: she is associated with "sentiments d'enfance". In appropriating Marguerite, Nerval makes her into a village sweetheart who is part of the complex of childhood memory[2]. The Faust of this fragment is a good deal nearer Nerval's own situation at the age of nineteen than was Goethe's hero, with his peculiarly German-Romantic striving for the Infinite; Nerval's Faust wants fame and money so that he can marry a nice little country girl and settle down. The fame and money, he hopes, will come from pursuits which are not approved

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1. Cf 'Faust'I, Gibert, 77.

2. In the 1853 preface to 'Faust', written while he was working on 'Sylvie', Nerval will make the same claim for Goethe's Gretchen ('Faust', Gibert,27).

of by bourgeois father-figures (512); but the marriage will vindicate his departure from the fold of respectability and celebrate his return to it.

After the pact with Mephisto has been made, Faust says "Allons voir Marguerite". Mephistopheles replies: "Qui? cette petite paysanne ... Elle te tient donc toujours au coeur!... Allons donc! J'ai bien d'autres femmes à ton service; je puis te donner à choisir entre Hélène, Cléopâtre, Aspasie, et toutes les beautés les plus renommées de l'antiquité". But Faust will have none of it: "Quelqu'elles (sic) soient, Marguerite les surpassera toujours à mes yeux" (522-523).

The same offer is made, and again refused, in 'Nicolas Flamel'[1], whose eponymous hero is another avatar of Faust, an alchemist where Faust was the son of an alchemist. There are numerous direct echoes of Goethe's 'Faust', and a certain number of direct transcriptions of the 'Fragment', though a dose of Byronic Satanism has also crept in (of the slightly watered-down French variety), and the metaphysics are simplified. The devil offers Flamel "des richesses, de longs jours, les plus rares beautés de l'univers". But Flamel is as faithful to Dame Pernelle as Faust to Marguerite in Nerval's fragment (143-44). She and Flamel are a model of conjugal bliss and fidelity. When Flamel agrees to sign the pact, the devil requires him to pledge not only his own soul but also his wife's, since "ta femme et toi ce n'est qu'un (152). There is also a reference to their being childhood sweethearts; when Flamel kisses his wife she says with matronly coyness: "Sainte Dame! Ne dirait-on pas des

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1. 'Mercure de France au XIXe siècle' 1831, t. xxxiii. Reprinted in C. Dedeyan, vol. iii.

époux de quinze ans" (148). - This is the same pattern as the 'Faust' fragment: fabled beauties, who could be procured by supernatural means, are rejected in favour of an ideal of simple conjugal fidelity, just as Goethe's Faust forgets the supernatural beauty in the magic mirror when he sees Marguerite. "Le bonheur qu'on peut espérer dans ce monde" is triumphant. And by Pernelle's "Ne dirait-on pas des époux de quinze ans", 'Nicolas Flamel' is connected with Nerval's dream of a childhood sweetheart who might become a faithful wife. One's mind leaps forward over twenty years to the mock-marriage with a childhood sweetheart that Nerval will describe no fewer than three times during the 'Sylvie' period. But the roots of this dream were already in Goethe's 'Faust'. Marguerite ("une femme comme il en existe beaucoup") is like any one of the village girls Nerval played with and who could have made him a good wife. In the 'Fragment' Nerval-Faust plans such a marriage; in 'Nicolas Flamel', three years or so later, it has taken place[1].

In a couple of other fragments translated from the German, too, Nerval seems to be finding situations which express his own longings.

The narrator of Jean-Paul Richter's 'Le Bonheur de la maison' (1831) is in love with a child, Maria. She is all in all to him: "aussi je compris que cela ne pouvait durer longtemps; je me mis à l'aimer de toutes mes forces (416). So Nerval must have felt, after his father's return, about the girls of Mortefontaine. Like Nerval, Richter's hero is

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1. In Chapter V I shall show how the idea of a comfortable marriage with an ordinary woman continues in 'L'Alchimiste' and 'Léo Burckart', where it is opposed to the lure of a glamorous courtesan-figure into which Nerval projected his feelings about Jenny Colon.

separated from the girl, and the house without her is empty, desolate. The metaphor used to describe the narrator's reaction reproduces the one which, in 'Stances élégiaques', had conveyed Nerval's own lovelorn state: "mon coeur fut brisé, ma vie fanée à son avril, et, depuis, il s'est passé bien des printemps sans que l'arbre ait reverdi" (416)[1].

This is an exact parallel to Nerval's regret for a lost childhood love as it appears in the early lyrics. But it is no more than a parallel; unlike the dramatic pieces based on 'Faust', it does nothing to correct the original situation. The translation of Hoffmann's 'Aventures de la nuit de Saint-Sylvestre' (1831), on the other hand, opens up a completely new possibility[2]. The hero comes across his childhood sweetheart, from whom he has been parted, and finds her more beautiful than ever: "C'était elle ... elle-même que je n'avais point vue depuis tant d'années! Tous les heureux moments de ma vie repassèrent soudain dans mon âme, comme un éclair rapide et puissant. Plus d'éloignement funeste! Bien loin même l'idée d'une séparation nouvelle" (96). She is at once the same, and yet different: "Tout en elle avait pris je ne sais quel

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1. Cf 'Stances élégiaques' (1829): "Du tronc à demi détachée/ Par le souffle des noirs autans,/Lorsque la branche desséchée/ Revoit les beaux jours du printemps,/ ... Elle sourit à la lumière;/ Mais la verdure printanière/ Sur son front ne renaîtra plus" (I, 65). 'Le Bonheur de la maison' was originally published in the 'Mercure de France au XIXe siècle', t. xxxiii, 1831.

2. Hoffmann's story is built up on a mysterious parallel between the hero's love for Julia, and the love of Erasmus Spikher for the courtesan Giulietta, who is an instrument of the devil. Nerval leaves this out by only translating part of the Novelle, but the strange influence that at times makes Julie into a hostile creature is only explicable by reference to the half of the story he omitted. However, the fact that Nerval chose, not only this particular story, but this particular part of the story, is of great significance.

caractère étrange; il me sembla qu'elle était plus grande qu'autrefois et que ses formes s'étaient développées, de manière à ajouter merveilleusement à sa beauté (96). She has about her "quelque chose d'antique; elle rappelait les Vierges des peintures de Mieris... et pourtant il me semblait avoir vu quelque part, de mes yeux bien ouverts, cet être en qui Julie s'était transformée ... Rien ne lui manquait ... pour ressembler complètement à cette image d'autrefois, qui m'assaillait toujours plus vivante et plus colorée" (98). Her behaviour alternates between a sweetness so pressing that "l'aimable printemps, que j'avais cru à jamais passé, ressuscitait paré de couleurs éclatantes" (99), and an ironical, inhibited coldness. We gather that she is under the spell of her spider-legged, bulgy-eyed old husband, who, at the very moment when the hero thinks he is reunited with her for ever, appears and drags her away.

If we leave aside the Hoffmannesque element of magic, this has striking similarities to the situation in 'Sylvie'. Like Hoffmann's hero, Nerval finds a childhood sweetheart whose beauty has been transformed by maturity, so that she is "différente d'elle-même (I, 274). Sylvie, like Julie, has an antique cast of countenance. In 'Sylvie', as here, the hero hopes to settle down with the childhood sweetheart he has found again. The parallel, of course, is not exact: Julie is married to a repulsive old man, whereas Sylvie is engaged to Nerval's foster-brother. But the pattern is the same: the attempt at recapturing a past happiness which is made vividly present when he sees the girl again. The image of the sudden reflowering of the spring-time of youth recuperates the converse images which were a theme of the lyric pieces.

The ostensible object of Nerval's longing in a poem like 'Une Allée du Luxembourg' is an accessible happiness. Yet this is projected into the conditional mood, into an impossible might-have-been. Instead of pursuing the attainable, Nerval selects other men's writings and shapes them into patterns which meet his own emotional needs. And this is to be explained only partly as the timid man's use of fantasy to compensate for his failure to engage with reality. We note that what is attractive in Marguerite is the tradition and atmosphere of simple happiness she represents, that Nerval associates her with "souvenirs d'enfance", that 'Les Aventures de la soirée de Saint-Sylvestre' shows the hero's <u>return</u> to a childhood sweetheart and that it is the older generation - the <u>paternal</u> generation - which, in the 'Faust-drama', thwarts both the hero's desire for fame and his projected marriage. What is already emerging, vaguely as yet, is the vicarious expression of Nerval's longing to return to the happy childhood from which his father had removed him when he was seven years old.[1]

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[1]. But there is nothing in that preposterous melodrama, 'Han d'Islande' to suggest that Nerval's imagination was engaged in the same way as it is by Hoffmann's story. L. Cellier is surely right to disagree with A. Marie, who says: "Gérard, qui a passé à Saint-Germain, chez une tante, quelques mois de l'année 1827, y a rencontré quelque Sidonie: ... alors qu'il subit encore le charme de ce rêve, l'idylle d'Ordener et d'Ethel l'a attaché au roman d'<u>Han d'Islande</u>, tombé sous sa main" (A. Marie, 39). As Cellier says, this is a gratuitous supposition, for in Nerval's adaptation "l'idylle tient une place tout à fait secondaire" (Cellier, 27).

CHAPTER IV

JENNY

But if during the 1820's and early 1830's Nerval's fancy had been all in the direction of the ordinary girl with whom a humdrum domestic happiness could be achieved, from about 1834 onwards a new preoccupation comes to the fore. The circumstances of the famous love-affair with Jenny Colon are extremely hard to establish, but the following outline may be accepted as a working hypothesis.

He saw her acting for the first time in 1834 or earlier, and until the winter of 1837-38 there was a period of silent adoration, during which he founded Le Monde dramatique partly to further her career. He fell in love with her partly because she was held to realise the dark-eyed, reddish-blond ideal of feminine beauty which he and Gautier were seeking[1]. There seems little doubt that his feelings were excited by a purely literary image before he even met the actress. The image would be given a sort of spurious substance by her magical appearance on stage, by the illusion of a glamorous personality distilled by her acting, by the emotions aroused by her singing and given shape by the situations of the plays she performed in. As so often, it is Nerval himself who provides

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[1] See the pen-portrait of Jenny Colon by Gautier, commissioned by Nerval, published in 'Les Belles Femmes de Paris' (A. Marie, 94); Letter 17; 'Du Rhein au Mein' (II, 1432); 'Vers l'Orient (II, 28); Gautier's 'Caprices et zigzags', quoted by A. Marie, 126; Letter II, from Gautier; 'Un Tour dans le nord' (II, 875); 'Vers l'Orient' (II, 37); 'Les Femmes du Caire' (II, 233-34); The type is either held to be Venetian (exemplified in the work of Titian, Giorgione, Veronese, etc, and celebrated by Gozzi) or Flemish (exemplified in the 'Madeleine d'Anvers' of Rubens, which the two friends saw in 1836). The type is opulent and sensual, with the characteristic dark-eyed reddish-blond colouring.

the most lucid analysis of the not uncommon experience of falling in love with an actress: 'Le théâtre a cela de particulier, qu'il vous donne l'illusion de connaître parfaitement une inconnue ... l'actrice a ce privilège d'exposer à tous un idéal que l'imagination de chacun interprète et réalise à son gré"[1]. But this was written in 1846. In the early stages of the relationship, Nerval was too preoccupied with the subjective manipulation of Jenny's image to comment on the process.

During the period of silent adoration, he produced two plays in collaboration with Dumas, 'L'Alchimiste' and 'Piquille', in which one can discern a dramatised version of his own feelings about Jenny Colon before he had dared approach her. 'L'Alchimiste' presents a conflict between the glamorous public woman and the homely wife in which, as far as Nerval's conception of the play goes, the former has by far the greater power of attraction[2].

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1. On Mme Bonhomme, whom he saw acting in Cairo (II, 191). Compare the passage from Constant's 'Adolphe' which Nerval copied into the 'Carnet de Dolbreuse': "L'amour supplée aux longs souvenirs, par une sorte de magie. Toutes les autres affections ont besoin du passé: l'amour crée, comme par enchantement, un passé dont il nous entoure. Il nous donne, pour ainsi dire, la conscience d'avoir vécu, durant des années, avec un être qui naguère nous était presque étranger" (Richer, 'Expérience et création', 325). See Appendix "A" for a fuller reconstruction.

2. 'L'Alchimiste', a sort of "drame bourgeois" in bad Alexandrines, was signed by Dumas and figures in his collected 'Théâtre'. It has been recently published by M. Charles Dédéyan in 'Textes inédits et introuvables', which constitutes the third volume of 'Gérard de Nerval et l'Allemagne'. The play was not put on until April 1839, but it appears to have been originally scheduled for production in November 1836 (Letter 22 and Note 4). Internal evidence bears out that it was written before Nerval approached Jenny Colon. The discussion of the relative contributions of Nerval and Dumas is, of course, conjectural. My conclusions are confirmed by M. Jean Richer ('Expérience et création', 77).

Some preliminary discussion of the respective contributions of Nerval and Dumas is necessary. The platitudinous dedicatory verses give a clue: Dumas is out to produce a play with a clear-cut bourgeois moral incorporating a strong, sentimental part for Ida Ferrier. The heroine, Francesca, is a paragon of conjugal fidelity who, by her demonstrations of virtue in the best Sedaine-Augier tradition, defeats the Courtesan, La Maddelena, representing the temptations of Wealth and Riotous Living to which her husband is all too easily drawn.

At the same time, there are unmistakable signs of Nerval's hand. The hero, Fasio, stands in the line of Nerval's Faust-figures: he is an alchemist like his Master, Nicolas Flamel (330) and, like Flamel, a Faust who has settled down with his Marguerite. Francesca is another Pernelle. True, her character shifts in the second half of the play: she becomes a dominant Romantic heroine[1]. But Nerval's Francesca is the gentle wife of the opening acts, and the happiness she provides is associated with the hero's relative obscurity and poverty, so that his brief opulence destroys it. This is in keeping with the play's petit-bourgeois message, but it also corresponds to Nerval's imaginative scheme. The simple wife represents the mundane comfort and peace of mind which rewards the man who carries on a safe profession without aspiring to fame and fortune. And in a way which reminds us of the early lyrics, the true value of this happiness emerges only in the form of nostalgia, after it has been dispelled by sudden wealth: "Les beaux jours sont restés dans la pauvre demeure"[2].

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1. That Nerval was conscious of the change in tone is apparent from his own review of the play (O.C. II, 478). Cf also A. Marie, 138-39.

2. 372. See also 401-402.

As, later, in 'Léo Burckart', the easy trust between man and wife is broken when the husband becomes a man of consequence.

But the Francesca of the opening acts - Nerval's Francesca - is a pale, uninteresting figure whom her husband neglects. In the review he himself writes of "cet amour calme et bourgeois qui peut suffire aux natures vulgaires" (O.C. II, 475). Whereas the earlier Faust-figure desired money for the sake of Marguerite, and would not hear of Satan's fabled beauties, Fasio's wife is opposed to his alchemy. It appears as a forbidden and almost shameful enterprise which is secretly connected with his long-cherished dream of becoming rich enough to win La Maddelena[1]. The figure of the glamorous but inaccessible courtesan has, in Nerval's conception if not in the play as a whole, replaced the humble wife as the emotional centre of interest.

Nerval's undeclared feelings and secret hopes with regard to Jenny Colon are invested in the ambiguous but potent figure of the public beauty who may be won with money. Just as for the short-sighted Nerval the magical image of Jenny Colon would have been associated with her singing, so Fasio, at a bal masqué, recognises La Maddelena by her voice[2]. And it is

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[1] This emerges from the review (O.C. II, 474-475). Nerval does not avoid the trap awaiting those who write reviews of their own plays - we learn more about the relationship from the review than from the play itself! According to Gautier, Nerval worked on another play which has much the same theme. The hero is an ambitious doctor (Nerval was a medical student for three years) "qui dans son art trouvait de terribles ressources pour arriver à ses fins" (cf Fasio's alchemy). He had loved when he was poor; and had been rejected (cf Nerval's review of 'L'Alchimiste'). He is determined to become rich so that he can win the lady, and asks her: "cet or, comment vous le faut-il? taché de sang ou taché de boue?" (Gautier, 'Portraits et Souvenirs', 17-18, and A. Marie, 53-54).

[2] See 386 & 428.

certain that La Maddelena was connected in Nerval's mind with the kneeling figure of Mary Magdelene in Ruben's 'Descent from the Cross' which he and Gautier saw in Antwerp Cathedral a few months before the play was finished, and which belongs to the reddish-blond type of which Jenny was a living exemplar[1].

Yet, although the actress-figure replaces the village girl as the centre of emotional interest, at the same time earlier patterns persist unchanged. Indeed, they are strengthened. The scene in which the rich miser Grimaldi refuses to give his nephew Lelio the fortune left him by his mother, who died when he was a baby, is clearly moulded by Nerval's resentment at his father's refusal to make over the money due to him from his mother's dowry[2]. Lelio's feelings about his mother, and the sudden arrival of Grimaldi to snatch him away from the home in which he had been brought up (361), are a transposition of the author's own experience. As so often, Nerval's secret or unconscious feelings appear indirectly as a literary projection years before they emerge (but still discreetly) in the "autobiographical" works[3]. For Fasio too, Grimaldi represents the

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1. See especially Gautier's 'Caprices et Zigzags', quoted by A. Marie, 126. See also 'Du Rhein au Mein', II, 1432; and the passages referred to in Note I, p. 106.

2. Nerval's mother too, died when he was a baby. In real life, he accepted Dr. Labrunie's retention of his mother's dowry (A. Marie, 60), and the impulse to obtain his birthright by killing his father almost certainly remains unconscious, finding only an indirect, censored expression. - Nerval elsewhere attributes actions of his father to an uncle, in particular the withholding of money he needed and which he felt was due to him (see 'La Pandora', I, 353 and compare Letters 46 & 51).

3. See 'Promenades et souvenirs' (1854), I, 159. Significantly, it appears that Nerval has invented this scene and the role of Lelio, since they do not figure in the sub-Shakespearean tragedy of 'Fasio' (by H.H. Milman, London, 1821) from which 'L'Alchimiste' is adapted. (See O.C. II, 479).

disapproving older generation. Like the senators in the 'Faust-fragment', he condemns the hero's creative aspirations, even threatening to turn him out of his house. When Fasio's apparatus explodes and blows open the way to the miser's treasure-store, he witnesses the murder of Grimaldi by Lelio. The two men, having thus become unwitting accomplices, share the money. Later, each will incur in turn the guilt for the murder. We may thus see Fasio and Lelio as the double projection of Nerval's hidden resentment against a father who stands between him and wealth which will win the courtesan. At the same time, the two men appear as rivals, since Lelio seems to be the "amant en titre" of La Maddelena. The pattern of identification which will emerge strongly in 'Léo Burckart' is here adumbrated.

'Piquillo' was put on in October 1837. Jenny Colon played Sylvia. Although the part was originally to have been taken by Mme Dameroau, we have seen in the case of 'L'Alchimiste' how Nerval wrote his secret hopes about Jenny into a role intended for another actress, and there is every indication that this process is continued here.

In the first place, Nerval seems already to be adjusting the character of a famous coquette with a reputation for frivolity, in very much the same way as he will do later, when he has met Jenny, in the Letters. The apparently heartless Sylvia is in fact ripe for a great love. Her reputation for being vain, flighty and pleasure-loving is accurate enough. But she is not so by temperament: she has made a deliberate choice to avoid being subjugated by love, giving herself

lightly to many men to avoid giving herself deeply to one. In the end her growing love for Mendoce breaks down her desire to retain independence by frivolity, and this woman, "n'ayant jamais aimé, ne voulant aimer jamais" (137), is caught in her turn, as has already been predicted: "Non, je ne dirai plus de ces tendres paroles/ Dont la source n'est pas au coeur ... Hélas! de ma coquetterie/ L'amour me punit aujourd'hui" (132).

What makes it all the more likely that here Nerval is projecting his own hopes about Jenny being similarly reformed by love, is that he puts into Sylvia's mouth words which seem to apply directly to himself, and which are an explicit acknowledgment by the public figure of the reality of an undeclared passion such as his (Sylvia is replying to someone's surprise at the romantic behaviour of a character who is pursuing a woman he has never spoken to): "Qu'y a-t-il d'étonnant? n'a-t-on pas vu de ces amours sympathiques, qu'un premier coup d'oeil allume dans deux coeurs? est-il besoin de se connaître pour se chercher? est-il nécessaire de se parler pour s'être dit: 'Je t'aime'?" (120). This not only sanctions Nerval's silent adoration: it comes half-way to meet it. Sylvia also corresponds (like La Maddelena) to Jenny Colon in that it is by her voice that the hero recognises her (136). As with Nerval and Jenny, the thrill of love is occasioned by her singing[1].

The 'Lettres à Jenny Colon' are a baffling set of documents. But the available evidence, fully reviewed in the Appendices to this Chapter,

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[1] It is significant that there is no Marguerite-figure in 'Piquillo'. Even so, in the recognition theme which plays an important part in this work, there is the hint of later works in which the humble little girl will appear as a facet of the actress's multiple personality: 'Corilla' and 'Les Confidences de Nicolas' (see below, p. 144).

points to their being the remnants of a real correspondence dating from the winter of 1837-38, when the relative success of 'Piquillo' had emboldened Nerval to declare his love. The relationship was short-lived, since in April 1838 Jenny made a "safe" marriage with the flautist Leplus.

Unfortunately we cannot tell how far the manuscripts reflect the actual course of the affaire. We can postulate the order in which Nerval left them and thus establish a coherent narrative[1], but this may represent a rearrangement fifteen years after the event. The difficulty is that the Letters belong somewhere between life and literature. They are drafts, or copies, of letters which were originally designed to be sent, and some of which may have been sent. Yet the manuscripts were carefully kept, and Nerval entertained several projects for an epistolary novel based on them. The letters themselves announce the intention, or the temptation, of dramatising his love, of turning life into literature: "j'arrange volontiers ma vie comme un roman" (IX); and again: "le beau roman que je vous écrirais, si j'étais moins sincère" (XIX)[2]. M. Jean Richer thinks that the 'Carnet de Dolbreuse', which he is to publish, shows that "Nerval a été hanté, et probablement dès 1833-1834, par l'idée d'un roman dérivant, en somme, de La Nouvelle Héloïse"[3]. In 1842, a few months after the death

1. See Appendix "B".
2. Variant: "le beau roman que je ferais pour vous si ma pensée était plus calme!" (I).
3. Private letter dated November 1960. Unfortunately, in a more recent letter (October 1964), M. Richer tells me that the publication of 'Delbreuse' is indefinitely postponed. Thus there is at present no means of following up his extremely interesting suggestion (following J.W.Kneller) that the hero of 'Dolbreuse', Olivier, is modelled on Rousseau: imitating Rousseau's affaire with Sophie d'Houdetot, Nerval invented Olivier to project his fantasies about Jenny before, during and after his affaire with her (J. Richer, 'Expérience et création', 212, and J.W. Kneller, 'Nerval and Rousseau', RHLA, March 1953). Kneller, having pointed out references, parallels and (perhaps) borrowings from Rousseau's novel, concludes that the influence was superficial.

of Jenny Colon, Nerval published six of the letters under the title of 'Un Roman à faire', attributing them to a certain "chevalier Dubourjet" with whom he clearly identifies himself[1]. It is probable that he would have used them in the epistolary novel of which, he says in a manuscript fragment of the Preface to 'Les Filles du feu' (I, 1178-79), 'Le Roman tragique' was part, and which would perhaps have turned into the novel announced in January 1854, 'L'Illustre Brisacier'[2]. And despite Jean Richer's contrary theory, it does appear that Nerval intended to insert some of the letters in 'Aurélia', which is fictionalised autobiography[3]. Finally, the literary nature of the letters is underlined by Nerval in 'Promenades et souvenirs': "j'appris le style en écrivant des lettres de tendresse ou d'amitié ... j'y retrouve fortement tracée l'empreinte de mes lectures d'alors, surtout de Diderot, de Rousseau et de Sénancourt" (I, 157). Norma Rinsler is surely right when she says: "the value of this work as an imaginative act far outweighs any factual biographical value which may have been attributed to it"[4].

We cannot know when, to what extent, or why, Nerval rewrote the original letters. Certainly there are many passages when he is striving for effect, over-writing, indulging in the rhetoric of the unhappy Romantic lover. The extent of literary inflation may perhaps be judged by comparison with Letter XV which, with its normal, relaxed tone and its context of a daily routine, could well figure in the main body of Nerval's correspondence. Does this reflect the unpolished state of the letters Nerval

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1. See Chapter VI, 138-40.
2. See Senelier N°. 1,199.
3. See Appendix "B", 579-581.
4. N. Rinsler, 236.

actually sent, in contrast to those he later "wrote up" for publication? If this were so, the bulk of the letters might be supposed to be no more than exercises in style, as he suggests himself in 'Promenades et souvenirs', the chief model being 'La Nouvelle Héloïse'[1].

But the truth is surely more complex. The exalted tone goes beyond mere pastiche, the tension arises from a deeper anxiety than is likely to be occasioned by a preoccupation with style. Even if the re-writing took place after the affaire with Jenny was over, because Nerval had decided that it was a pity to waste good copy, the fact remains that the material being dealt with is rooted in his own experience. The initial experience, of course, was far from spontaneous. Nerval's image of the singer was formed before he met her: she conformed, he thought, to an essentially literary ideal of feminine beauty, and his wishes about her help to shape the plays written during the period of silent adoration. But once he had approached her, imagination and reality came uneasily together. It is surely the attempt to reconcile the two that gives the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon' their febrility and their peculiarly tense formality. The Letters are above all the first-hand record of Nerval's attempt to impose a subjective truth, born of his longings, on the intractable material of the

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[1] The mysterious Letter XXI suggests the curious possibility that Nerval might have written actual letters to Jenny in which he referred her to the inflated, literary version of the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon' that he intended to publish as an epistolary novel, 'Delbreuse', even inviting her to reply in kind. His request for her to reply - with the implication that he is the auther of the letters, would seem to invalidate Senelier's intriguing theory that the reference is to letters by Rousseau published in 1840 (Senelier, N° 942 bis). The problem can be solved by assuming that Nerval is referring to the intended publication of 'Delbreuse', but this, like Senelier's theory, remains speculative. - The suggestion in the third edition of I, that this is the draft of a letter to Marie Pleyel, does not seem particularly helpful.

relationship. It is, after all, his life ("ma vie") which is being arranged as a novel, and he is too sincere, too agitated, to give way to the pleasures of pure romancing. Certainly he is giving a literary version of his love-affair - but it is a version in which his own feelings are genuinely engaged. The letters are indeed, as Nerval himself says, the product of "une âme qui a réellement pensé et souffert" ('Un Roman à faire', I, 1250). Nerval is emotionally more than aesthetically involved in the problems of composition[1], and Jenny Colon was not simply "un prétexte à lyrisme"[2]. The inflated style, the "literary" tone, are themselves symptons of self-dramatisation. The literary version of an unsuccessful love-affair is an occasion for narcissism: the letters offer Nerval an image of himself which is passionate and heroic. Yet they do so without changing the basic <u>données</u> of the situation[3]. Whereas in a play like 'L'Alchimiste' imaginative projections had to be accommodated to the demands of the <u>genre</u>, here the claims of the imagination must adapt themselves to the fact of Jenny's indifference.

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1. The manuscripts were evidently extant before the 'Roman à faire' publication of 1842, which suggests that the rewriting, if not contemporaneous with the <u>affaire</u>, took place fairly soon after it. Jean Richer suggests that the rewriting took place at the time of composition (see Appendix "A", 388).

2. R. Bizet, 'La Double Vie de Gérard de Nerval'.

3. Nerval himself shows how it is possible to be self-conscious and sincere at one and the same time: "Je vous ai dit mes souffrances avec le sourire sur les lèvres, de peu de vous effrayer; je vous ai raconté avec calme des choses qui me tenaient au coeur ...; je faisais ainsi la parodie de mes propres émotions; il me semblait qu'il était question d'un autre" (Letter II). This self-consciousness may well arise in the composition of the letters themselves. J.-P. Richard quotes this passage as an example of the duality of self in Nerval ('Géographie magique de Nerval', 60).

For, although we cannot use the letters to build up a picture of what actually happened, we can deduce the nature of the relationship, and in particular the way in which Jenny treated Nerval. The picture that emerges is not flattering. She is a coquette taking advantage of a man hopelessly in love with her, now leading him on (II bis, 35-36), now forcing him into humiliating abjectness by the threat of a break (VI), now exacting a total and unrewarded allegiance (XI), now teasing him into protestations of fidelity by pretending to suspect that he is fickle (IX). She is an expert. If this were in doubt, one has only to read her letter to Doche (I, 743) for confirmation[1]. One simple, vital fact emerges: she did not love Gérard de Nerval, and there was no hope for him. For her, he is no more than a minor admirer. But for him, she is everything, and the fact of her indifference is impossible to face. He has staked all - his happiness, his career, even his life - on winning her love. He is entirely dependent on her, at the mercy of her lightest word or action (XIV, 7-8), her plaything, her puppet. Thus we have a devious dialectic which seeks to reconcile what she was with what he wanted her to be.

There is the continual background awareness that she does not love him. But it is never brought out and contemplated. Clear evidence that she finds him unattractive is balanced by the assertion that their love

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[1] See also a letter from Jenny to an unidentified correspondent (Alfred), included in the third edition of I. She was clearly promiscuous, and had four children before she was twenty-five. She could be kind, but she was also capable of treating Nerval harshly (see J. Senelier, 'Recherches et découvertes', 15; also Letter II, 2; VI, 1-2; XIV, 1-6; XVII, 11-12). She seems to have been warm-hearted but flighty: "Méfiez-vous! non pas de votre coeur, qui est bon, mais de votre humeur, qui est légère et changeante!" (VI, 15-16). - My figures refer to line-numbers.

exists on a transcendental level far above mere physical contact (XII, 1-11). He keeps the truth out of focus by presenting it in the conditional mood (VI, 3-8 and XVII, 11-13), or by concealing it in mitigating factors (VII, 9-14). Or again, by inventing a mystery to explain her caprices, he avoids the real explanation in all its simplicity[1]. Her behaviour is interpreted as an immediate and detailed response to his: her coquetry becomes the consequence of his advances, her resistance is proportional to his grand passion (XVI). The most recalcitrant behaviour is re-interpreted and fitted in to his subjective scheme. Nerval is suffering from the delusion that strong feeling must arouse strong feeling. It cannot be true that she does not love him because if it were the whole foundation of imagined happiness would be removed.

This dialectic precludes objectivity. Observation is inhibited not so much by a defect in the observing faculty as by a dread of seeing what is really there - and one should stress again that this is quite a common weakness, not one peculiar to Nerval. The object is to preserve at all costs the illusion of a possible happiness with her that he has built up. He dare not risk the despair that would result from a complete break (VI). Instead of fulfilment in the present, the past is used as a guarantee for a hypothetical future[2]. The moment of consummation is postponed

1. J.-P. Richard sees the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon' as a labyrinth of subjective feelings whose negative centre is the void constituted by her absence of response ('Géographie magique de Nerval', 25-26).

2. The evasion of the present occurs in Letters II (27-31) and VII (45ff). When he is apart from her he feels that letters are inadequate to express his feelings (XIII, 19-26); but attempts to express them in person end in humiliation, and "je ne me sens fort que loin de vos yeux" (XIV). No doubt this fitted in with Jenny's strategy, for the coquette likewise lives on unresolved situations and postpones the moment of crisis for as long as possible.

indefinitely. He knows that women expect to be conquered, but their love is exceptional and transcends the rules of normal relationships (IX).

It is intensity of desire rather than the lack of it which prevents a normal consummation. Letter V shows that Nerval could obtain sexual gratification only with a woman who excites him because she resembles Jenny but who, because she is no more than a casual conquest, does not intimidate him. Possession can take place only by proxy, as an imaginative act. Hence the story that Nerval, before he had even met Jenny, purchased a bed in which to receive her. There is evidence, too, that he had erotic dreams[1]. Sexual excitement exists apart from the ostensible object. When he is first confronted with Jenny in the flesh, on the other hand, Nerval's instinct is to retreat (VII, 30-40). Of course the instinct is suppressed, but his later analyses of this situation suggest that Jenny in person was a disappointment, that his emotional response is not as freely aroused by the reality as it was by the image[2]. Desire is awkward because it is subjective rather than direct. We may imagine that, for all its intensity, it did not manifest itself in that straightforward and rather predatory intentness to which women respond. Nerval himself is clearly aware of this, and this is why he seeks to postpone the moment of consummation[3].

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1. See 'Notes manuscrites', I, 424; 'Carnet du Voyage en Orient', II, 711 & 714; 'Aurélia', I, 412-13.

2. In 1844 he describes how an actress of one of the theatres of the Boulevard du Temple came down into the audience, enabling them to "toucher du doigt (leur) idéal". "Bien des sylphides de nos grands théâtres", remarks Nerval, "ne gagneraient rien à se faire voir de si près" (O.C. VIII, 72-73). In 1850 'Les Confidences de Nicolas' again points out that one is likely to be disappointed if one comes face to face with an actress who has been worshipped from afar (II, 1001).

3. See IX 4-11 and passim; XI, 25ff; XII, 1-11; XVII, 15ff.

The uneasy attempt to attach a purely subjective emotion to the particular person who is its ostensible object leads to over-emphasis, clumsiness and a tense self-consciousness. Only when he is with the prostitute who seems to him to be the image of Jenny, can Nerval succeed sexually. And the typical love-situation in his work will be that the desired woman always stands for someone else. Yet the empty sexual gratification with Jenny's substitute leaves Nerval with the guilty feeling that she has profaned his ideal, together with the despairing sense of the ideal's impossible remoteness. The experience is impoverishing. The serenity of the Mediterranean scene, like his night of love, has no power to enchant him, and he is on the point of leaping from the cliff to find death in the blue, pure sea. Death thus appears as a means of recovering purity (V, 67-97), of expiating guilt by transcending the imperfect sexual union.

This experience is the germ for many future developments. The first is in Letter V itself when he imagines its positive equivalent: after a night of ecstasy, having tasted the reality of which the Neapolitan adventure was only the shadow, Death comes to claim him. She appears in the form of a gentle, maternal[1] woman who promises him eternal peace (V, 16-28). The moment of maximum intensity is thus rescued from bathos, and once again there is the refreshing prospect of purity and peace. But this is imagined only. When Nerval does possess Jenny, joy is marred by an excess of feeling which is as though godlike and too powerful for human faculties to contain. This too gives rise to a longing for innocence

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[1] She is "bonne et secourable", addresses him as "jeune homme".

regained, for a return to "(le) temps où mon amour, inconnu de vous, était pur et céleste" (XVIII). The theme of love and death is here initiated: death as an escape from the guilt of vicarious and therefore empty love-making; death as a means of transcending and perpetuating the moment of intensity; death in maternal guise as a return to peace and purity.

This appears to me to arise originally out of Nerval's despair at his failure to engage with reality. The original experience is negative. It is not in the first place a consequence of the unconscious identification of the beloved with the lost mother. But we shall see later how this grows into the idea of death as a means to reunion with the lost love or the lost mother. Once again, Nerval's imaginative processes must be seen, not as a single imaginative pattern existing unchanged since infancy, but as an endlessly dynamic development through time, as a series of responses to changing circumstances, or as a set of variations on a central theme whose outline emerges hesitantly and gradually, hardens and deepens with the years, but is never finally resolved.

There is no easy escape from reality into fantasy[1]. On the contrary, Nerval is struggling with the agonising problem of reconciling the two. Hence the all-pervading symptoms of inhibition and hyper-tension. Hence also the restless oscillation between two extreme positions. On the one hand there is a total abdication, an unconditional devotion[2]. Avoiding the inference that she is the wrong kind of woman, he takes the blame for

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1. Cf Gautier: "Balzac admirait beaucoup cet élan sublime d'imagination qui supprimait la réalité et arrivait droit à sa chimère sans tenir compte du temps ni des obstacles" ('Portraits et souvenirs', 35).

2. See III, 6-11; V, 10-15; X, 11-16; XII, 13-14.

her heartless treatment of him[1]. Yet the self-abnegation is not quite straightforward, the admission of guilt is not quite ungrudging. Even when offering his services, he is insisting on his rights: "J'ai voulu me montrer à la fois un homme sérieux et timide, un homme utile et exigeant" (VII, my italics). Humility mingles with arrogance, dedication with demand[2]. There is more than a trace of attitudinizing (XVI, 5 ff) and of complacent self-regard. The very oddity of his behaviour becomes a matter for pride[3]. Both extremes are defensive positions providing a refuge from the stark, central truth of Jenny's indifference from which the mind always swerves aside.

The very fact that Nerval intended to put to literary use what were originally authentic love-letters, is highly significant. The relationship with Jenny Colon finds extension not in time and space, not in reality, but in imaginative literature. And Nerval's imaginative treatment of his experience is not definitive. He may write in 'Aurélia': "une dame que j'avais aimée ... était perdue pour moi" (I, 363), suggesting for a moment that he is capable of accepting the finality of loss. But this is much later, and even then 'Aurélia' will turn out to be an interpretation of his dreams and visions designed to show that the loss was not final after all. The set of Nerval's creative imagination is apparent. The 'Lettres à Jenny Colon' reveal, but skirt round, the central fact that he has been paying court to a woman who is quite

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1. See I, 16-33; also II, 2-3; VIII, 1-6; IX, 2-4; XII, 1-2; XIV, 10-20.
2. See also II bis; XX, 63-67.
3. See VII, 9-14; IX, 34-36; XI, 7-8.

unsuitable. Indeed, they may be seen as an elaborate literary subterfuge intended to disguise it. Thus, though we can deduce the nature of the relationship (her imperious coquetry, his awkwardness), and though there are many flashes of lucidity and even of irony, reflecting an intermittent self-awareness, the Letters are not primarily an analysis of the psychological realities of the situation. They are rather a histrionic extension of it.

This failure to come to grips with the situation is capital in Nerval's life and in the history of his work. The creative imagination engages with a given situation, but the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon' do not resolve it, and later works based on the same situation tend to prolong it, in a series of variations. In terms of Nerval's life, this means that a clear recognition of failure and the reasons for failure would perhaps have enabled him to enter into another affaire with his eyes open, and therefore with some chance of success. But the affaire with Jenny is never liquidated. Instead of being regarded as what has not been, it remains as what might have been -

> "What might have been is an abstraction
> Remaining a perpetual possibility
> Only in a world of speculation"[1].

The possibility is kept open, and when it is used in later works like 'Corilla', it will again be inconclusively rearranged rather than definitively analysed.

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[1] T.S. Eliot, 'Burnt Norton'.

CHAPTER V

RETURN TO MARGUERITE

In his early twenties, Nerval transfers an unsatisfied adolescent love to the substitute realm of literature, and in his translations and adaptations of 'Faust', the dominating theme is the hero's marriage to the sweet and unaffected Marguerite (Chapter III). But during the period of silent adoration of Jenny Colon, the village sweetheart is obscured by the more glamorous figures of La Maddelena and Sylvia, who clearly correspond to Jenny. Nerval is expressing his hopes of becoming wealthy enough to win the actress ('L'Alchimiste'), and of the reputedly flighty lady being reformed by a great love ('Piquillo'). When he does approach her, the relationship is unsuccessful, but the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon', situated somewhere between life and literature, tend to prolong rather than resolve his frustrated hopes, and he will later transpose the situation (still unresolved) in 'Corilla'.

However, immediately after the affaire with Jenny had been cut short by her marriage to the flautist Leplus, Nerval's imagination reverts to the earlier possibility. This is dramatically illustrated by a study of the two versions of 'Léo Burckart'[1].

1. 'Léo Burckart' was also written in collaboration with Dumas. The two men worked on it in Germany in the Summer of 1838, a few months after Jenny's marriage. The first version is used for J. Richer's edition in the series "Le Drame romantique". The second version is given in 'Sylvie, suivie de Léo Burckart et de Aurélia', ed. H. Clouard. It is announced that O.C. IV will give both versions (Senelier, N°. 2,442). To decide who contributed what, reference should be made to J. Richer's edition, to Senelier N°s 295 & 298 and to Letter 265. Evidence is somewhat conflicting, but we can conclude that Nerval was chiefly responsible for the play, which he signed, and that it was he who rewrote it, so that scarcely anything remained of Dumas' contribution in the second version. - 'Léo Burckart' is a fine political melodrama, and no apology is needed (as in the case of 'L'Alchimiste' and 'Piquillo') for discussing it.

In the first version the feelings of the revolutionary student Frantz Lewald for the aristocratic Diana de Waldeck, mistress of the Prince, are plainly a literary transposition of Nerval's retrospective attitude to his own recently closed liaison with Jenny Colon. This is at once a critical analysis of his own feelings, and an imaginative adjustment of the affaire's outcome.

Frantz's attitude to Diana comes out clearly in the 'Prologue'. He is discussing his feelings for her with Marguerite, wife of Léo Burckart; he has lost Diana, but he still loves her - or so he thinks. Marguerite consoles him and teases him, gently. She does not take his love for Diana at all seriously: "cet amour était un amour d'enfant, tout entier dans la tête" (285). His emotions were auto-suggested; she, Marguerite, it is implied, can see his feelings for what they were, whereas Diana, the cause of those feelings, was taken in by them. Frantz's tragic airs are made to look rather silly, as Marguerite shrewdly analyses the way he nurses the pain caused by Diana's absence until it has become "un désespoir réel" (285), the way he has exaggerated his own feelings, and the way he puts a false, subjective interpretation on her actions (287). In a few shrewd, ironical, kindly words the factitious nature of an "amour de tête" is revealed. Exalted feelings are not the same as love. Having put his hero in the same unhappy position as himself, Nerval can stand back from his experience, smiling ruefully, but seeing it critically and clearly.

But despite this calm recognition that the excitement of a self-suggested emotion is not love, and that such feelings would die if they

were not nursed, Nerval has also written into this 'Prologue' the painful and recent memory that exaltation may cause anguish, even though it is not, perhaps because it is not, inspired by a genuine feeling for the woman in question. The febrile and sterile activity of the mind possessed by a purely subjective excitement is self-wounding. There is a desperate note in Frantz's voice which we have heard before, in the 'Lettres à Jenny', and the feelings which had been criticised for their subjectivism nevertheless remain sufficiently intense to keep a certain validity. Diana makes an ambiguous speech (293) which leaves open the possibility that she was in love with Frantz all the time and only refused him because she had realised that he was not truly in love with her.[1] The very weakness of the subjective lover's position is exploited to salvage his pride. Behind this, there is the suggestion that perhaps Jenny Colon, like Diana, may have refused her lover with a breaking heart, simply because she recognised that he had deluded himself into a passion that would be ephemeral.

But this is suggested deviously and unobtrusively, and the main tendency of 'Léo Burckart' is to show that the young man's love for the famous Diana de Waldeck was a temporary aberration. He never <u>really</u> loved her. Instead, he discovers gradually that he had secretly been in love with Marguerite all the time. This is all the more convincing to

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[1] Compare 'Corilla': "Le seigneur Fabrice n'adore en moi que l'actrice peut-être, et son amour a besoin de la distance et de la rampe allumée" (I, 346); and 'Sylvie': "vous ne m'aimez pas!... vous cherchez un drame, voilà tout" (I, 295). It is probable that Jenny Colon would have made similar objections to Nerval, but the evidence of the Letters is that she would have raised them, not because she loved him too much and did not want to be hurt, but because she loved him too little and did not want to be bothered.

the imagination, and therefore all the more soothing for the wounded ego, if this love had been unconscious.

In the first version we can see the transference actually taking place. Already in the 'Prologue' the alert reader is aware of an unstated feeling for Marguerite on the part of Frantz: the classic situation of the hero who is secretly in love with the go-between. The transference is prepared for <u>before</u> the final break with Diana:

"Frantz - Que vous êtes bonne! Oh, si elle avait votre coeur! Oh, si c'eût été vous que j'eusse aimée!

Marguerite - Nouvelle folie!

Frantz - Cela n'est pas. Mais cela aurait pu être. Et, aujourd'hui, je serais heureux" (288-89).

Frantz's love for Marguerite is expressed first in the conditional mood. The imagination passes easily from the proposition: "if only she had been like you", to its logical corollary: "if only you had been in her place".

Circumstances conspire to bring his feelings out: Marguerite is to accompany her husband to prison, and Frantz's reaction reveals that his feelings have passed beyond the friendship which as yet is all that he proclaims: "Tenez, il vous fallait un malheur pour que je sentisse toute la force de mon amitié pour vous" - and he offers to follow her in her misfortune, to follow her, indeed, to the end of the world (310). Then comes a melodramatic shift of fortune which throws them together: Marguerite's husband is to move, not to prison, but to the highest office at the Leipzig court, and she is more neglected than ever.

In Act II, Frantz's love comes right out into the open - the final stage of the transference, moving the inception of love further and further back into the past: "Ah! vous savez bien que je ne l'aime plus (Diana), n'est-ce pas, ou plutôt que je ne l'ai jamais aimée ... J'allais à vous, je vous parlais d'elle. Mais aujourd'hui, j'en suis à me demander si, même à cette époque, c'était bien pour elle que j'allais à vous" (385). What was only a desired possibility has become a distinct probability, formulated positively. He goes on to say that if he were certain that she was happy with Léo, he could find the strength to leave her. But, of course, she is not happy (though she will not admit it), and this leaves room for hope. He at last declares his love openly[1]. What started as wishful thinking has quickly reached the status of an avowed fact.

Pressed as to whether she loves him in return, she will not answer and he takes this as a sign that she does. His monologue shows that love, in changing its object, has not changed its manner (388). The same conflicting attitudes of the Nerval-Jenny and Frantz-Diana <u>affaires</u> are here reproduced. The hero's emotion is aroused not by the beloved herself, but by the heightened atmosphere of a society occasion. And her feelings are deduced from an interpretation of her silence, which to the subjectivist is as eloquent as speech. Her supposed understanding of his

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1. The tone and sentiment of these speeches are often strikingly close to the 'Lettres à Jenny': "Marguerite, Marguerite, où trouverez-vous un homme qui vous soit plus dévoué, un coeur qui soit plus vôtre, une existence plus heureuse de se sacrifier pour vous?"

feelings (which he did not properly understand himself) immediately develops into a no less hypothetical response to them. A motive is supplied for her silence: although she loved him all along, a timid young girl is not in a position to choose her husband, and she had to accept the cold-hearted Léo. - It is on these shaky foundations that Frantz builds the assertion that true love is not simply a literary convention - not simply a product of the overheated imagination (as his passion for Diana had been). It exists, and he has found it.

The transfer to Marguerite is complete. At this point in the play (Act II) there seems to be a serious possibility that the increasingly neglected Marguerite will finally succumb to Frantz's ever bolder advances. Nerval has shifted the centre of interest from Diana to Marguerite. And in re-writing the play he strongly endorses the change, for in the second version, as M. Richer points out, "il n'a jamais été question d'amour entre Frantz Lewald et Diana de Waldeck"[1]. The roles of the two women are reversed; Diana is now the go-between and confidante of Frantz's love for Marguerite, on whom Frantz's attentions are now focussed exclusively. What is more, the suggestion in the first version that they might have known each other when she was a young girl, is here fully implemented. He is a favourite ex-pupil of her father and has known her since childhood. He is an old friend of the family, perhaps even a relation[2]. What is more, it appears that there was a childish attachment between them (144),

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1. J. Richer, 'Nerval et ses deux Léo Burckart', 'Mercure de France', December 1949, which presents the then unpublished Prologue of the first version.

2. See 143, 144, 177, 235.

and in the course of the second version the idea that Marguerite might have married him and not Léo is even more strongly felt than in the first. For the first time in Nerval's work, the hero returns to a girl he knew in childhood - not, it is true, with the conscious desire to renew the acquaintance; but this situation, which will be the basis of 'Sylvie', is already strongly adumbrated.

The most important changes occur in the 'Prologue', which Nerval extensively rewrote. It is not Frantz, but Diana, who describes meeting Marguerite again after all these years and finding her changed almost beyond recognition. Yet the scene is surely a reminiscence of 'Les Aventures de la soirée de Saint-Sylvestre', where it was the hero who had this experience. As in 'Les Aventures', the meeting takes place at a soirée given by a local worthy. "Je ne l'ai reconnue que la dernière", Diana tells Frantz, "et je me demandais, un moment avant, quelle était donc cette belle personne qui venait à moi" (144)[1]. Nerval is well on the way to attributing to his own hero this experience of rediscovering a childhood sweetheart transformed into a mature beauty.

In borrowing this situation from Hoffmann, Nerval makes it his own. If the imaginative basis of the scene is 'La Soirée de Saint-Sylvestre', it reads also like a sketch for 'Sylvie'. Both Marguerite and Sylvie are childhood sweethearts transformed by maturity. In both works, there is an uncle or avuncular figure who has been the hero's teacher. In both,

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[1] Cf in 'Les Aventures': "Tout en elle avait pris je ne sais quel caractère étrange", etc. (see Chapter III, 69). On the influence of Hoffmann, see below Note 4 p. 192.

there is a sense of kinship with the girl[1]. In both, the grown man looks back nostalgically to an innocent childhood relationship. But in both cases there has been a loss of innocence, symbolised by the disappearance of the simple old traditions[2]. In both works, the hero comes back to the haunts of his youth after three years in Italy[3]. In both, the heroine reflects sadly that if only the hero had returned from Italy earlier, they might have found happiness together[4]. Now, this corresponds to Nerval's own life, but with a very significant difference: in 1838, at the time 'Léo Burckart' was written, Nerval had been back from Italy for three years. If like Frantz he had spent those three years in Italy and then gone straight to the scenes of his childhood, he might have met some Valois Marguerite and never have had the unhappy affaire with the actress. 'Léo Burckart' is an imaginative transposition of what might have happened in Nerval's own life if he had been true to his dream of marrying a childhood sweetheart, if he had never answered the lure of the glamorous public woman.

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1. Diana implies that Frantz is quite closely connected to Marguerite's family (144). Sylvie's brother is the hero's "frère de lait", and "Sylvie ... était pour moi comme une soeur" (I, 290).

2. Frantz complains to Marguerite: "les vieux serviteurs sont morts ou renvoyés. La maison n'est plus la même ... je ne saurais à quoi rattacher ici mes souvenirs ... Le salon a pris un air tout moderne, les vieux meubles ont disparu, avec le souvenir des vieux parents peut-être, et des anciens amis, sans doute" (143). The hero of 'Sylvie' is moved by the relics of his past which he finds lovingly preserved in his uncle's house: "je revis avec attendrissement les vieux meubles conservés dans le même état" (I, 284), but when he goes to see Sylvie, he has the same sad experience as Frantz: the past is dead - "les meubles étaient modernes" (I, 287). (My italics).

3. 'Léo Burckart', 144 and 'Sylvie', 271, 283.

4. 'Léo Burckart', 198 and 'Sylvie', 283.

In the scene where Frantz describes his return to the haunts of his youth, the Valois nostalgia is already strongly in evidence. Even the décor is like that of 'Sylvie': "je suivais les bords du fleuve que la brume commençaient à couvrir" (145). And in the décor there is the immanent breath of past happiness: "je retrouvais nos promenades chéries... Un instant même je distinguai la mélodie d'une certaine valse de Weber ... qui me rappela tout à coup tant de douces impressions de jeunesse, que je me mis à pleurer comme un enfant" (145). There is, of course, a slight difference in emphasis: a Weber waltz instead of the folk-tune which is opposed to Weber in 'Fantaisie'. But the association is there, and in general this passage exactly captures the mood of certain parts of 'Sylvie'.

The Valois nostalgia has much deeper roots in Nerval's imagination than is generally supposed. Mme M.-J. Durry, for example, thinks that it was Nerval's reading of Restif which precipitated what she calls "le grand retour au Valois"[1]. But in fact, there was already evidence of a vicarious, perhaps only semi-conscious interest in the idea of marrying a

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[1] M.-J. Durry, 132-33. Nerval seems to have worked on Restif in June-July 1850 (see Letter 158 - though the Pléiade editors omit to note that "un travail à finir pour le 15" probably refers to 'Les Confidences de Nicolas', published in 'La Revue des Deux Mondes' from 15 August). Three references to Restif before 1850 (O.C. II, 421, in 1838; O.C. I, 156-58, in 1839; II, 1287 (?), in 1841) reveal only a skimpy, perhaps second-hand, acquaintance. Most critics, following P. Audiat ('L'Aurélia de Gérard de Nerval'), would agree with Mme Durry that it was only from about 1850 that Nerval's "recherche du temps perdu" began - N. Popa, for example: "l'hypnose du souvenir du Valois paraîtra seulement à partir de 1850" ('Les Filles de Feu', II, 18); or J. Richer: "c'est vers 1849-50 que semble commencer cette remontée aux sources" ('Expérience et création', 290).

simple village girl, in the translations of Nerval's early twenties. And when Nerval's love for Jenny Colon has ended in failure, the longing to return to the village sweetheart comes out strongly in the second version of 'Léo Burckart'. When Frantz sees Marguerite there is exactly the same confusion between time present and time past that Nicolas experiences at a similar meeting with Mme Parangon[1]. Behind the grown woman the image of the young girl suddenly surges up.

Nerval's hankering after the childhood sweetheart, eclipsed by his hopes in the direction of the actress, is reaffirmed. The transference of the hero's love for Marguerite is projected far back into the past, becoming a sweet childhood attachment which he could renew by returning to the scenes of his youth.

But the young girl has married someone else. It is as though Léo has stepped into the position that might have been occupied by Frantz. Both men have exalted mystico-patriotic ideas, but the calming influence of Marguerite has enabled Léo to channel his energies in purposeful political activity, whereas Frantz remains a student hothead. Léo is another version of Frantz - a Frantz who has been steadied and matured by marriage (146-49). He cannot be very much older than Frantz, and yet he appears as the wise adult, broken to serious affairs, who would be in a position to give advice to the immature idealist. This impression is confirmed by the scene where Léo addresses the rampaging students in fatherly terms - a

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1. "Mademoiselle ... madame", stammers Frantz (144). And Nicolas: "Colette? c'est toi? ... C'est vous, madame" (II, 1029). There is a similar moment of confusion in 'Madame d'Egmont', when Renaud is unsure whether his beloved is a Countess or a soubrette: "Henriette! ... est-ce toi? Madame! ... est-ce vous?" (III, v).

scene in which he has Frantz arrested for duelling (177-78). But Léo is what he is through Marguerite, and if it had been Frantz who had married her he could perhaps have achieved the maturity and respectability which, as it is, sets Léo effortlessly above him.

Frantz's claims on Marguerite sometimes seem better founded than Léo's. Léo neglects her and treats her coldly, even cruelly. He does not need her now. Frantz on the other hand needs her desperately. He is an orphan and has no-one in the world: "Que je vous voie seulement! que j'entende quelques douces paroles à ce moment suprême ... Autrement, seul au monde ... à qui dirais-je le secret de ma vie et de ma mort! Ma mère n'est plus, et je n'ai point d'autre soeur que vous!" (196). Nerval's own feelings shine through the transparent figure of his hero. He, too, longed for a sympathetic woman - mother, sister, lover, wife - to share his most secret thoughts. And in some ways Marguerite is closer to Frantz than to Léo. After their bad news in the 'Prologue', Marguerite goes to Léo only to be told brutally: "Pourquoi me déranger? ... Laisse-moi seul, Marguerite" (159). But a scene or two earlier, when Frantz came in, she felt his sympathy immediately without it even having to be made explicit (154). Frantz and Marguerite sometimes seem united in their youth against Léo's adult seriousness (145). Marguerite even secretly shares the regret that she did not marry Frantz instead of Léo (198).

Frantz's rivalry with Léo appears partly as an attempt to win recognition of equal status. He is beneath Léo's notice: when his name is mentioned in the older man's presence, he does not even reply (150), and

when Frantz comes as the students' delegate to offer Léo financial support, the offer is refused with some hauteur (160). Diana is always making fun of Frantz's irresponsible, cloak-and-dagger student politics (eg 148-49). He himself fears he and his fellow-students may not be taken very seriously (170). Léo by contrast talks paternally to the students, and when he is taken disguised to their secret meeting, says: "je rougis vraiment de jouer un rôle dans cette comédie d'enfants" (220). But Léo's secretary, Paulus, assures him: "sous ce tumulte d'écoliers, il y a des hommes qui agissent", and when a traitor is summarily executed the point is confirmed: "ce ne sont point ici des jeux d'enfants!" (223). And Frantz has retained his generous revolutionary fervour, whereas Léo is cold-hearted, and has gone over to the tyrants. When Paulus reminds him ironically of the time when "nous faisions de l'opposition ensemble, monseigneur" (202), our sympathies are turned in the direction of Frantz, whose youth is not yet tarnished.

The pattern is of a younger man whose position has in a sense been usurped, and who wants to prove himself as worthy as his rival. It becomes in the end a matter of life and death. Frantz oscillates between a bold self-assertion and a readiness to abdicate, between assassination and suicide. At one moment he declares himself satisfied with a Platonic relationship which Marguerite's husband need not even know about; the next, he is thinking of divorce and hinting at the possibility that he might murder Léo. But this thought can only be expressed obliquely, and the idea is no sooner put forward than it is withdrawn: it was not Léo's death he was thinking of, but his own (188).

The rivalry over Marguerite is never overtly expressed, but it is as though it is transferred to the political action, when Frantz is designated as Léo's assassin. Now at last he meets him man to man: too proud to strike the assassin's blow, he succeeds in provoking him to fight. It is only in the furtherance of this political action that he can taunt Léo with his rival claim to Marguerite. But this man-to-man challenge is punctured, for Marguerite has overheard, and rushes in to deny his words. Léo relaxes. Cruelly, it is Marguerite who delivers the coup de grâce with these wounding words: "Sortez donc, vous n'avez pas le droit d'être ici ... Allez attendre à la porte, au coin d'une rue, celui que vous avez mission d'assassiner!" (238). Frantz, cut off from sympathy, ignominiously shown the door, unable to accomplish his mission, can only stammer pathetically: "Madame! ... vous me jugez mal ... madame, je voudrais vous dire ... " (238), before being cut short by Léo. The ending is perfunctory: an unconvincing and brief reconciliation, then Frantz goes out and shoots himself.

But this does not represent a total defeat of Nerval's imaginative longings. For although he identifies himself most intimately with Frantz, he also projects his wishes into the role of Léo. Léo is the serious, respected and responsible political journalist that Nerval himself dreamed of becoming in Vienna in 1839-40[1]. It is true that fame draws Léo away from Marguerite. She is the simple bourgeois wife who hates sophisticated

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[1] See Letters 47, 49, 51, 68 and 68 bis. These vague ambitions are projected into the character of Henri de Brégeas, who represents Nerval's desire for respectability and a career, and who is contrasted with the irresponsible Fritz (II, 1272-75).

society and is explicitly contrasted with the aristocratic Diana: "Etais-je née, moi, pour être la femme d'un ministre, pour vivre au milieu de ces fêtes, en cachant mon chagrin sous des couronnes de fleurs, moi, pauvre Marguerite des champs, qui ne demandais à Dieu que de l'amour pour vivre et de l'air pour respirer". But there is a home-loving side to Léo which corresponds to Marguerite's humble nature. At the beginning of the play, when he is still living a life of relative obscurity, he says: "j'ai trouvé la véritable patrie, c'est à dire une famille; je n'ai aucun désir de quitter Francfort. Je commence à m'habiter à mon obscurité; peu à peu, tous mes rêves d'avenir s'évanouissent et se fondent dans mon bonheur présent. L'homme se trompe souvent à sa destinée, il prend son désir pour une vocation, il se croit appelé à changer la face du monde avec sa pensée et sa parole; tandis que Dieu l'a simplement créé pour être fils respectueux, bon mari, honnête homme et voilà tout". And at the end, when he has again been reduced to obscurity, he is reconciled with his wife. There is a correlation between a humble obscurity and the love of Marguerite. And it is partly because he eventually accepts obscurity that Léo emerges as the man Marguerite really loves.

We see that the imaginative patterns of Nerval's works vary in response to his current preoccupations. When Jenny Colon is still available, Nerval's heroes reflect his hopes of winning her. But in the two versions of 'Léo Burckart' we can trace his progressive disengagement from this project. The desire to succeed and to make money, originally associated with the Marguerite-figure, has now become a bar to the simple

happiness she can provide. 'Léo Burckart' can be seen as a rearrangement of 'L'Alchimiste' in which the emotional centre of gravity is the dutiful and unpretentious wife, and modest obscurity is the condition of fulfilment. Léo as Minister is cut off from Marguerite: hence Frantz, as a poor student, is drawn close to her. We note that he is bound to her, not only because they were childhood sweethearts (so that he has the prior claim), but also by ties of kinship. Frantz's cry: "ma mère n'est plus, et je n'ai point d'autre soeur que vous" (196) carries all Nerval's longing to return to the happiness of childhood and to be received again, by marrying a simple village cousin, into the family from which he had been excluded by his father's return, and from which his own ambitions remove him still further. The same longings are concentrated in Léo's speech welcoming his return to obscurity and a happy family life.

But there are two sides to the picture. Frantz's obscurity, by linking him with the simple Marguerite, is a justification of Nerval's own lack of success. But at the same time the young man's earnest idealism is a reflection of the aspirations which Nerval is still struggling, through 'Léo Burckart' itself, to fulfil. Frantz's rivalry with Léo mirrors Nerval's longing to win his father's recognition of his literary career.

Yet the literary character does not stand in a single one-to-one relationship with a real-life "model". Nerval is also working out his feelings about his older and more successful collaborator, Dumas. At the time 'Léo Burckart' was written, he lived with Ida Ferrier and Dumas in a

little house his friend had rented in Frankfurt (Letter 33), and the couple, although they were not yet married, travelled as man and wife, a fact which Nerval comments on ironically (Letter 31). That Nerval found Ida more sympathetic than the hearty Dumas can be deduced from the letter he wrote to her after his attack of madness in 1841. He writes with an almost family feeling, no doubt remembering their life together at Frankfurt, and connecting Ida and Dumas with the mystic family of his visions. He longs to bask again, as he had during the tour of Germany, in the reflected warmth of Dumas' glory[1]. At the same time there is a note of regret. Since those days Dumas has gone from strength to strength, advancing easily to the acclaim which Nerval has missed. He expresses no jealousy of Dumas, but he does underline the contrast between his friend's effortless success and his own wretchedness. And it is clear that he does not expect the bluff Dumas to understand, as Ida will, that the experience of madness was not simply a temporary aberration but an essential part of his personality (Letter 86).

It is probable that, either in fact or fancy, Nerval confided his unhappy love to Ida just as Frantz confides his to Marguerite, and just as Nerval - if we are to believe the first version of 'Aurélia' - confided in Marie Pleyel[2]. In each case the sympathetic <u>confidante</u> becomes a replacement for the first love. Frantz, like Nerval in the second version of 'Aurélia', uses the tone of the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon' when addressing the <u>confidante</u> to whom his feelings have been transferred.

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1. Cf Letter 33.
2. See Chapter II.

And we find that Nerval's feelings for Dumas follow the characteristic oscillation between love and aggression which was discernible in his attitude to men like Blanche or Janin. Thus when Dumas finally married Ida in 1840, Nerval wrote an emotional letter of congratulation which goes far beyond the compliments required by convention. This seems particularly inappropriate if it is true that Dumas married in order to avoid being sent to prison for debt[1]. The heightened tone arises because Nerval is generously transforming a latent envy into affectionate self-identification: the warmth comes from the fancy that he himself might have found happiness with Ida-Marguerite.

We recall that Ida had taken the part of Francesca, the sweet, simple, neglected wife in 'L'Alchimiste', and that the equivalent part in 'Léo Burckart', written while Nerval was sharing a house with the Dumas ménage, is that of Marguerite. And here Nerval's hostility towards Dumas, of which he was probably only partly conscious, finds indirect expression, for whereas in the first play the heroine's suitor hardly counts, in the second his place in the framework of the plot is filled by Frantz, who is the rival of the successful and famous husband. Yet even here the sexual rivalry is transferred, as it were, to the political action. It is as though Nerval's jealousy of Dumas is being doubly censored.

Years later, the rivalry is expressed more directly. Earlier hints that Dumas had had an undue share of credit and money from the plays written in collaboration[2] develop into recriminations over allegedly unpaid debts.

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1. See A. Maurois, 'Les Trois Dumas', 148, and Letter 54.
2. See Letters 39, 42 bis (third ed. of I) and 72.

Nerval's bitterness, a product of the contrast between Dumas' success and his own poverty, is scarcely concealed by the bantering tone (Letter 265). The very fact that in the following letter he is so deeply remorseful, indicates that the hostility was real (Letter 266). Letter 221 is also humorous in tone, but it reproduces the essential pattern of the rivalry between Frantz and Léo. Nerval recalls that he was in love with Dumas' mistress. Overcoming the temptation to murder him ("le frapper par derrière ne serait pas loyal"), just as Frantz refuses to incur the dishonour of assassinating Léo, Nerval explores the idea of a duel, but has to retire in humiliation (like Frantz) when Dumas frightens him off by a display of infallible marksmanship. Nerval is again thinking ironically of the fact that Dumas pretended to be married to Ida when he writes: "j'ai toujours respecté les épouses de mes amis: mais ce n'était pas une épouse". Censorship is still operating through the humour, but over the years the impotent sense of rivalry has come closer to the surface of the mind.

CHAPTER VI

MARGUERITE AND JENNY - A POSSIBLE SYNTHESIS

In the three plays he wrote with Dumas, Nerval's imagination has fashioned the love-situation in response to the state of his relationship with Jenny Colon: strongly drawn by the distant and exciting public woman in 'L'Alchimiste'; playing with the idea that the capricious prima donna might be reformed by love and settle down to a regular relationship in 'Piquillo'; putting aside altogether the idea of union with the aristocratic Diana de Waldeck in favour of a childhood sweetheart in 'Léo Burckart', written after the affaire with Jenny had finished.

But now Nerval's imagination is moving towards a new synthesis. Whereas in the second version of 'Léo Burckart' the hero's love-affair with the Jenny Colon-figure is definitely over, and he turns to Marguerite as a quite separate alternative, in 'Corilla' (1839), 'La Polygamie est un cas pendable' (late 1830's?) and 'Un Roman à faire' (1842), the affaire with the famous beauty has not yet reached its crisis, and the hero is attracted by a humble girl who either resembles the actress or even proves to be the actress herself in disguise.

The image of the actress-figure as it has so far appeared in Nerval's works is of a famous, much-courted beauty, even a courtesan. But there is another side to her. Although in the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon' Nerval never states specifically that he fell in love, not with the actress so much as with the heroines she played, he is clearly thinking of himself when he describes this process in other contexts[1]. And there is abundant

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[1] On Mme Bonhomme (II, 191) and Mlle Guéant (II, 999-1000).

evidence that he was attracted to Jenny Colon not only by her prestige and beauty (an example of the majestic Flemish or Venetian type), but also by the ingénue parts in which she so often seems to have been cast[1].

An unsigned article in 'Le Monde dramatique' whilst Nerval was still directing it recalls Jenny's début (at the age of thirteen), and stresses that after excelling in child parts, her successes at the Vaudeville were always in the ingénue roles of such plays as 'La Laitière de Montfermeil' (O.C. I, 130-131). In 'Les Etats de Blois' (September 1837), she played the part of Paulette, a milkmaid "qui chante une chansonnette en attisant son feu" (O.C. II, 367). In 'Le Remplaçant' (August 1837), she was Marie, a peasant girl who marries her village fiancé after conventional adventures which Nerval analyses not without gentle humour (O.C. II, 357-364). As Angélique, too, in 'Le Fidèle Berger' (January 1838), Jenny Colon played a shop-girl who is in the end united with the boy next door in spite of the efforts of a "Lovelace suranné" to get her for himself (O.C. II, 420-424).

But more interesting still are the plays in which Jenny took the part of a great lady who pretends to be, or is thought to be, a girl of humble condition. The first of these is 'Madame d'Egmont ou Sont-elles deux?'.

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[1] The problem here is to decide which of the plays Nerval saw. (Her principal roles are listed by J. Senelier, 'Recherches et découvertes', 12-17, while the detail of her Brussels tour of 1840-41 is given by J. Richer, 'Expérience et création', 605-610). The safest principle is to confine ourselves to plays Nerval reviewed and those with which he appears to have been familiar. If, as seems likely, he went to the theatre every night during the period of silent adoration, the plays he saw again and again (even if he scarcely followed them till she came on stage) must have imprinted themselves on his mind (see below p.393 and the opening chapters of 'Sylvie' and 'Les Confidences de Nicolas').

The Countess d'Egmont is in love with Renaud, a draper's boy, and disguises herself as a maid to meet him. Later, she disowns him, and he is shut up as a madman. Renaud is faced with a double figure: sweet little Henriette, the maid; and the cruel lady who coldly denounces him. However, she again dresses up as Henriette and goes to see him in prison. There is a moment of double vision: "Henriette! ... est-ce toi? ... Madame! ... est-ce vous?" (III, v). (This must have struck Nerval, for it reappears in 'Léo Burckart': see p.133). But then the maid seems to eclipse the Countess, and he is ready to admit that he must indeed have been mad to think she was the same person. The ending is inconclusive[1].

Nerval's own 'Piquillo' (1836), too, seems to be associated with this same idea. It is true that the part of Sylvia, played by Jenny, expresses Nerval's hopes that the famous coquette may be reformed by love (see Chapter IV). But Sylvie will be the name given to the little village girl, and the recognition scene strongly suggests the possibility that the beautiful singer reminds the hero of someone else[2]: "Je sens qu'auprès d'elle,/ Si noble et si belle,/ Mon esprit rappelle/ Un rêve effacé" (123). It turns out, of course, that he has in fact met her already. But the suggestion is there. In his review of the play, Nerval places it in the

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1. G. Marie has already pointed out that " 'Corilla' n'est ... qu'une transposition de 'Madame d'Egmont' " ('Gérard aima-t-il Jenny Colon ou la Comtesse d'Egmont?'). J. Richer ('Expérience et création', 218) summarises the reasons for supposing that Nerval saw this play. There is no evidence, however, that he saw either 'La Prima donna ou la soeur de lait' (1832) or 'La Paysanne demoiselle' (1834).

2. The situation derives from 'Jodelet', adapted by Nerval from 'L'Héritier ridicule' and other plays by Scarron. The ms, dating from 1835, was never published (see A. Marie, 97-98 and O.C. II, 466 and 790).

naïve tradition of "les vieux opéras-comiques qui faisaient les délices de nos pères, et dont on chantait les airs en nous berçant" (O.C. II, 376). This nostalgia for the unsophisticated tunes which recall his childhood is associated with Nerval's longing for the adolescent sweetheart. Later, he will see Jenny Colon as Paulette singing a "chansonnette" by her fireside, and in 'Corilla' the prima donna, impersonating a little flower-girl, will sing "chansonnettes" which contrast with the more ornate and sophisticated manner of her operatic roles[1].

Finally, there is 'Le Perruquier de la Régence' (April 1838), in which Jenny took the part of a barber's daughter to whom a marquis disguised as a "clerc de notaire" is paying court. All turns out well when it transpires that she is really the daughter of a Russian nobleman (O.C. II, 429-437).

Using these ingredients, Nerval's imagination works out a situation which partially gratifies a new fancy. The affaire with Jenny is over. But this is a fact the imagination cannot accept. Hence 'Corilla' puts the clock back to a point in the relationship where all things were still possible.

Nerval had often seen the famous Jenny (we may assume) playing ingénue parts; in particular, he had seen her in the role of a rich, inaccessible lady who, by disguising herself and changing her voice, was

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[1]. It is likely, as Rhodes suggests, that Nerval wrote the lyrics for 'Piquillo' (see Letter 22).

transformed into a sweet little girl the hero could marry ('Madame d'Egmont')[1]. This is linked in his mind with the story of the Colombe sisters (see Chapter II): an easy adventure would be possible with the one who was the double of the famous singer, just as he himself had spent the night with an easy woman of humble condition who was like another version of Jenny Colon. 'Corilla' is based on the proposition that there might be a synthesis of Nerval's twin imaginative appetencies: the personality of the singer (who in real life has treated him cruelly, and whom he now half wishes he had never approached) is reproduced in a double, a simple, humble creature whom he could easily possess and who might provide the unaffected sympathy and warmth that her more famous counterpart had withheld.

That Nerval at this time connected the image of Jenny with that of the adolescent sweetheart is suggested by the plagiarised story 'Jemmy', which probably dates from 1839[2]. On the one hand he changes the heroine's name from Jemima to Jemmy, whilst her reddish hair would also link her with

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1. G. Marie has proposed the ingenious theory that Nerval fell in love with Jenny Colon because this role retrospectively realised his hopeless childhood love for Sophie de Fenchères, mistress of the duc de Bourbon. Sophie, doubly inaccessible by age and rank, is identified with Mme d'Egmont who makes herself available to the young commoner by becoming a maid. Whilst agreeing that the general pattern indicated by G. Marie is of great importance, I would deny the necessity and the wisdom of attaching it to precise biographical circumstances. The merging of Mme d'Egmont and Henriette, of the two Colombe sisters, etc (a situation whose very recurrence shows its deep significance) corresponds to a profound imaginative need, not to a single childhood memory (see G. Marie and M. Cavé: 'Gérard aima-t-il Jenny Colon ...?').

2. See J. Gaulmier, 81-85, to whom I am indebted here. Gaulmier shows how the work is both an appeal to the literary market and a reflection of Nerval's private predilections.

Jenny Colon. But at the same time the rustic scene in which hero and heroine exchange a kiss in obedience to the rules of the game they are playing, reads, like so many of Nerval's earlier productions, as a sketch for Sylvie. Links which later strengthen and clarify can be seen here in shadowy, perhaps pre-conscious, form. The idea that he fell in love with Jenny because she reminded him of an adolescent sweetheart is not yet fully formed. But the suggestion is there. The work of unification is beginning.

'Corilla' appeared sixteen months after Jenny's marriage. But the situation corresponds to the early stages of the relationship. Fabio, poet and dreamer, (compare Fasio in 'L'Alchimiste'), is in love with the prima donna of San Carlo, with whom he has managed to arrange a meeting. But when he sees her coming he is tempted to run away, though his fears are slightly allayed when she arranges a rendezvous. Then it transpires that she has fixed a rendezvous with another man, Marcelli, at the same time, and Fabio, despite his bravado, is afraid he is being duped. This is apparently confirmed when he sees her meeting his rival, challenges the couple, and is told by Corilla that he must be mad, as she has never seen him before (this is from 'Madame d'Egmont'). However, this is only a test. Fabio is told that as his passion seems purely imaginary, "il suffirait de lui procurer la satisfaction d'un entretien avec quelque créature de la taille et de l'air de la signora Corilla"[1]. He is led to believe that it was not Corilla who made the appointment with him, but a little flower-girl dressed to look like her. He meets the flower-girl,

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1. 342; my italics. The 1842 version of Letter V reads: "J'avais fait rencontre à la Villa Real d'une jeune femme qui vous ressemblait; une très bonne créature" (I, 726 and 1259).

as though by chance, and reproaches her, declaring that although she resembles Corilla slightly, she is only an imperfect substitute. The final twist of course is that he has not been dealing with a flower-girl dressed as Corilla, but with the real Corilla dressed as a flower-girl. The playlet ends with the lady reserving her choice. She has doubts about both Fabio and Marcelli: "Vous êtes trop mondain, et lui (Fabio) trop poète" (346-347).

On the one hand this is an amusing, lucid and civilised critique of subjective passion. Mazetto, the entremetteur, considers that Fabio can be put off with any girl having much the same height and bearing as Corilla (and events prove him right, since Fabio is unable to recognise her when he meets her face to face). Marcelli compares him with Ixion. But the most detailed analysis of subjective love for an actress comes from Fabio himself, who dreads meeting the idol of his heart precisely because he knows that she may be quite unlike the image he has formed of her, and because he is afraid that he in his turn will not be able to live up to the image of the passionate lover he has presented in his letters, especially if he is quite sober[1]. Fabio's readiness to accept defeat at the hands of the Don Juan figure, Marcelli, who is cold-hearted and calculating, but effective as a lover, corresponds to Nerval's rueful admission in the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon': "il y a toujours quelque niaiserie à trop respecter les femmes" (XI). And Corilla herself recognises that Fabio's love "a besoin de la rampe allumée" (346).

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1. I, 333. Cf 'Aurélia', I, 364-365; and 'Lettres à Jenny Colon', XIV, line 9.

Yet the final conclusion - that the hero never really loved the actress - is never drawn. For all his self-analysis, Fabio remains a sombre, even desperate figure, and beneath the civilised banter of 'Corilla' there shows, as in the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon', "l'éclair d'une âme qui a réellement ... souffert"[1]. Fabio will have nothing to do with the substitute, even though, ironically, she is in fact the real person. He maintains to the end that his love, for all its subjectivity, is real: "c'est bien elle seule que j'aime" (345). As usual, the work is twosided. Ironical analysis is balanced by a persisting affirmation of subjective emotion. The whole story, based very closely on Nerval's affaire with Jenny[2], instead of being forced through to its crisis, is being held back by the hero's reluctance to put his love to the test of reality. Whereas Jenny Colon had chosen the flautist, Corilla leaves her choice open.

Since the affaire with Corilla is inconclusive, the way is left open to another possibility. Supposing Fabio had fallen in love with the prima donna only because one of her roles reminded him of a young country girl... After the first meeting he says: "toutes ces héroïnes que j'adorais en elle, Sophonisbe, Alcime, Herminie, et même cette blonde Molinara, qu'elle joue à ravir avec des habits moins splendides, je les voyais toutes enfermées à la fois sous cette mantille coquette" (332).

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1. 'Un Roman à faire', I, 1250. "La légèreté de proverbe à la Musset masque la profonde mélancolie" - J. Gaulmier (105) on 'Corilla'.

2. Corilla is the Venetian type (335); the hero goes to the theatre every evening to hear this famous singer; he recognises her finally by her voice; the rendezvous is at the Villa Reale, which is where Nerval met the working-girl resembling Jenny; Nerval took the girl to San Carlo which is where Corilla is singing.

His chief pleasure was in the illusion of meeting all the heroines he had seen her play, and the part he singles out is precisely that of the humble Molinara. When Corilla is pretending to be a flower-girl, "elle chante des chansonnettes espagnoles avec une voix d'un timbre fort claire" (342). Now, unaffected singing is connected with the Marguerite figure, from the folk-songs of Goethe's Gretchen onwards, and Fabio calls the false Corilla "la fleur sauvage des champs" (344), which is precisely the image applied to Marguerite in 'Léo Burckart'[1]. The flower-seller is a country girl come to town, combining the attributes of the village sweetheart and the Neapolitan embroideress of Letter V. Further, there is the suggestion that her heart is warmer than Corilla's, which echoes Frantz's statement in 'Léo Burckart' that Marguerite is more warm-hearted than Diana[2].

Later, Nerval will carry the situation to its logical conclusion: in 'Les Confidences de Nicolas' and in 'Sylvie' the hero falls in love with the actress because she reminds him of his adolescent sweetheart. This is not directly suggested in 'Corilla', and Fabio, for all his wavering, maintains that it is the singer he really loves. Nevertheless, the possibility is established that the loss of the actress need not have been definitive and tragic if it was discovered that he had loved her only because, by impersonating a humble girl, she had revived the emotion of the adolescent love. This is clearly more satisfying than 'Léo Burckart', since it salvages the <u>affaire</u> with the singer who becomes, no longer a woman who

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1. "Moi, pauvre Marguerite des champs" (see above, pp.136-37).

2. 'Corilla': "ton coeur vaut mieux que le sien, peut-être" (344); Frantz to Marguerite in 'Léo Burckart', of Diana: "oh, si elle avait votre coeur".

rejected him, but a link in a chain which leads beyond her. Yet Nerval's honesty and his loyalty to the past prevent this suggestion being brought out fully. And the central fact that the hero's love is totally subjective and hence unreal, though fully explored, is not fully accepted.

One of Nerval's still-born dramatic projects, the intriguingly entitled 'La Polygamie est un cas pendable', provides a sort of epilogue to 'Corilla'[1].

"Le réveil d'un jeune seigneur en voyage dans les Pyrénées, au matin de son mariage avec une petite paysanne de l'endroit. Tout en se parant de ses habits de fête, il rappelle à son fidèle valet le souvenir de son premier amour pour une cantatrice de la ville de Gênes. Celle-ci mit à sa faveur la condition de deux ans de voyage à l'issue desquels son amoureux reviendrait lui demander sa main ... Pérégrinus plus Don Juan que Don Juan lui-même, évoque toutes ses amours de tous les coins du monde ...

Le cortège se forme: le magistrat va sceller le mariage, quand une femme, puis deux, puis une procession de femmes, plus belles et plus

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1. "Opéra-bouffon", 7 pp ms, now apparently lost. Senelier gives a copy of a short synopsis which appeared in a catalogue, and which seems to be all there is to go on (N° 324). The date is a matter for conjecture. Senelier suggests 1842 at the earliest ("dès 1842"). Peregrinus also figures in 'L'Ane d'Or' of that year. Three reasons support an earlier dating. First, it probably belongs to a period of collaboration with Dumas, since it was found in the latter's papers (it looks as though Nerval furnished the idea and the initial sketch and then sent it for elaboration to Dumas who for one reason or another did not go ahead with it), and the main period of collaboration with Dumas is the late 1830's. Second, it has close affinities with 'Corilla'. L. Cellier (136-37) dates the scenario 1853-54, but his reasoning is far from conclusive. Third, its source is an '<u>opéra-comique</u>' which Nerval saw in December 1838, 'La Perugina' (cf Peregrinus) and in which the heroine is a milk-maid who is nevertheless of sufficiently good birth to be married to a count (see J. Richer, 'Expérience et création', 219-220).

diverses à mesure, se présentent et revendiquent chacune Pérégrinus pour leur époux ... Evanouissement de la fiancée des Pyrénées ... Pérégrinus accusé de polygamie est jeté en prison. Une dernière apparition, celle de Rosalina, la prima donna de Gênes. Pérégrinus éperdu déclare qu'en fait c'est elle qu'il aima de véritable amour. - Rosalina dévoile alors sa ruse. Elle a revêtu successivement tous les costumes de toutes les femmes qui furent aimées par Pérégrinus; elle le pardonne en leur nom et en son nom, le marie à la petite paysanne et invite tous les assistants aux réjouissances".

The fascinating thing about scenarios like this one and 'La Forêt noire' is that the imaginative structure of the story emerges clearly, unobscured by the ingredients that would later be added to make it into a successful comic opera, and free of the calculating but crude contribution of Dumas. - The part of the story that concerns the prima donna is essentially another version of the Jenny Colon/Corilla situation. Fabio and Marcelli have been merged into one: Peregrinus is at once Fabio with his "c'est bien elle seule que j'aime" ("c'est elle qu'il aima de véritable amour") and Marcelli-Don Juan, making one easy conquest after another[1].

The pattern is exactly that of 'Corilla', save that it is reversed: instead of the hero falling in love with the heroine enacted by the prima donna, she enacts the women he has fallen in love with. One of these is presumably the "petite paysanne", whom he marries with her blessing.

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1. This surely reveals that the two characters represent opposite sides of the same person, two images that Nerval had of himself (see below, pp.200-204).

There is a contradiction here: how could Nerval have motivated the hero's marriage to one woman just after he has declared that it is the other he loves? The point is that this raw material has not yet been subjected to considerations of motive, and the plot as it stands, with its unresolved contradiction, is a direct reflection of the state of Nerval's imagination at this period. The hero's love for the singer is real, as Nerval's was. But even though Peregrinus loses his beloved, it is not a true loss: his love is fulfilled vicariously, since the little country girl is a facet of the singer's identity. Thus, though the scenario is artistically far behind the polished and elegant 'Corilla', in terms of Nerval's imaginative schemes it is in advance, following up what was only hinted at, clarifying what was left obscure.

On the 5th June 1842 Jenny Colon died at the age of 34. Only six months later, in December, Nerval published six of the letters he had written to her, under the title of 'Un Roman à faire'. It is as though he was playing with the idea of making the letters the basis of an epistolary novel, in the eighteenth century manner, but was reluctant to do so. Imagination again conflicts with honesty and sets up a sort of unresolved balance between life and art. On the one hand Nerval would like to give free rein to all his wishes in a fictional transposition of his experience; on the other hand the reflection that the experience was a real one holds him back. We are left with a sketch, "un roman <u>à faire</u>".

The fiction is the old one of letters found in a trunk. The letters belonged to a naval officer lost at sea on the way to Santo Domingo, "le

chevalier Dubourjet". There can be no doubt that Nerval identified himself with this character, based on one of his father's relatives; "Dubourjet" is a mixture of the real-life original and Nerval himself[1]. The letters were addressed to a famous Italian countess (from Naples, it would seem) and returned to the chevalier by her husband together with a letter announcing the lady's sudden death. Nothing in the letters, says Nerval, suggests that there would have been "un dénoûment très positif à une intrigue assez ordinaire". He toys with the exciting story that might be made up ("la ressemblance de la noble comtesse avec une pauvre ouvrière de Naples serait féconde en suppositions romanesques"). But this is suggested with humour, and he ends seriously by saying that one should not profane truth by mingling it with fiction (I, 1250).

What Nerval presents as fact corresponds in part to the circumstances of his affaire with Jenny Colon: seen in a sober light, it was no more than "une intrigue assez ordinaire" which never looked like getting very far[2]. The temptation to dramatise himself is held back by this lucid

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1. He figures in Nerval's half-imaginary family tree as "Duburgua, mort à Saint-Domingue, cousin des Laville de Lacépède", among his father's relations. According to P. Audiat this was a real person, A.P. Justin Duburgua, who came from near Agen, and was the author of an "ouvrage à la Fontenelle", 'Le Newtonianisme de l'Amitié ou Lettres philosophiques sur la Lumière et la Couleur', An XI (1803), written at the request of "la comtesse Roxane Somaglia" (P. Audiat, 78). All these details correspond to the Dubourjet of 'Un Roman à faire'. Duburgua died in 1803, not in 1808 which is the date Nerval gives for the death of his hero; but, as M. Richer points out in the Notes, 1808 is the year of Nerval's birth, which means he could fancy himself to be the reincarnation of the dead man. The "cahiers de pensées détachées, conçues dans un esprit assez misanthropique" (1249-50) found among Dubourjet's papers, might well correspond to Nerval's maxims published in 'L'Artiste' in 1844 (I, 432). Letter 255, in which there are signs of mental disturbance, is signed by Nerval "J. Duburgue".

2. The idea that the relationship was perfectly ordinary in itself, furnishing no more than the pretext for the imagination to work on, recurs in 'Petits Châteaux de Bohême (I, 99) and 'Aurélia' (I, 363).

self-awareness. Nevertheless he is dramatising himself by claiming - still as a fact about Dubourjet - that the affaire was abruptly terminated by the lady's death. Nerval's own love-story was terminated by Jenny's marriage to another man. But would not her death (which has now occurred, making publication of the letters possible), if it had taken place before anything had been decided, have given his imagination free scope - a scope which would include what is here rejected as an impossible fiction: the hero's union with a humble girl who is a double of the great lady? Fiction intrudes on what is presented as fact; dates are juggled with; and wishful thinking is held in uneasy balance by honesty and irony.

And another possibility is glimpsed: if Jenny Colon had died before the relationship had been tarnished by reality, the awkward clash between fact and fiction can be abolished, and Nerval can explore the possibility of a purely imaginary love.

P A R T T W O

LE RÊVE ET LA VIE

CHAPTER VII

LE RÊVE ET LA VIE

Up till about 1839, Nerval's work is not primarily concerned with what he calls "le monde des Esprits", the dream-world. According to R.-M. Albérès, Nerval changed suddenly and radically as a result of his attack of madness in 1841 ("que rien n'avait annoncée"); the pleasant "littérateur" turned almost overnight into a visionary with access to the significance lying "behind" appearances.[1]

Albérès' theory, of course, presents too schematic a view of Nerval's intellectual development. Jean Richer argues convincingly that Nerval's interest in occult works dates from his childhood[2]. In the 1828 preface to 'Faust', he is eagerly in sympathy with the hero's thirst for divine revelation[3]. And that he was interested as early as 1831 in the phenomenon of "l'épanchement du songe dans la vie réelle" (I, 367) is suggested by his translation of a passage from Hoffmann's 'Aventures de la nuit de Saint-Sylvestre' which strikingly prefigures 'Aurélia'[4]. There is evidence, too, that Nerval suffered from occasional mental derangement long before the first serious attack of 1841[5]. The mythical ancestry traced in his imaginary family-tree is said to be based on "renseignements

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1. R.-M. Albérès, e.g. 15 and 35.

2. J. Richer, 'Expérience et création', 19, 385 f, etc. L. Cellier and others have warned us not to take Albérès too literally (eg. Cellier, 'Gérard de Nerval', 77-79).

3. 'Faust', Gibert, 9. Similarly, in 'Poésies allemandes' (1830) Nerval's introduction is in sympathy with the German Romantic striving to break through the limitations of the human condition to infinity and perfection, whilst recognising that such aspirations must always fail.

4. See above p. 103 Note 2.

5. See above pp. 120-21 and Letter 22: "Je me souviendrai des fièvres de la Belgique".

pris à Francfort le plus récemment vers 1822"[1]. Figures like Charles VI in 'Le Prince des sots' (1833-34?) and Raoul Spifame in 'Le Roi de Bicêtre' (1839) exemplify the belief that madness is a form of wisdom. There are undercurrents in works of the 1830's which show that Nerval is not far from avowing his interest, and perhaps faith, in the supernatural. For example, the scene in 'Piquillo' (1836) when Mendoce recognises Sylvia could be connected with 'Fantaisie' (1832). In this case the explanation would be that he had loved her in a previous existence. Similarly, Nerval could have fallen in love with Jenny Colon because his soul remembered her from another life, and indeed Gautier's portrait of her establishes two points of resemblance with the "Dame à sa haute fenêtre" of the poem: Jenny, too, was a dark-eyed blond; and Gautier imagines her as being perfectly suited to a Louis XIII setting (A. Marie, 94-95). Further, in 'L'Alchimiste' (1836), Fasio tells La Maddelena (who corresponds in Nerval's imagination to Jenny) that she is an angel who has taken human form - so that his soul, which is also of divine origin, recognises her higher nature ('L'Alchimiste', 389). Finally, 'Deux Statues brabançonnes' (1836, II, 899) shows Nerval's emotion at the idea of the Virgin as an eternal type of beauty.

But these are latent suggestions, never developed. Mendoce recognises Sylvia simply because he has met her before, and Fasio's approach to La Maddelena may be purely conventional flattery[2]. In the 1828 preface to 'Faust' Nerval's preference is solidly on the side of the

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1. J. Richer, 'Expérience et création', 33.

2. A minor character comments: "tout ceci n'est que galanterie" ('L'Alchimiste', 395).

ordinary and accessible Marguerite[1]. He translated only the part of 'Les Aventures de la nuit de Saint-Sylvestre' which relates the hero's meeting with his childhood sweetheart Julia, leaving out the passages dealing with her otherworldly counterpart, Giulietta. M. Richer shows that the imaginary family tree was composed in 1841[2]. Although Nerval identifies himself with Charles VI and Raoul Spifame, the degree of identification will be much greater in a work like 'Le Calife Hakem' (1847). Charles VI is eclipsed by his more dashing but sane brother, and Raoul Spifame is presented fairly unequivocally as a poor lunatic. In none of the works of the 1830's studied in Part One is any importance attached to the idea of loving a woman whose true domain is the dream-world. They are concerned primarily with human relations in the real world.

We may, however, accept a modified version of Albérès' theory. Nerval did not undergo a sudden intellectual change of life at the age of 33. But it is only after the visionary experience of 1841 that the idea of a more significant world lying behind appearances takes powerful hold over his imagination, so that fictional rearrangements of his life give way partly to transcendental extensions of it. Nerval's visions left him with a yearning faith in the spirit-realm where, he felt, his true destiny, his eternal destiny, would be enacted.

The newly formulated convictions can be established by correlating two vitally important texts of 1840-41, the preface to 'Faust' II, and the first eight chapters of 'Aurélia', which I shall refer to as 'Aurélia'

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1. See Chapter III and 'Faust', Gibert, 10.
2. J. Richer, 'Expérience et création', 40.

(1841), since they are based on material written at this time[1]. The two texts show such striking similarities in the description of dream-phenomena that it is impossible to know whether Nerval was bringing his own experience to bear in his interpretation of 'Faust', or whether his dreams (or at any rate his account of them) were influenced by his reading. It probably works both ways. Nerval's ideas about contact with the other world, strengthened by the sense of imminent revelation which preceded his attack, were crystallised by his work on 'Faust'. The emotion which one senses in the solemn, spacious rhythms of the preface, is the excitement of self-discovery. Nerval finds in Goethe what Baudelaire was to find in Poe: vague ideas of his own clearly formulated, so that they stand out suddenly with a sharp validity.

Faust's genius enables him to break down the barrier between the visible and invisible worlds. In regions or planets beyond time and space, the ghostlike forms of everything that has ever existed are preserved, so that the whole of past time, legend and history, exists concurrently with the present. Faust is able to draw the ghosts of Paris and Helen into the present, to conjure them up and make them visible to the eyes of flesh-and-blood. Here time and eternity mingle, for Faust, a man belonging to time, falls in love with Helen. He can live both in the world and in the world beyond, for it is possible to free oneself from terrestrial ties either in dreams, by magnetism or by ascetic contemplation.

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1. See Appendix "A". I shall refer, not only to the final version, but to the 1841 manuscripts published by Jean Richer (see 'Expérience et création').

The next stage is for Faust to penetrate into the world of spirit, take the place of Menelaus, and re-enact the legendary past. Faust can transcend the limits of the past just as he has transcended those of the present. The clock of history having been set back, the souls of Faust and Helen pass "avec la rapidité du rêve" from one historical cycle to the next. The centuries pass like hours as they move from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. In this race through past time Menelaus cannot compete: as an "individualité passagère" he may not live beyond his own age. Nerval clearly considers that he himself has had similar experiences: the feeling that one is repeating actions that one has already performed, which, Nerval emphasises, occurs in waking life as well as in dreams, may mean that one is re-enacting the events of a previous existence.

Nerval identifies himself with Faust when he says "ce sera là presque la descente d'Orphée", since for him his own visions were also a descent into the other world[1]. Like Faust, he quits his earthly bonds and, by magnetic influence, visits a region where the forms of the beloved dead are preserved in a synchronism of all time[2]. As with Faust, his dream-experience and his waking life interpenetrate[3]. It is true that he is not able, as Faust is, to bring the dream-figure of the beloved back into the material world; but his pictorial representation of her[4] may be seen as an attempt to do this, and he does retain from his experience the

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1. 'Faust', Gibert, 20; 'Aurélia', I, 418 etc.
2. Cf the same idea in a passage published in June, 1840 (II, 28).
3. Compare 'Faust', Gibert, 19 and 'Aurélia', 367 & 369.
4. I, 379.

conviction that the spirits of those he loves, friends and relations, exist eternally in the land beyond death where he may in the end be re-united with them[1]. Further, he insists that his visions, so far from being a temporary aberration, formed part of the continuous experience of his essential self: "je suis toujours et j'ai toujours été le même"[2]. Nerval's own penetration into the other world is basically similar to the account he gives of Faust's.

Thus after 1840 Nerval feels that his true destiny transcends the limits of his life as an individual. The characteristic actions of this destiny are repeated, not only in privileged stretches of personal experience, but also in the cyclical patterns of history, so that any historical or legendary hero may perform them.

The pattern, which will emerge ever more strongly, is as follows: The struggles of history reflect a cosmic conflict in which two races engage in fratricidal strife. Originally they were one race, united in peaceful harmony under the influence of the Mother-Goddess (I, 380). Nerval's identity is split between a good self loyal to the Mother and recognised as a member of her family/race, and a bad self who, from a failure to recognise his true origins, fights on the side of the hostile race. The good self is received into the family by a loving father-figure and may be given the prospect of marrying a girl who is a younger version of the mother. The bad self is threatened with exclusion or imprisonment while his double usurps his place, or the father-figure

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1. I, 376 & Letter 86.
2. See Letters 85 <u>bis</u> and 86.

rejects and excludes him. The family paradise represents the restoration of Nerval's childhood innocence and happiness, and the golden age of primaeval harmony. This may occur on the supernatural plane, by his entry into the world of spirit, or on the natural plane, through the orphan's discovery of his parentage.

It is significant that Nerval, in all his contemporary accounts of the events of 1840, says, not that he met Jenny in Brussels, but that he saw her. This presumably means that he saw her acting, and the whole trend of the 'Aurélia' manuscripts suggests that, even before the onset of his madness, he was assimilating Jenny to a composite figure of his dreams. One of the parts she played was that of Marguerite de Valois, daughter of Catherine de Médicis, in 'Les Huguenots'[1]. He also saw her at a concert with the Queen of the Belgians (Louise d'Orléans). Jenny, too, was like a queen ("la reine du chant"), and both women "étaient coiffées de même et portaient à leur nuque, derrière leurs cheveux tressés, la résille d'or de Médicis"[2]. Now, if one looks at some of the 'Autres Chimères' that were probably written about this time, it seems likely that in the somewhat vague systems of identification and affiliation on which these are based, the Bourbon-Orléans line of Louis-Philippe is seen as a revival of the Valois-Orléans line to which Marguerite de Valois belonged. It is

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1. See J. Richer's list of Jenny Colon's roles in Brussels, 'Expérience et création', 607 ff.

2. 'Expérience et création', 421.

probable that Nerval was indeed a supporter of the July Monarchy[1], and regarded the Orléans family as a reincarnation of the beloved Valois whose position had been usurped by the absolutism of the Bourbons[2]. Thus Jenny Colon is assimilated to Louise d'Orléans, a member of the "good" family, who contracted a political marriage with a stranger, Léopold I, just as Marguerite de Valois, also belonging to the "good" family, married the apostate Henri IV (founder of the rival dynasty) and was repudiated by him. Jenny will also be identified with the Queen of Sheba, a member of the "divine family" of Nerval's vision ('Aurélia' (1841), 'Expérience et création', 427) who, at any rate in Nerval's later version of her story, is nearly trapped into a political marriage with the leader of a hostile race[3]. Thus in the dream-world as in real life, he may lose Jenny

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1. If G. Rouger is right in supposing that he contributed to the Government review 'Le Carrousel' in 1836. The article entitled 'De l'aristocratie en France' is probably by Nerval: the contemporary recreation of successive historical periods to which it refers recalls the preface to 'Faust', and the obvious fascination with the idea of re-enacting a scene from one of Nerval's favourite periods, so that the present looks like a revival or repetition of the past, suggests the link between the Valois line and the July Monarchy: "vous avez assisté peut-être à cette fête des Tuileries, où toute la cour réunie des Stuart et des Médicis sembla se réveiller, par un enchantement, d'un sommeil de trois siècles" (G. Rouger, 'Gérard de Nerval et Louis-Philippe').

2. See in particular 'A Hélène de Mecklembourg' (I, 40), in which Nerval appears to be celebrating the marriage of Louis-Philippe's eldest son because it will provide an heir to the dynasty which will carry on the Médicis tradition, and 'A Louise d'Or., Reine' (I, 42). Jean Richer's interpretation seems to lay too much emphasis on Nerval's loyalty to the Napoleonic line, though it is clear that these sonnets are, in a confused way, Bonapartist <u>as well as</u> Orleanist (see 'Expérience et création', chapter ii).

3. Nerval states in 'Petits Châteaux de Bohême' that he planned to write an opera in which the singer would take the part of the Queen of Sheba, thus realising the radiant figure of his dreams (I, 95). See also 'Expérience et création', 427 and 'L'Histoire de la Reine du matin', II, 509. Another case is Helen rescued by her true soul-mate (Faust) from union with a limited individual who is not worthy of her.

to the wrong man. One begins to see how his mixed attitude to friends who had been more successful in love than himself (Chapter II), and who might therefore be thought of as having taken illegitimate possession of women who belonged in a more real sense to Nerval, is being transposed to the visionary plane.

In 'Aurélia' (1841) Nerval interprets his visions as a privileged visit to the eternal region where his true family are united in a timeless present. The reunion is celebrated by a banquet. He is welcomed and initiated by an uncle whose features resemble his own (I, 371), corresponding to Antoine Boucher, the maternal great-uncle who looked after him during the first years of his life and whom Nerval clearly regards as a spiritual father. In 'Aurélia' (1841) this father-figure is full of love, but he does warn Nerval that there are dangers and difficulties in the path of complete union with the family (372), and in literary transpositions of the vision he will reveal a hostile side. At the centre of the family, and presiding at the banquet[1], is a radiant female figure who is at once the Queen of Sheba (counterpart of Jenny Colon), the Mother-Goddess of the human race[2], and a person corresponding vaguely to Nerval's mother. These visions are idealised memories of his early childhood, and it is probable that Eugénie, his mother's sister, the aunt who helped to bring him up, stands for his lost mother.

But the characteristic of the dream-figures is that they are not differentiated or individualised, but belong to a close-knit group. The

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1. At the side of Solomon, who is here a benevolent figure, though later he will become hostile.

2. 'Expérience et création', 431-32 (and I, 422-23).

younger ones, representing the village girls he had known as a lad "inspiraient toutes une sorte d'amour sans préférence et sans désir, résumant tous les enivrements des passions vagues de la jeunesse" (375). Later, he finds himself dressed as a little boy with "trois femmes ... (qui) représentaient, sans leur ressembler absolument, des parentes et des amies de ma jeunesse" (376). It is as though they share a single composite identity, their features constantly shifting and passing from one to another. When the eldest, the mother-figure, speaks to him in a voice which thrills him with a direct remembrance of infancy, he feels shy and happy, transformed in a moment into the little boy he once was (377)[1]. Her apotheosis, in which her forms are absorbed into the forms of nature, leaves the universe dark and desolate.

The family Nerval seeks is at once his own family, remembered from early childhood, and the chosen race, royal and divine, existing in and beyond time, to which he truly belongs. At the family banquet he recognises "les traits divins de ma famille"; but at the same time he is more than half convinced that he has been transported to his "native" village "dans la maison de mon vieil oncle, qui avait été si bon pour moi" ('Expérience', 427-28). The twin title given to the dreams of 'Aurélia' (1841) is 'Souvenirs d'enfance - Memorabilia': these are both actual memories and memories of an existence out of time (I, 1227). The "mission artistique et archéologique" with which Nerval hoped to be entrusted in 1841 was to have taken him back to his own family origins

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1. Cf Letter 313 on the power of "des voix de femme d'un timbre délicieux" to bring back memories of childhood.

and, through these, to the historical affiliations of the chosen race (Letter 85). His imagination seeks to unify the different elements of his experience and his speculation into a single meaningful pattern. Thus Jenny Colon is identified with the historical incarnations of the Queen (Marguerite de Valois, Louise d'Orléans) and with the Mother of the mythical family, the Queen of Sheba. But she is also assimilated to the dimly remembered figures of childhood, to the composite mother-figure whose identity shades off into the little village girls whom Nerval really knew and might really have married. The works based on the dream-experience of 1841 will ratify the synthesis of the actress-figure and the Marguerite-figure adumbrated in 'Corilla'.

The mystical reunion of 'Aurélia' (1841) does not take the form of any specific situation: he is simply welcomed as belonging to the family. He is at once a child cherished by its mother and an adolescent surrounded by young girls (sisters or cousins or aunts) who partake of a common identity stemming from the mother. We shall see how, when he transposes the dream into literary works, this generalised experience will be expressed in the form of particular conventional situations (such as marrying a girl cousin who resembles the mother)[1].

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[1] The family banquet may perhaps be taken as the centre of what Georges Poulet calls Nerval's "cercle onirique": "l'instant rêvé ou vécu n'est complet que s'il ouvre à la richesse qui le presse, que si, dans le point central qui le constitue, viennent se fondre toutes ensemble, comme un orage qui s'abat au centre de sa giration, des années de rêves, de projets, d'angoisses, <u>mêlées</u> et <u>contractées</u> dans un seul moment". For Poulet, the central experience tends to be destroyed either by expansion and dispersion, or by turning inwards and consuming itself. Salvation lies in communication with another person ('Nerval et le cercle onirique', 'Cahiers du Sud', October 1955.)

But the visions of 1841 are not exclusively happy ones. When Nerval was found at midnight marching along a street in Montmartre scattering his clothes around him and chanting the joyful hymn which celebrated his imminent departure for the other world, he was arrested and taken to the police station. Here he had the experience of meeting the Double. This was a man incarcerated at the same time as Nerval, who did not know his own name, whose face Nerval never saw clearly, and who was of the same height as himself. When the other man speaks, it is as though the voice were reverberating in Nerval's own chest. He has the hallucination that two friends come to bail him out but, though they identify him correctly, it is the other man who leaves with them, and Nerval's despairing protests are so noisy that he is shut up in a cell. In the visions, this other self, having thus usurped his rightful place and left him in captivity, appears with arms in his hands and tries to prevent Nerval's admission to the family paradise. At other times, though, he is loving and fraternal (373)[1].

That this possible usurpation by the other self is of primary importance in Nerval's imagination will be seen by the frequency with which it recurs. We have seen how the Queen, whether she be a Valois, an Orléans or a Sabean, may marry the "wrong" man and thus be separated from the man she should be bound to by blood and destiny. So, during his attacks, Nerval felt that his place had been usurped. In 1854 he wrote under his portrait, an idealised engraving: "Je suis l'autre", meaning that his true self was the tortured and prematurely aged man shown in a more

[1] See 'Aurélia', chapters iv and v, and mss.

realistic engraving based on the photographs of Nadar, taken during a spell of madness. He writes to George Bell, presumably referring to the realistic portrait: "Dites partout que c'est mon portrait ressemblant, mais posthume, - ou bien encore que Mercure avait pris les traits de Sosie et posé à ma place" (Letter 311), and asks Dr. Blanche to explain to the ladies at the Passy clinic that "l'être pensif qu'elles ont vu se traîner, inquiet et morose, dans le salon ... n'était pas moi-même assurément ... je renie le sycophante qui m'avait pris mon nom[1] et peut-être mon visage" (Letter 312). On the one hand he insists that the Nerval of Nadar's portrait is now dead; the morose, dishevelled figure broken by depression was not really himself. But on the other hand he states simply that the true self is in the haunted mistrustful face of the photographs. The feelings for the other self can range from the deepest fraternal affection to murderous hatred. But perhaps the most constant factor is the fear of usurpation, the dread that the double will take his rightful place, be accepted by his friends, enjoy his privileges, whilst he is shut up as a raving madman for claiming to be himself. As manic confidence waxes and wanes, Nerval identifies himself either with the good or the bad ego[2].

There is an added dimension. The purest dreams of the visionary are continued in the vulgar delusions of the madman. Nerval could easily see himself as an orphan. He never knew his mother, and after the retreat

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1. The man arrested at the same time as Nerval had no name - because he was trying to usurp Nerval's ...

2. Cf J.-P. Richard: "entre les deux aspects de sa personne, Gérard reste incertain. Il se sent double, mais il ne sait jamais si le vrai moi, le bon à tous les sens du mot, c'est lui, ou si c'est l'autre" ('Géographie magique de Nerval', 61).

from Moscow his father was presumed dead. Perhaps the stern officer who suddenly appeared when he was seven years old to take him away from a home where he had been happy in order to teach him "ce qu'on appelait mes devoirs"[1], the unsympathetic disciplinarian who had consistently opposed his most cherished ambitions, this man who kept him from his birthright by withholding the portion of his mother's inheritance which was his due, - perhaps he was also depriving Nerval of his birthright in a more essential sense? There is clear evidence that Nerval did, in fact, make this assumption in his mad moments (though it is equally clear that he also loved and respected his father): he thought he was the son of Napoleon's brother Joseph who had loved his mother at Danzig[2]. Thus, parallel to the theme of the usurping other self, there will be the theme of the hostile half-brothers, reflecting the divided loyalties imposed on Nerval by his delusion. There is the successful brother who is recognised by his true father and may marry a cousin (?) who resembles his mother; and the "wrong" brother, who, out of loyalty to his putative father, fights

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1. This is how Nerval saw it near the end of his life ('Promenades et souvenire', 159).

2. This is reported by Alexandre Weill: 'Gérard de Nerval, souvenirs intimes'. As the Pléiade editors point out, the origin of the idea is probably the fact that Nerval wrote a play for Joseph Colonna, Count Walewski, the natural son of Napoleon and a Polish lady. Walewski was born the year Nerval's mother died in Poland. Being used as a ghost-writer could be seen as a sort of usurpation of identity (see Letter 36 and Note 2; Letter II, Note 8; 'Almanach cabalistique', II, 1224-25; and 'Aurélia', I, 404: "ma mémoire que je croyais être celle de Napoléon"). Jean Richer thinks that Nerval also identified himself with Napoleon's legitimate son, the Duke of Reichstadt ('Expérience et création, chapter ii). But the most frequent claim, deriving from these scarcely formulated systems of identification, was that he was the son of Joseph Bonaparte, who appears in the imaginary family-tree as "seigneur ou propriétaire de Mortefontaine" ('Expérience', 61). See also O.C. VIII, 208 and Letter 311, Note 10.

against his true family and is thus involved in combat with his real brother or father.

There are two tendencies here, parallel but distinct. If the mystical family reunion of 'Aurélia' (1841) is a true picture of Nerval's ultimate destiny, then his actual life is a time of exile among the insubstantial shadows of this world. But if the delusion about being a noble bastard were to prove founded, he could be reunited with his true family in actual fact. In this way the dreams of 1841 could be transferred to the domain of normal, waking experience. Now, in Nerval's published writings he never makes the claim that he is a noble bastard. The idea is only avowed privately. However, the fantasy does find frequent expression in fictional situations, in the second life constituted by the literary works.

It appears as early as 1833-34, the probable date of his unpublished historical novel, 'Le Prince des Sots'[1], an overcrowded and overwritten work in which one can detect the beginnings of some of Nerval's major themes. That of the "frères ennemis" occurs in two generations. Charles VI is the ineffectual dreamer: his madness may be almost indistinguishable from wisdom, but it makes him unfit to rule, and his old-fashioned belief in fidelity is not enough to prevent his voluptuous wife from falling in love with his brother, Louis d'Orléans. The lovers imprison the king in his own palace and Louis takes his place. Louis has two illegitimate sons, Richard and Jacob. Richard is loyal to his putative father, Aubert, a visionary whose early mystical experience may well be based on Nerval's

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[1] O.C. VI.

own (67-68), but who is also an uncouth Vulcan-figure, the type of the ugly, vengeful cuckold. Certain features of his description read like a caricature of Nerval's own father[1]. Richard avenges Aubert by killing Louis, his real father. He instinctively hates his half-brother Jacob (they are doubles, since both exactly resemble their father) and kills him too. When he realises what he has done, he commits suicide by leaping out of a window, and accidentally kills his mother who is passing underneath! Beneath the melodrama, one can see how this reflects Nerval's imaginative scheme. Richard is the "bad" brother, loyal to a twisted, vengeful line, fighting the privileged race to which he really belongs.

Jacob on the other hand is the "good" brother, instinctively aristocratic, recognising his true father, recognised and protected by him. His mother is dead (like Nerval's), but at the age of fifteen he has an experience in which Nerval is obviously closely implicated, when his sensuality is aroused in the gallery of nude portraits of the women his father has seduced. They seem to come alive before his eyes, and the climax of the scene comes when he recognises the portrait of his own mother. Nerval's memory of his dead mother is similarly connected with a portrait (see Introduction), and this scene has the same underlying pattern as the visions of 'Aurélia' (1841): a generalised emotion aroused by a group of feminine figures focusses on the one representing the mother.

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[1] He is a rough, obstinate soldier (O.C. VI, 34), of Meridional stock like Dr. Labrunie (cf O.C. VI, 157 & I, 165). We must not of course take this as a portrait of Nerval's father, for it is exaggerated to the point of being grotesque. But, as Norma Rinsler has suggested, the Vulcan-figure, threatening yet ridiculous, with his limp, is one of Nerval's images of his father. See 'Horus' and the end of 'Octavie'.

An incomplete scenario, 'Le Magnétiseur', written in 1840[1], gives another version of the "frères ennemis" story. There are two half-brothers, sons of Count Aldini: Médard (illegitimate) and Maurice (legitimate). Both are in love with Aurélie. Maurice's claim is well-founded, since she returns his love. But Médard's passion is a forbidden one, first because he is a runaway monk, and second because it will transpire that Aurélie is his half-sister, though she is not related to Maurice[2]. In any case, Aurélie is indifferent to him, and he is only able to exert an influence over her by magnetism[3]. He has learned his magical powers from his putative father and uses them, Faust-like, to impress the ducal court. As in 'Faust', there is a conjuration scene: Médard brings to life a tapestry representing a pastoral scene from an earlier age. There is a suggestion that he feels out of place in the aristocratic society of the court, although (like Nerval at the Embassy in Vienna?) he has quickly adapted himself to its manners. The fact is that he is in a false position: he had joined the French army with the specific intention, which has apparently been carried out, of killing Maurice, a German

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1. 'Nouvelles et fantaisies', Champion, 1928, xvii-xix. Nerval worked on it in February 1840, though the project dates from earlier (Letter 55). It derives partly from Hoffmann's 'Der Magnetiseur', translated into French in 1836, and has details from his 'Der unheimliche Gast', translated in 1829 as 'Le Spectre fiancé' (see E. Teichmann and J.-F.-A. Ricci). But the names of the main protagonists, the general atmosphere, certain situations and, loosely, the whole pattern of relationships, are from 'Die Elixiere des Teufels'.

2. In Nerval's scheme of things, this in one sense makes the relationship a "legitimate" one, since what is sought is, at the deepest level, union with his own family. Hence the theme of love between brother and sister (see above, p. 17).

3. In the preface to 'Faust' and in 'Aurélia', magnetism is a means of reaching the other world.

colonel, and is trying to usurp his rightful place. However, it turns out that Maurice has not been killed: he was saved by his father. He will marry Aurélie and Médard is sent back to the monastery (a prison?).

The hero in this story is the wrong brother. He attempts to usurp Maurice's rights first by fighting on the side of the enemy race and trying to kill him, and then by the use of magic. It is significant that here, as in 'Le Prince des Sots', visionary powers are attributed to the "wicked" side of the family. Although Médard's putative father almost certainly corresponds to Nerval's beloved uncle Antoine Boucher, whose books had given his own mind its mystical bent[1], magic here is shown as the forbidden means of obtaining another's birthright. Nerval notes that he has not been able to give the scene of the enchanted tapestry any bearing on the main action - unlike the parallel scene in 'La Forêt noire' where a scene from the family past enacted before the hero's eyes makes him realise in a flash that he is a member of the family. Médard, we may infer, is unable to do this precisely because the mystical side of Nerval's longing to be restored to his true family is here presented as deceitful and forbidden. Maurice triumphs because he is in fact the legitimate son of Count Aldini and is recognised by his father. Nerval is giving preference to the natural expression of his wishes; the supernatural claims, the product of illusionism, are forbidden.

This indeed is the sense of the way Nerval, in 'Le Magnétiseur' is shaping his source-material. The chief source is Hoffmann's gothic novel, 'Die Elixiere des Teufels', with which we may assume Nerval to have been familiar, since he considered translating it, though he never got beyond a

1. 'La Bibliothèque de mon oncle' (II, 937).

couple of sample passages[1]. This is the story of the conflict between sacred and profane love, the Saint and Venus, which continues in a family from one generation to the next. There are two half-brothers, Medardus (good) and Viktorin (evil), who are doubles. The evil self is possessed by an overpowering desire to violate and kill the heroine, Aurelie, and when this is consummated (and therefore exorcised), the good self, Medardus, can enjoy spiritual union with Aurelie's heavenly counterpart, Saint Rosalia. The idea of a continuous family destiny, in which each generation re-enacts what is essentially the same dramatic conflict until its final resolution[2], is a key to Nerval's mystic system, and appears in works as disparate as 'Aurélia' and 'Le Marquis de Fayolle'. And, especially after 1852, Nerval's ideal dream-figure will assume the double aspect of saint and sorceress (see Chapter XIV). But the point to be made here is that in 'Le Magnétiseur' Nerval has not followed his original in giving the final victory to a supernatural love beyond the bounds of flesh. This is partly because he has in mind a potential audience which is more prosaic than himself. But it is also because, in the complex of works based on the themes of the noble bastard and "les frères ennemis", Nerval is interested in the solution which does not have recourse to the supernatural: the conventional recognition of the hero.

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1. 'Nouvelles et Fantaisies', Champion, 1928. There seems to be no justification for Senelier's classification of the text under apocrypha rather than translations. In any case, his description of it as "un résumé du début" (n°. 1235) is incorrect, since the text consists of translations of two separate passages: Hoffmann, 'Die Elixiere des Teufels', 13-14 & 27-29.

2. Compare the theme of the family destiny in Greek tragedy. The influence of this novel on Nerval has been explored by F. Constans: (see next page)

(Footnote 2. continued
from previous page):

'Artémis ou les Fleurs du désespoir' (Senelier gives two references to this, one of them imaginary: Nos. 1,193 & 1,194). Speculation leads perilously close, at times, to the "vie romancée": "Imaginons-le à Sainte-Gudule, à la fois frémissant d'émotion" etc. The link that Constans establishes between Sainte Gudule and Rosalie is based partly on the erroneous statement that Egmont's translation of the 'Contes fantastiques' of Hoffmann came out in 1840; actually, the date was 1836 - the 1840 edition was an "édition maquillée" (see E. Teichmann, p. 254, or A. Marie, p. 371). And surely M. Constans goes too far when he says that Nerval imagined the resemblance of a Neapolitan embroideress to Jenny Colon as a result of reading 'Les Elixirs', since his original version of the incident does not even mention the statuette of Saint Rosalia which is Constans' evidence for linking the encounter with Hoffmann's novel ... It seems much more probable that the early version is a fairly straightforward account of a real event to which literary and imaginary elements accrue later. Another link in M. Constans' chain of reasoning is this: "En rapprochant son nom (Sainte Rosalie) de celui de Circé sur le carnet du voyage il semblait ... vouloir opposer la sainte à la magicienne et l'image du remords au souvenir de la faute". This is trebly suspect. (1) The assumption that the Circé of the 'Carnet du Voyage en Orient' is the same as the Neapolitan woman is based on pretty slender evidence (Constans is following N. Popa: see critical edition of Filles du Feu, II, 42). (2) in any case, the reading "Circé" is seriously in doubt, since both M. Pierre Martino and the Pléiade editors read "Amours de Paris. Rosalie", and not "Amours de Circé. Rosalie". (3) Most serious of all, it would seem that M. Constans quotes certain key phrases from the 'Carnet' in the wrong order, which is extremely misleading. He quotes as follows: "Amours laissées dans un tombeau ..., Amour de Circé, Rosalie... Idées sur les nombres ... Poursuivre les mêmes traits dans des femmes diverses. Amoureux d'un type éternel. La fatalité". This is in order to show that Nerval "a visiblement conçu Sainte Rosalie, à l'instar du moine d'Hoffmann, comme le symbole sacré de son amour, l'expression céleste de la femme idéale dont il poursuit les traits en diverses incarnations terrestres". If Nerval had written the phrases quoted by Constans consecutively and in the order he quotes them, we might be able to consider his theory. But the phrases occur in the Pléiade edition as follows: "Nuit de Vienne". (N.B.) "/Poursuivre les mêmes traits dans des femmes diverses. Amoureux d'un type éternel. La fatalité. L'homme du Caire ..." (II, 706); "Amours laissés (sic) dans un tombeau. Elle. Je l'avais fuie, je l'avais perdue. Je l'avais faite grande. Italie. Allemagne. Flandre. Vaisseau d'Orient. / Amours de Paris. Rosalie. / Proserp(ine). / Nuits de Vienne. Peregrinus. (Massica). / A Vienne ne l'ai-je pas revue dans l'une des filles de l'Archid(uc). (Déplacer). La femme courant les Sperls. Bruxelles. Le portrait. Les lettres. / Idées sur les nombres..." (II, 718). The notions incorporated in the key phrases quoted by Constans have clearly much wider and more complex associations than his judiciously selected and arranged presentation of them would suggest. - Having made these points, it is only fair to add that M. Constans' initial discovery of the vital importance of 'Les Elixirs du Diable' is a valuable one.

And yet it is often with the unsuccessful brother that Nerval seems to identify himself most closely. This was true of 'Le Magnétiseur', and it is also true of 'Emilie' (1839)[1]. This was a work of collaboration and the imaginative structure is less stark than in the untreated scenarios. The hero, Desroches, an orphan and a professional soldier in the French army, fights on the "wrong" side: his unreasonable guilt at having killed a Prussian sergeant who was not actually attacking him appears as a premonition when it is revealed that the sergeant was the father of Desroches' prospective bride, Emilie. The revelation takes the form of a re-enactment of the past: Emilie's brother Wilhelm - he and Desroches are described as "frères ennemis" (340-41) - having discovered that his intending brother-in-law is his father's "murderer", asks to be taken to the scene of the crime. He then flings back his cloak to reveal his father's uniform, complete with sabre-cut, and challenges Desroches to a renewal of the combat. Desroches refuses, and there is partial reconciliation. Finally Desroches expiates his guilt by a sort of legitimised suicide, attacking the Prussian ranks singlehanded until he is inevitably killed.

As in 'Le Magnétiseur', the Germans represent the "good" race. There is evidence that Nerval considered himself as being descended, through his mother, from the Franks[2], and it is frequently across the Rhine that the French (or apparently French) hero finds his true family. Desroches

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1. Published in 'Les Filles du feu', Champion. Although the story is the fruit of collaboration, the main responsibility in it would seem to be Nerval's (see Senelier, N°s 1,251 & 1,257). J. Gaulmier has a good case for restoring it to 'Les Filles du feu' (Gaulmier, 110-113).

2. See below, p. 282.

discovers his affiliation too late. He fights those he should love: we note that, since he is an orphan of unknown origin, it is possible that he is related to his fiancée's family. Wilhelm, on the other hand, is loyal to the "good" race. When his village, by a change of frontier, is transferred to French territory, he avoids the very danger into which Desroches has fallen by pretending to be short-sighted (like Nerval) so that he will not be called up.

The fears and longings which shape the plot of these works derive essentially from Nerval's visionary scheme of things. In particular, the visions of 1841 had seemed to him like a vivid re-living or re-enactment of the past. Hence the scene where a capital event from the past is tangibly recreated will have a central place in the works which seek to give an acceptable literary form to the visionary experience. And this is not simply because Nerval wanted to accommodate his private vision to public taste. It is also because he felt that the events of real life had significance precisely when the dream-world came as it were to the surface, producing a series of actions whose true significance was that they formed part of the continuous dream-destiny. Nerval's dearest wish was that life and dream should coincide. Dream, so far from being an escape from a dreary reality, finds a true extension in reality itself. Hence in works like 'Le Magnétiseur' and 'Emilie' we have fictional situations in which the hero's normal daily actions are a version of Nerval's deepest visionary experience.

This is true not only of fictional parallels, but also of re-interpretations of his own past. For 'Un Roman à faire' (1842), Nerval

entirely re-shaped the fifth 'Lettre à Jenny Colon' which describes the Neapolitan encounter with a working-woman resembling the actress. In the original account, given to Jenny herself, the Neapolitan woman is just an impoverished reflection of the actress, and the night spend with her is no more than a shabby simulacrum of possession, which leaves a taste of hopeless remorse. But in the new version, written after the attack of 1841, in which Jenny had appeared to him in his dreams as an Oriental Queen, and after Jenny's death which to Nerval was also an entrance into the world of spirit, the embroideress is depicted as a mysterious creature who seems to be in touch with the occult world, and he claims that she is Jenny Colon herself, "descendue à moi par enchantement" (I, 1259). The evening is described as "un rêve, où seule vous avez régné" (I, 1260).

The Neapolitan adventure appears retrospectively as a privileged experience in which the typical pattern of the dream had been dimly reproduced in a situation that had actually occurred. Nerval here is the "good" self, although in a sense he is an intruder, since the woman's lover is expected to arrive in the morning and, as a Swiss Guard, he is likely to be armed and threatening[1]. But this is a background threat, and Nerval is absorbed in the enumeration of details which show that the woman is an incarnation of the dream-figure. She speaks an unknown Oriental language and dresses up like a Queen, thus enacting something approximating to the role of the Queen of Sheba, Jenny Colon's dream-counterpart. She has a child whose cradle is apparently watched over by an image of Saint Rosalia. Now, Saint Rosalia is the celestial mirror-

[1] For C. Mauron, this military figure once again represents Nerval's father.

image of Jenny Colon-Queen of Sheba[1], just as she was the heavenly counterpart of Aurelie in 'Die Elixiere des Teufels'. The child cherished by its mother is like Nerval in the dream of 1841 when he feels himself transformed into a little boy by the voice warm with maternal love (I, 377). The whole scene is like the enactment of a tableau from the dream-life. And, as in 'Aurélia' (1841), the younger woman is accompanied by her mother. The relationship is chaste (unlike the original version), and the emphasis is not on physical possession of an individual, but on a sort of generalised, undefined communion.

We now see how closely 'Emilie' reflected Nerval's private experience, for the heroine, like the Neapolitan woman, "avait pour occupation de broder des ornements ... pour les églises" and was accompanied by an older, protective woman. Although the point is not specified in 'Emilie' or the 1842 version of Letter V, we may guess that, as in 'Aurélia' (1841), the younger woman is another version of the mother-figure.

The mother also represents the figure of death. In the manuscript of 'Aurélia' (1841) Nerval writes: "une femme vêtue de noir apparaissait devant mon lit et il me semblait qu'elle avait les yeux caves ... Cette femme était pour moi le spectre de ma mère, morte en Silésie"[2]. This recalls the woman he had seen standing in a doorway as he walked up the Rue Notre-Dame-de-Lorette at midnight, (who was almost certainly a prostitute): "une femme encore jeune dont l'aspect me frappa de surprise. Elle avait la figure blême et les yeux caves; je me dis: 'C'est la Mort' "[3].

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1. See 'Aurélia', I, 422.
2. 'Expérience et création', 425.
3. 'Expérience et création', 422.

The pattern adumbrated in the fifth 'Lettre à Jenny Colon'[1] is here more strongly established, though Nerval does not finalise it by drawing in the links between the different stages. After an encounter with a prostitute representing at once his mother and the figure of Death, Nerval, having prepared himself to die, passes in a visionary state into the "other world" where he finds his mother. At first she has the features of death, but later she is restored to the beauty and purity of his earliest memories. After the death of Jenny Colon, the actress will take the place of the mother in the 1853 version of the experience. The prostitute with the pale face and hollow eyes now "semblait avoir les traits d'Aurélia" (I, 365), though she still represents Death. Thus from 1841-1842 onwards Nerval feels that only after the ordeal of death can he be reunited with those he loves. What had begun as negative despair after the profanation of his love in Naplès has become a positive aspiration. Yet this is not to be accomplished by physical death. Instead, the visionary is able to cross the frontier separating this world from the next without losing his place in the land of the living. This is what happens in 'Aurélia' (1841), so that the characteristic means of entry into paradise will be the <u>simulated death</u>.

But Nerval belongs to this world. He may be welcomed by his divine family in the visions of 1841, but he cannot be received among them, and has to return to earth. It is in the events of his earthly life that he sees, in the retrospective interpretation of the Neapolitan adventure, the reflection of the other world. For Nerval, like all of us, knew that

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1. See above, pp. 120-121.

he was condemned to live his life. He knew that he could not simply escape from life into the world of dream and death.

This is the sense of the story of Francesco Colonna, which he wrote up in a couple of chapters of the 'Voyage en Orient' in 1844.

On the one hand there is no doubt that he identified himself deeply with Francesco's platonic adoration of Polia[1]. A difference in rank prevents the lovers from establishing a real relationship. Instead, they both enter religious orders[2] and meet in the dream-world under the patronage of Venus Urania, returning to a Golden Age when all nature was

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1. The title of the sonnet, 'A J-y Colonna' (I, 43), shows that he identified Jenny with Francesco's beloved. (Cf F. Constans: Deux enfants du feu', 'Mercure de France' Jan.-April, 1948, 630). There are parallels between the situation of Nerval-Dubourjet in 'Un Roman à faire' and that of Francesco. And Nerval himself indicates that the story had special significance to him when he writes: "le hasard - s'il est un hasard? - a mis en mes mains leur histoire mystique" (II, 71), drawing the identification even closer by his explicit comparison of Polyphile and Faust (see Richer, 'Expérience', 111).

It seems to be assumed that the two chapters dealing with Francesco Colonna ('Vers l'Orient', chapters xiii and xiv) are contemporaneous and were both written after reading Nodier's 'Franciscus Columna' which appeared in 1844 (see 'Voyage en Orient', ed. G. Rouger, vol. iv, 197, followed by the Pléiade editors). But chapter xiii derives exclusively from Francesco Colonna's 'Hypnérotomachie' (see M.-J. Durry for a collation of the texts, showing how discreetly Nerval used his material), while chapter xiv is inspired by the excitement of discovering Nodier's version, which he did not know of (since it probably had not appeared) at the time of reading 'Hypnérotomachie'. It seems probable that Nerval read Nodier after adapting chapter xiii from Francesco Colonna, and that Nodier confirmed (or so it seemed to him) what he had already guessed about the story of the two lovers: "c'est une histoire touchante qu'il faut lire dans ce dernier livre de Nodier, quand on n'a pas été à même de la deviner sous les poétiques allégories du Songe de Polyphile (71-72). It was Nodier who revealed Francesco to Nerval as an exponent of platonic love, Nodier who showed him in the Italian painter an alliance "entre les croyances de l'homme religieux et l'esthétique du païen" (M.-J. Durry, 114).

2. In 'L'Alchimiste, La Maddelena had pretended that she was going to become a nun because she was hopelessly in love with Fasio, a married man ('L'Alchimiste', 392). But it was probably not until Nerval wrote up the story of Francesco and Polia that the idea of the beloved being removed from the contingencies of a worldly existence in this way crystallised.

alive and friendly, visiting all the temples of the celestial Venus until their final union at the very shrine of love. This dream-life is the prelude to their eternal union after death, and their waking life is simply a period of waiting and exile.

The role of the mother, the lovers' patroness and protector, is here given to Venus Urania. But this is not the traditional story of a healthy pagan sensuality triumphing over Christian asceticism. Nerval notes that the lovers' vows are expressed through the forms of the Christian faith. The Mother-Goddess is an amalgam of the divinities of the different religions, in particular the Christian Mary and the Egyptian Isis, mother of the child who will save mankind (II, 72). Isis is the Mother-Goddess who will put an end to suffering and strife when the resurrection of her son restores the innocent springtime of the world. When Nerval revisited Pompei in 1843 he imagined a reconstruction of the cult of Isis[1], and in 'Octavie' he will claim that he himself took the part of Osiris in re-enacting the ceremony (I, 315). He speaks in 'Isis' (1845) of "l'impression presque religieuse que me causa une seconde fois la vue du temple d'Isis de Pompéi" (322). Superficially, this means simply that he remembered the place because he had been there nine years earlier, but we can be certain that in his reverie among the ruins, Nerval was once again re-enacting the legendary past. In 'Isis', he identifies himself with the Lucius of Apuleius' 'Golden Ass' when the goddess promises to extend his life beyond its earthly limits in return for his devotion. Isis is thus the mother who will restore paradise, the patroness of the perfect spiritual love of Francesco and Polia.

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[1] See I, 323 and also 317-318.

For it is in the figure of Isis, through the celebrated Nervalian syncretism, that he finds the solution to the problem of faith which is tormenting him around this time. How, in an age "qui a besoin de toucher pour croire" (II, 71), can the old beliefs in a divine order be maintained? Nerval's doubts during this period open up the unending desolation of a world empty of divine sympathy[1]. The solution is reached by reversing the proposition he puts into the mouth of Mme Carlès in the 'Voyage en Orient': "quand on croit à tout, on ne croit à rien" (II, 353): to believe in no particular cult may be to believe in all. The multiplicity of religions, instead of pointing to humanity's perennial self-delusion, can be seen as the successive facets through which a single truth has flashed out ('Isis', I, 326).

Behind this is Nerval's conviction that the beloved is a younger substitute for the mother-goddess, essentially sharing her identity, and this will come out strongly in 'Les Pyramides' (1850) when he describes the initiation rites of the priests of 'Isis'. Having come successfully through the ordeals of initiation, the postulant is at last privileged to witness the unveiling of the goddess's statue. To his astonishment the statue moves, and the goddess takes on the likeness of the woman he has loved most dearly, or of his own private ideal of perfect beauty. Before he can embrace her, she dissolves into a cloud of perfume. He is now proclaimed the equal of the gods and transported while unconscious into a veritable paradise (like Nerval in 1841 and the hero of 'La Forêt noire').

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[1] See 'Le Christ aux Oliviers', I, 36-38 (much bleaker than the conditional last stanza of Vigny's 'Le Mont des Oliviers'); 'Isis', I, 324; and II, 87. For Nerval's scepticism, see also II, 89; 'Isis', I, 323; and 'Aurélia', I, 390.

Here he is united with a lovely virgin in whom he recognises Isis herself (II, 228-29). In 'Aurélia', Isis appears to Nerval in a dream and tells him: "je suis la même que Marie, la même que ta mère, la même aussi que sous toutes les formes tu as toujours aimée" (I, 403). The ordeal represents, once again, a simulacrum of death.

But in the chapters devoted to the story of Francesco, Nerval cannot identify himself wholly with his hero's platonic love. He himself has seen the beloved passaway into the realm of death, but this has not been enough to persuade him that this life is a dream, and that the true reality exists beyond it: "Polyphile, plus sage (que moi), a connu la vraie Cythère pour ne l'avoir point visitée, et le véritable amour pour en avoir repoussé l'image mortelle" (II, 71). By foregoing union in the here-and-now, he has earned eternal union and the promise of paradise. But Nerval had made the wrong choice, losing his chances of an untarnished and purely spiritual love by trying to establish a real relationship with the actress in flesh-and-blood. Francesco is the "good" self, belonging unequivocally to the chosen race which will be admitted to the promised land. Nerval, standing uneasily on the borderline between life and dream, must struggle with the difficult compromise between the two.

This struggle is the theme of 'Le Roman tragique' (1844). Identification here is very strong. The hero, Brisacier, was an eighteenth century adventurer who posed as the natural son of the King of Poland, was exposed, imprisoned, and later exiled. According to Nerval, he produced documents proving that he was descended from "la branche royale des

Valois"[1]. Thus he is associated both with Nerval's own dream of illustrious Polish origins, and with the Royal line which represents the chosen race. Presenting 'Le Roman tragique' in 1853, Nerval finely analyses the process of identification by which his own memories replace historical evidence.

The basic attitude behind 'Le Roman tragique' is self-dramatisation, or playacting. L. Cellier has spoken of Nerval's "cabotinage foncier"[2], and this may be seen as a constant feature of his creative activity. The creation of heroes who embody an exaggerated version of the writer's ego is typical of an age when histrionic posturing is not distinguished from self-revelation. The division of the self into creator and created, spectator and actor, means that self-admiration can be freely indulged. Yet the process is also particular to Nerval, for with him the created self enacts the destiny, glimpsed in dreams and visions, which he feels is more authentically his own than the shapeless compromise with circumstances lived from day to day. Nowhere is this self-dramatisation more apparent than in 'Le Roman tragique'. Yet Brisacier is not simply Nerval as he would like to be. On the contrary, by a fascinating "jeu de miroirs", he practises within the story the very same self-dramatisation upon which Nerval is engaged in writing the story. Just as Nerval projects himself into Brisacier, so Brisacier, having joined a troupe of

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1. I, 1179. Nerval's account is quite different from that given in the 'Mémoires' of the Abbé de Choisy (see Book 8). The most important difference is that whereas Choisy makes it quite plain that Brisacier was an imposter, Nerval is more than half inclined to believe that his claims were founded.

2. 'Où en sont les recherches sur Gérard de Nerval?', 'Archives des Lettres modernes', May 1957, 20.

strolling players, projects himself into his roles. And this is more than an occasion for complacent narcissism. Brisacier is deeply committed to the proposition that the roles he enacts correspond to his essential destiny, so that their patterns can somehow be imposed on reality. It is significant that his playacting extends back into his actual life, in his claim that he is of noble birth[1].

Brisacier's two levels of playacting correspond to the two parallel tendencies in Nerval's interpretation of his visions. As a noble bastard, he could enjoy reunion with his family in this life. As an actor, he can give a tangible, if temporary, existence to his dreams.

His claim to be a noble bastard is given a spurious corroboration when his fellow-actors tell the authorities that he is "un personnage illustre que sa famille ne pouvait abandonner" (I, 181), specifying to the inn-keeper that he is "le propre fils du grand khan de Crimée" (176). But his glory is short-lived. The inn-keeper soon discovers that he is really "un prince de contrebande" (176). The story has only been invented so that the others can leave him behind as a sort of living security while they move on without paying their bills. Brisacier's reaction when his pretensions are deflated is an immediate suicidal despair. So Nerval must have felt when his doctors told him that he was only a poor writer, and not the god-like personage he had felt himself to be (see Letter 86). Brisacier's defeat is ignominious. He cannot even commit suicide, for his sword has been taken away from him. In any case: "on ne se perce pas le

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[1] Unlike the hero of Scarron's 'Le Roman comique', Nerval's source: Scarron's Le Destin <u>is</u> of noble birth, as is the hero Gautier based on him in 'Le Capitaine Fracasse'.

coeur avec une épée de comédie, on n'imite pas le cuisinier Vatel, on n'essaie pas de parodier les héros de roman, quand on est un héros de tragédie: et je prends tous nos camarades à témoin qu'un tel trépas est impossible à mettre en scène un peu noblement" (176). This is a comment on his own playacting. Vatel is presented as the type of the ordinary little person who takes himself for a hero and thus makes himself ridiculous. His story is told in a famous letter of Mme de Sévigné (26 April 1671): he committed suicide by throwing himself on his sword because he felt he had failed to provide adequately for a visit of the King to Chantilly (he was Condé's maître d'hôtel). Mme de Sévigné notes that "on dit que c'était à force d'avoir de l'honneur en sa manière" ('Lettres', vol. i, 274), but Nerval, who significantly makes Vatel into a cook instead of an important officer of Condé's household, implies that cooks do not have honour: Vatel's act is a ridiculous parody of heroic behaviour which is not suited to his class and in any case belongs within the covers of a novel.

Yet there is a typical ambivalence. The actual reason given for not wanting to fall on his sword is that it could not be done in a manner becoming to a tragic hero, it could not be convincingly stage-managed. He is still play-acting. The phrases he uses, for all their mock-heroic ring, belong to high tragedy: "l'ingrate qui m'avait trahi", "un tel trépas". And a moment after, the impulse towards suicide is again something to be taken seriously, something on which a potential tragic status is conferred: he held back, he declares, because "je suis un comédien qui a de la religion" (176).

The ambiguity is typical of Nerval's presentation of Brisacier. He never states outright that his hero is a charlatan, and the way in which Brisacier's pretensions persist through his very humiliation shows that they go very deep. This corresponds to Nerval's attitude towards his own sense of belonging to a noble or even divine family. The puncturing of the illusion, even when it produces ironical self-abasement, involves real despair. The strolling players (as we shall see from 'La Forêt noire') represent the privileged family, and when they virtually imprison him and go off without him, we realise that Nerval is again expressing the fears of 'Aurélia' (1841): that he may be shut up as a raving madman while a more lucky "self" takes his place.

The story is also shaped by a particular memory: the amateur theatricals with Marie Pleyel in Vienna[1]. The imagination, compulsively reliving a past humiliation, both attenuates the experience by blurring the details of the disgrace, and exaggerates it by transforming a pusillanimous reaction into a violent revenge. At the same time, this particular source is grafted on to Nerval's older preoccupation with the memory of Jenny Colon-Aurélie, to whom Marie Pleyel, in her role as <u>actress</u>, is assimilated. The theatre is the setting for the <u>affaire</u> with Jenny: Nerval fell in love initially with the heroines she played, and during the period of silent adoration used the theatre (in 'L'Alchimiste' and 'Piquillo'), as the place in which his own fears and wishes regarding Jenny could be enacted. This is now taken a stage further. After 1840-41, Nerval is fascinated by privileged stretches of time during which a

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[1] See above, p.

special sense of significance seems to indicate that the events of his extra-terrestrial destiny are being enacted or re-enacted. In 1842, the encounter with the Neapolitan woman was seen as such an occasion. But there he was no more than a passive spectator. The theatre is a place where tangible form can be given to dreams, and the actor who is also a playwright can invent, and then, in a sense, live his destiny. Nerval had noted in 'Le Carnet de Dolbreuse': "Vous voulez arranger le monde comme une tragédie. Tout noble, tout beau"[1].

There is evidence that Nerval's fascination with the idea of the troupe of strolling players derives from this ambition[2]. Brisacier, it is true, is not an actor-playwright. But he is possessed with the sense that his own destiny is filling the world of mingled illusion and reality which is constituted by the stage. His situation corresponds to Nerval's at the time of his relationship with Jenny: Aurélie is fundamentally indifferent to her strange suitor, though there are signs of a momentary response to his devotion which is enough to fix, if not to satisfy it[3]. Now, Nerval's attempt to establish an ordinary relationship with Jenny had failed. Thus he had missed the chance of union with her in the pure,

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1. Published in N. Popa's ed. of 'Les Filles du Feu'. Cf: "Je ne demande pas à Dieu de rien changer aux évènements, mais de me changer relativement aux choses; de me laisser le pouvoir de créer autour de moi un univers qui m'appartienne, de diriger mon rêve éternel au lieu de le subir. Alors, il est vrai, je serais Dieu" ('Paradoxe et vérité', I, 432). The last sentence measures both the magnitude of Nerval's ambition and its impossibility. For J. Richer, Nerval considered the theatre as "un lieu de purification et d'expiation", whilst the actress "a joué un rôle important comme médiatrice entre le monde 'réel' et le 'surréel' ('Expérience', 216 & 214).

2. See Appendix "B".

3. Eg. "ne m'as-tu pas aimé un instant, froide étoile!" (I, 178).

non-contingent world of the dream, such as that enjoyed by Francesco Colonna and Polia. So now, through the substitute identity of Brisacier, he tries to correct that mistake, by enacting his dreams about the actress on the stage, combining life and dream. Brisacier does not write the plays he performs in, but he longs to distort them to fit his own wishes (179).

Brisacier's exalted ambition is to use the theatre as the gateway to another world. Aurélie is "la divinité de mes rêves comme de ma vie" (181). As Achilles, he dreams of putting his opponents to the sword and abducting Iphigénie. As Nero, he sees himself burning the theatre to the ground and carrying off Junie through the flames: "Et soyez sûrs alors que rien n'aurait pu me la ravir, depuis cet instant jusqu'à l'échafaud! et de là dans l'éternité!" (179). In his vengeance for the insult he is god-like, holding the thunderbolt of Jupiter in his hand. He will carry Junie out of this world into the eternal realm where the gods have their seat. It is significant that Nerval compares Achilles' projected abduction of Iphigénie to that of Helen by Paris (178). If Faust is substituted for Paris, then we have the situation of the eternally predestined consort abducting his bride and so removing her from the limited temporal possession of her husband, an "individualité passagère"[1].

In just the same way the god-like Achilles-Nero, who can transcend time, has a diminutive rival in the actor who plays Britannicus. He is a poor figure beside Brisacier, who speaks of him patronisingly. Yet, we remember, it is Britannicus whom Junie loves, not Nero. And Aurélie's

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1. 'Faust', Gibert, 22.

choice falls on the timid rival. But this defeat of Brisacier's hopes is presented in such a way that it looks almost like a victory. It is implied that the success of "Britannicus" owes less to his own merit than to Brisacier's magnanimity. Aurélie's choice is the result of a mere caprice endorsed only by Brisacier's acceptance of it. More profoundly, Brisacier speaks of his rival with warm affection as "mon frère". Defeat is attenuated by identification with the rival. (The same device will be used with Zeynab and the Armenian). The loser retains his superior status. It may be that it was the very grandeur of the dreamer's conceptions that caused Aurélie to prefer the safer rival. Nerval will often introduce this suggestion, which rationalises Jenny's choice in a way that salves his own pride, by suggesting that women prefer petty-natured men. Yet Brisacier can retain the conviction that it is to him she really belongs, in this world and the next.

At the same time, Nerval's sense of the precariousness of his own position reasserts itself. There is a tragi-comic contrast between dream and reality as Brisacier peeps out beneath the Imperial purple, making sure, before he lights the holocaust which will take him to eternity, that no-one is looking (180). The heroic, god-like self can never quite get clear of the real self. And the end is humiliation. The "other self" goes off with Aurélie and the rest of the troupe, abandoning Brisacier to his imprisonment. He writes begging to be readmitted to their company, no longer as the dashing lead, but as a freak, a monster to draw the crowds (182). As before, the heroics cannot quite be suppressed. This callous

treatment is interpreted as a devious plot designed to ensnare him, so that Aurélie's very indifference is used as evidence of positive feelings on her side.

The true doubling as between the two selves is reflected in the contrast between Brisacier as Achilles-Nero and Brisacier as Vatel or the troupe freak, rather than that between Brisacier and "Britannicus". The point at issue is whether Nerval's own pretension to establish some sort of real enactment of his dreams has any validity. At his best, Brisacier does appear as god-like; but at his worst he is a pathetic lunatic.

Brisacier is also the hero of 'La Forêt noire', a manuscript scenario[1]. He too stands on the borderline between dream and reality, but whereas the hero of 'Le Roman tragique' was struggling to impose a subjectively apprehended destiny by force, in 'La Forêt noire' he is the passive witness of (apparent) visions, and is finally recognised by his illustrious family. 'Le Roman tragique' was another indeterminate re-interpretation of the past; 'La Forêt noire' carries the happy convictions about a future life which Nerval retained from the visions of 1841.

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[1] The dating is controversial. Jean Richer thinks that the ms represents Nerval's attempt to work out a more personal version of 'Les Monténégrins', the original of which had been popularised by Scribe, since "on y retrouve plusiers scènes existant déjà dans 'Les Monténégrins' " ('Expérience et création', 107-110 and Notes). But one of the main sources, identified by M. Richer himself, is Nodier's 'Inès de las Sierras', which was published in 1837. It seems more likely that 'La Forêt noire' represents the original version of 'Les Monténégrins'. It has such close and so many affinities with 'Aurélia' (1841) that, until more conclusive evidence is produced, I should be inclined to agree with G. Marie in dating it around 1840 (G. Marie, 'Un Château de Gérard de Nerval en Forêt noire', 'Mercure de France', October 1958).

The scenario is a remarkable transcription of the 1841 experience, following it, once the hidden parallels are brought out, extremely closely[1]. Brisacier, an orphan, is a Captain in the French (Catholic) army occupying the German (Protestant) town of Neuburg in 1702. He is fascinated by a troupe of gypsies ("bohémiens"), who are at once magicians and itinerant entertainers[2]. They are of the enemy, yet a race apart. Among them is a young girl whom Brisacier recognises from a painting seen in early childhood[3]. She is protected by a woman whose features appear old; but beneath her swarthy face one can see that she is really young[4]. A venerable old man who claims to have the power of prophecy tries to rouse the Protestant population by foretelling "(les) joies mystiques du paradis où les croyants rejoindront leur famille et retrouveront ceux qui leur sont chers". The orphan Brisacier is deeply moved, and resolves to help the "gypsies". However he is imprisoned[5] for disobeying orders, and the family escapes.

They are in fact French Protestants of noble family who have been banished and have now adopted German titles. They live in a castle near

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1. The scenario is shaped, surely, much more by Nerval's imaginative preoccupations than by any specific biographical reminiscence such as that postulated by G. Marie, who suggests that the 'Schloss Favorite' (setting for the seenario) recalled Mortefontaine and "Adrienne" ('Un Château de Gérard de Nerval ...').

2. Cf 'Le Roman tragique': the gypsies are like a troupe of strolling players - we are told of "leur humeur vagabonde". The Neapolitan woman of Letter V is also described as "un peu sorcière ou bohémienne pour le moins" (I, 1260).

3. Cf 'Le Prince des Sots' and the portrait resembling Nerval's mother.

4. "Sous ses traits basanés on s'aperçoit qu'elle est jeune". On the commonsense level this means that she is a young woman made up to look old. But Nerval's odd way of putting it reveals his recurrent interest in the multiple identity. The idea may be a reminiscence of Hoffmann's story 'La Maison déserte', which figures in volume iv of the Egmont translation of 1836.

5. Cf Nerval in 1841.

Neuburg. But Brisacier does not know this. In Act II he is carried there unconscious, and when he regains his senses, he is convinced that he has been transported to the paradise foretold by the old man, the magic world "où doit briller l'image de celle qu'il aime"[1]. The young girl appears no longer in the costume of a gypsy, but in that of the portrait he remembers. The older woman has also been transformed: she is dressed like a Queen[2]. He begs her to unite him with the young girl, whom he had evidently loved in his youth.

As in 'Aurélia', the hero now relives a scene from his early childhood: an attack by Catholic troops on the family castle in the Cévennes had put the family to flight. Brisacier does indeed belong to the family, and was left for dead. To test him, this scene is re-enacted[3]. Each member of the family looks younger. Past and present blur together as they sit at a family banquet (as in 'Aurélia'), which is suddenly broken up by the violent irruption of the soldiers. But just at this moment when the past is ressuscitated, and he is about to be reunited in this paradise with those he loves, the "dream" comes to an end, and he is

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1. So Nerval had been carried half-conscious by the men who arrested him: "on me coucha sur un lit de camp" ('Expérience et création', 423). So too, in his dreams, he felt he was <u>transported</u> to the family paradise ('Expérience ...', 426-27).

2. Cf the <u>Queen</u> of Sheba who presides at the family banquet in 'Aurélia' (1841) ('Expérience ...', 427).

3. The "bohémiens" are like actors who can give life to events belonging to the dream-world. Cf the young Neapolitan woman who <u>dresses up</u> as a queen, and Brisacier's use of the strolling troupe in 'Le Roman tragique'. The conjuration of Helen by Faust is also described in terms of the theatre ('Faust', Gibert, 18). See C. Mauron: "Gérard projette au théâtre à la fois son propre cas et sa propre auto-analyse". M. Mauron suggests that this scene is like the Freudian re-enactment of a traumatic experience.

transported, again in an unconscious state, out of the castle. Like Nerval in 1841, he is allowed only a glimpse of happiness.

It is true that the scene of violence does not figure in 'Aurélia' (1841) at this point. But there is a fragment which refers to it. The woman who is at once his mother and the figure of death, comes to his bedside. He recalls that he is one of three children of the family, and was impaled by the Tartars, "lors de la prise de nos châteaux" by the river Dwina. But after this destruction the race revived, and the three castles were rebuilt on the banks of the Dordogne. He is transported there. "Leur ange tutélaire était toujours la dame noire, qui dès lors avait repris sa carnation blanche (La Brownia)"[1]. The massacre and the transportation of the family home(s) to another country, correspond clearly to 'La Forêt noire'. The dark-skinned mother-figure (the spirit of the race) who regains her youthful complexion and appearance in the new home, is the older woman of the scenario. Also, in 'La Forêt noire' as in 'Aurélia', there is the conviction that only by his death can the hero pass into the other world. Yet here too, death is simulated, not actual.

It is noticeable that the identity of the three figures in 'La Forêt noire' is never stated. As in the dreams of 1841, the women share a sort of composite identity (he refers to "l'image de celle que j'aime"). This is the same pattern of the older woman who will unite him with a young girl who is another version of herself. The portrait is at once the portrait of Nerval's mother and that of the girl. The older woman is both Brisacier's mother and the girl's mother. In this essentially happy and confident transposition of Nerval's dream-experience, the double is

1. 'Expérience et création', 425-26.

figured only by a brother-officer who is jealous of his rank and tries to prevent him helping the "gypsies". The old man represents the uncle of 'Aurélia' (1841), who is responsible for the hero's initiation into the family paradise.

Nevertheless we note that the part of the scenario which corresponds to the visions of 1841 ends with the hero's banishment from paradise. Nerval's fears as well as his hopes come into play here. Later, we find him in action, recognising the old man among the enemy forces and: "n'osant le frapper, il s'est précipité parmi les ennemis en appelant la mort". As in 'Emilie' or 'Le Magnétiseur', there is the fear that he is destined to fight on the wrong side, to be excluded and damned for failing to recognise those to whom he truly belongs. The old man is intermittently hostile, and at one point becomes furiously angry because Brisacier has been allowed to penetrate into the family sanctuary.

However, perhaps the most important point about the scenario is that it realises Nerval's desire to carry the visionary experience into real life. In the last act, Brisacier is fully recognised as the long-lost son (or nephew?), and the mother-figure promises him the hand of Diane d'Alby[1]. As always, Nerval's concern is to give his visions a concrete, normal validity. The events of act II, having fully realised the sweetest dreams of 1841, were after all illusory. Yet their essential meaning is valid: Brisacier is <u>in fact</u> a member of an illustrious family, and he can marry the young girl who resembles the portrait of his mother he has loved since childhood. It is true, of course, that even on this level a

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[1]. In 'Le Magnétiseur' the family is called <u>Aldi</u>(ni).

sense of prohibition is operating. Before the final reunion, Brisacier, who has been condemned to death for disobeying orders, undergoes a simulacrum of execution, which, we think until the last moment, will be a real one. This partly reflects the honest Nerval's difficulty in envisaging the final consummation of his longing to be reunited with his true family. But once again, more profoundly, it means that only after crossing the line which separates life from death, reality from dream - even if this is only done symbolically - can the consummation come. Reality is a mirror-image of the other world.

All the works discussed in this chapter, then, derive essentially from Nerval's visionary longings. But he is not content to escape from life into the dream-world. Whether in re-interpreting his own past or in inventing fictional extensions of it, he is concerned to match reality to vision. The central aim is to depict a reality which re-enacts the main pattern of the dream-destiny. Nerval did not turn his back on this world in 1841. But the whole significance which he sees in the events of this world has changed.

One major effect of this is to abolish the distinctness of the contrast between the two feminine types which were alternately the subject of his longings in the 1830's. 'Corilla' (1839), of course, suggests that the two may be made concurrent by the creation of a single figure having multiple identities. But the synthesis is only dimly suggested. It is only in a work like 'La Forêt noire' that it has, in response to the complex but strongly unified impressions of his madness, been effected.

Diane d'Alby is a Marguerite-figure "qui ne sait que chanter et danser"; at the same time she is of noble birth. She is also a living reincarnation of the mother. The mother, like Jenny Colon, is both a Queen and Goddess.

CHAPTER VIII

NERVAL AS DON JUAN

"Hélas! mon ami, nous sommes de bien pâles Don Juan" (II, 38)

After 1841, then, Nerval's creation of a second life takes a new direction. Its pattern is determined more and more strongly by the visionary experience, so that the heroes of the later works will always retrace the steps taken by their author in the world of his own mind. In 'La Forêt noire' Brisacier finds his true family in "another world", as Nerval had done in 1841. But commitment to a supernatural destiny does not involve the abandonment of reality. In creating this image of his experience, Nerval is careful to establish it also on the plane of rationality, in the sane (if over-colourful) world where long-lost children are restored to love and unconditional acceptance. On both levels the same story is enacted, but they remain distinct. And from now onwards we can see Nerval oscillating between the two: on the one hand continuing the work of the 1830's in projecting the desires and diffidences of his everyday self; on the other hand writing and rewriting the myth of his own eternal destiny.

Later on it will be the Marguerite-figure who, under the name of Sylvie, will represent accessible normality. But in the 1840's, perhaps because the village-girl has become associated with the profound dream of reunion with a lost mother and a lost family, Nerval is making new departures. His journeys provide fresh autobiographical material, the promise of new possibilities. On his return from Vienna, and later, on

his return from the Middle East, he is embarking on a new enterprise, the invention of a "real" past. (The inverted commas indicate what a paradoxical undertaking this is). Starting from a sadly slender real-life donnée, he elaborates a story of which he himself is the hero, and which at once expresses the wish that he had proved an effective lover, and ironically analyses the reasons why he has not done so.

Nerval is not normally associated with Don Juan, the professional seducer of women. Nevertheless there is in him a hankering after the casual series of adroit successes which is the mark of the Don Juan type. Curiously enough, he does not seem to have been inspired, as one might have thought, by the "finer" side of Don Juan, the Romantic hero driven by an exasperated longing for the Absolute from one bed to another, the Don Juan of Hoffmann, though he must surely have read Hoffmann's 'Don Juan' in Egmont's translation of 1836[1]. On the contrary, the Don Juan figure who appears in Nerval's work belongs to the class of elegant seducers; of fast operators, rather than to the fallen angel category invented by the nineteenth century.

In the invention of an idealised life constituted by the works of pseudo-autobiography, Nerval is manifestly not content with the role of ineffectual dreamer. The famous remark: "j'avais quitté la proie pour l'ombre ... comme toujours!" (I, 97) contains a note of regret. The defensive tone which creeps into the humour of his story of the "dame de

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1. In vol. iii of Egmont's translation. An "anecdote" from Hoffmann's 'Don Juan' is given in an article in 'Le Monde dramatique', also written in 1836 (O.C. II, 348). See also 'Soirée d'Automne' of the same year (I, 520f).

Marseille" (Letter 17) is self-conscious and a little resentful about the fact that women tend not to take him seriously. True, in the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon' he specifically dissociates himself from the rapid and ruthless methods of "la galanterie ordinaire". Yet he does so a little reluctantly; he seems conscious that in abandoning all attempt at a brilliant or forceful conquest he is missing his chances. Even in this monument of disinterested love, there are unmistakable signs that Nerval thought that the "modernes manières" which - making a virtue of necessity - he had rejected, might have been a more effective way of carrying on his courtship.

Once again, two opposed appetencies are revealed: the timid man's awe for the beloved which prompts him to treat her with exaggerated respect; and a regretful glance over the shoulder at another possibility which has been left behind - the seduction campaign, the efficient conquest. These two appetencies are symbolised in one or two works of the 1830's, notably 'Le Prince des Sots' and 'Corilla', by a pair of rivals in love, one shy and ineffectual, the other bold and effective. Once again, there is the dualism between the self who belongs to the dream-world, and the self whose sphere of action is reality, transposing into a dualism of identity the contrast between Nerval and his more worldly friends.

Charles VI in 'Le Prince des Sots', like the Nerval of the Letters, is a timid man with an old-fashioned belief in constancy in love. He has re-instituted the "Cour d'Amour" in order to uphold the old traditions of chivalry in an immoral age. But the Queen despises her sickly husband and falls passionately in love with his handsome and accomplished brother, the

chief exponent of the "galanterie" which, according to the King, has been making such rapid progress. Louis is irresistible to women, and uses his charm unscrupulously to seduce them. Described as a "vrai don Juan de son époque" (O.C. VI, 122), he is a hedonist and a sceptic about love which he defines as "une lueur passagère aussi vite éteinte qu'allumée" (122). Apart from desultory efforts to maintain the power of the aristocracy, which is being undermined, he evades his state responsibilities (31). He is a poet and an aesthete, a voluptuary delighting in complex and delicate sensations (224, 273), a sort of Des Esseintes avant la lettre.

This mirrors the contrast between Nerval and Gautier during their trip to Belgium in 1836, when they appear as two connoisseurs of female beauty seeking the rare collector's piece, the "biondo e grassoto" type. And they were engaged on a joint work with the Don Juanesque title 'Confessions galantes de deux gentilshommes périgourdins'[1]. However, if Gautier's 'Caprices et zigzags' is to be believed, Nerval spent more time with his nose in 'La Nouvelle Héloïse' than looking out for the specimen they were supposed to be after (see A. Marie, 125-26).

The contrast occurs again in 'Corilla'. In the symmetrical construction of the imbroglio (Fabio and Marcelli each have a rendezvous with the same woman at the same time), one can again read the suggestion that the two protagonists represent two sides of Nerval himself. Fabio is, like the Nerval of the 'Lettres', dedicated to fidelity rather than conquest; he is earnest, timid, hesitant and a little ridiculous, more concerned with love as a thing of the imagination than as a thing of the flesh.

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[1] This work was never finished, though a contract was signed in July 1836, and Nerval claims in a letter dated September 1836 that it was "assez avancé" (see Letter 22 and Notes).

Marcelli on the other hand has many of the attributes of the cynical and uncommited seducer: he is gay (333) and superficial, a mixture of the connoisseur and the realist, appreciating Corilla both as a rare model of beauty (the same model that the two "gentilshommes périgourdins" were after - see I, 335), and as a lady with a decent fortune (341); he is concerned with the seduction campaign he has in hand, leaving Fabio, like Ixion, to embrace the cloudy forms of his imagination (342). The contrast is brought out by Fabio himself: "Voilà de nos jeunes fous à la mode; rien ne leur fait obstacle, ils sont les vainqueurs et les préférés de toutes les femmes, et la liste de Don Juan ne leur coûterait que la peine de l'écrire" (337)[1]. And surely there is envy as well as disapproval in his voice? This is a self-consciously old-fashioned belief in fidelity again, speaking out against the "modernes manières" of the young bloods; but the feeling that insolent success is more attractive than virtuous failure cannot be gainsaid.

In 'Les Amours de Vienne', published in 1841 but most likely written during the stay in Vienna during the Winter of 1839-40, Nerval attributes to himself, under the pseudonym of Fritz, a Don Juanesque career among the Viennese beauties. Here again, the Don Juan figure is balanced by Henri

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1. The hero of 'La Polygamie est un cas pendable' is described as "plus Don Juan que Don Juan lui-même" (Senelier, No. 324).

de Brégeas, the disapproving alter ego, the respectable self, who is seen frowning in the background[1].

Henri appears as an amusingly pompous young "attaché d'ambassade", very conscious of his position, overestimating his own importance, afraid that he will be compromised by his dissolute cousin Fritz[2], who makes fun of his pretensions[3] and becomes an embarrassing travelling-companion. And yet, although Nerval presents Henri in satirical light, one sees that the young diplomat has been invested with much of his own longing for a stable and respectable career, which comes out repeatedly in the contemporaneous letters to Dr. Labrunie. "(Je) ne puis attribuer ce qui m'arrive qu'aux complications nouvelles qui ont surgi tout à coup dans la question

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1. Nerval wrote up his stay in Vienna, which he clearly found extremely stimulating, in three partially overlapping articles or series of articles: 'Lettres de Voyage', 'Lettres sur Vienne' and 'Les Amours de Vienne'. 'Lettres de Voyage' was a series carried by 'La Presse' on 28 January, 5 March, 26 March, 28 June and 29 June 1840, the first unsigned, the middle three signed Fritz, and the last signed Gérard; 'Lettre sur Vienne' appeared in 'L'Artiste' on 8 March 1840, signed Gérard de Nerval; and 'Les Amours de Vienne', in the 'Revue de Paris' on 1 March 1841, signed Gérard de Nerval. This article was distributed among the opening chapters of the 'Voyage en Orient' as follows: Ch. vi (starting with Note 2) to "... je saurai tout" (p. 39); ch. vii; first dozen lines of ch. viii (to "... fort gravement"), then from "Je dois te faire l'effet ..." (p. 49 - see also Note 10) to end; finally, ch. x except for the last two paragraphs, but including Note 10. Later, the whole was combined with a certain amount of modification to form the first ten chapters of 'Vers l'Orient'. It is 'Les Amours de Vienne' which concerns us here.

2. See II, Notes to chapter vi of 'Vers l'Orient'. Nerval himself is referred to as Fritz in Gautier's 'Caprices et Zigzags'. When Nerval was preparing what is really the first extended draft of the 'Voyage en Orient' for publication in 'La Silhouette' in 1849 (Jan. 1849 - Jan. 1850 - see 'Voyage en Orient', ed. G. Rouger, vol. i, 95), he prepared for the meeting between the two cousins by putting references by Fritz to "mon cousin Henri, le diplomate" into the early chapters: see chapter ii, note 4, iii, note 2 and v, note 26; also ix, note 9.

3. See II, 1274.

d'Orient" (II, 1273), writes the pretentious Henri de Brégeas. Yet the pretension was Nerval's own: "La question d'Orient étant prêt de se terminer, je ne crois pas qu'on me continue ma mission vers les frontières de Turquie" (Letter 51).

Henri represents Nerval's solid, middle-aged image of himself, Fritz is the freedom and gaiety of youth[1]. He is inventing a version of himself with all the attributes we looked for in vain in his own earlier work: gaiety, freedom and amorous enterprise. Fritz is still young enough, at any rate in spirit, to have success with the ladies: "nous ne sommes plus de jeunes fous" (II, 1274), Henri de Brégeas admonishes him. But Fritz is a good deal more attractive and interesting than his somewhat owlish cousin. In the character of Henri, Nerval is making fun of his own more solemn pretensions. Fritz, and not Henri, is the hero of 'Les Amours de Vienne' and through him Nerval works out his own desire - and its failure - to be an effective lover in the sphere of reality.

Yet Fritz is a peculiarly Nervalian Don Juan. In this invention of a Don Juanesque past, we miss the ruthless singlemindedness of the professional ladykiller, and are given instead a series of incomplete sketches. Did Gautier have 'Les Amours de Vienne' in mind when he wrote of Nerval: "Sans se l'avouer, il pensait, comme Chamfort, qu'il n'y a en amour que des commencements"[2]? The opening gambits of each seduction campaign are carefully and amusingly plotted, but before the position can

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1. It is worth noting that Nerval's letters to his father are always signed Gérard Labrunie. In one of these he refers to Gérard de Nerval as "mon pseudonyme littéraire."

2. 'Portraits et souvenirs', 63.

be consolidated a new campaign begins, and the final stages of the game are never reached. Nerval fancies himself as Don Juan, and the autobiographical hero embarks on the "amours de Vienne" with enthusiasm. But he cannot in all honesty see himself in the part, and the result is a Don Juan whose ineffectualness in each particular pursuit cannot be concealed by a general air of confident excitement and sleight of hand in passing rapidly from one adventure to another. The inconsequential narrative, borrowed from Sterne and Diderot[1], emphasises the ease with which Fritz makes his overtures, but there is a certain hesitancy, almost embarrassment, when the actual moment of seduction is near. Fritz is like a man leaping from one shaky steppingstone to another.

His adventures fall into two phases: pursuit of three "beautés de bas lieu", and courtship of three "grandes dames" of Viennese society. The symmetrical arrangement of 'Les Amours de Vienne' tells us that once again this is "autobiographie romancée".

The first "beauté de bas lieu" is a lady's maid, Catarina Colossa (Katty), a Venetian who has been brought to Vienna by her French mistress. Her polyglot chatter causes constant misunderstandings, so that Fritz, like the hero of some post-Kafka novel, can never quite grasp the situation properly. After a walk in the park, where he embarks on "la séduction la plus compliquée" (not described), he accompanies her home "à travers un écheveau de rues assez embrouillé" (II, 37). Perhaps we should see this as belonging to the "obsession du labyrinthe" of which

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1. Nerval amusingly acknowledges his debt to this tradition in 'Angélique' (I, 263): if he is an imitator, so were the authors he imitates (the classic defence of plagiarism).

J.-P. Richard speaks[1]. Certainly Nerval, in this whole adventure, is very much the uncomprehending tourist in a foreign city. Lacking the ruthless decision of the true Don Juan, he is humorously aware of the danger of becoming more and more inextricably caught up in a web of misunderstandings and complications.

She tells him to come the next day, at noon. After turning up early, waiting in the street and then parleying with an old dame encountered on the landing, he finds her lunching with her mistress. Unperturbed, apparently, by this unexpected way of keeping an assignment, he obeys quietly when she asks him to sit on a chair, not at the table but behind her (like a second-class person), and submits to the lady's cross-questioning. In the evening, he takes her to the theatre, but she insists on paying for herself. "Hélas! mon ami, nous sommes de bien pâles don Juan. J'ai essayé la séduction la plus noire, rien n'y a fait. Il a fallu la laisser s'en aller, et s'en aller seule!" (38). However, he has arranged to meet her at five o'clock the following day. Again he is there early, pacing up and down. But "voici où mon Iliade commence à tourner à l'Odyssée": no sign of Katty; he knocks and goes up; a young girl (not previously mentioned) takes him by hand and leads him out into the street. There is a good deal of gesticulating and misunderstanding. The mistress of the house, he learns, is furious. Katty has gone to his hotel, the 'Aigle-Noir', to look for him. He rushes there to find her. She has come and gone. "Je pousse des cris d'aigle, et je reviens". More explanations, writing of notes (which he can understand better than

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1. J.-P. Richard, especially 23-30.

speech), expressive gestures. At last he understands: Catarina has another admirer who had appeared the previous evening when she was out with Fritz, and had a long conversation with the mistress. Presumably the mistress has decided that the intentions of this other suitor are more serious than those of Fritz (she has questioned both at some length), and was angry with Katty for playing fast and loose with him. So there is no rendezvous for Fritz: but he plans to waylay her in the street the next day - "et je saurai tout" (39).

However the entry for the next day, 23 November, contains not a word on the subject of Katty. Instead, he tells how he spent the evening of the 22nd, after the "rendezvous manqué", picking up another woman, again at the Leopoldstadt theatre ...

And so Fritz's meandering and overlapping adventures continue. Nerval as Don Juan is eager but bewildered, amusingly fallible and human in allowing events to get the better of him, quite lacking in the masterfulness of the traditional character. In the most engaging way possible, he is making fun of his own pretensions[1], showing Fritz to be quite unsuitable for his assumed role, able to record only a (problematical) "three" on his list of victims. When he has gained an introduction to the society ladies[2], we are asked to take the announcement, as yet unsubstantiated, of an imminent victory, as a guarantee that victory would have ensued in earlier campaigns which have been abandoned. We begin to see Fritz as a bankrupt who uses one dubious enterprise as security for another

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1. Just as he had presented Henri de Brégeas in ironical light. The irony works in two directions at once.

2. This corresponds no doubt to Nerval's admission to the Embassy circle.

equally dubious. He is a Don Juan in appearance, not in substance. He is acting a part, and Nerval presents him with consistent irony.

Nerval is also being ironical at the expense of the literary convention he is using. The reader's expectations, having been raised by Fritz's initial enthusiasm, are left in suspense, kept alive by tantalising hints, but never finally satisfied. The narration apparently follows the recipe of the traditional seduction campaign, but Fritz's movements, although their intricate detail corresponds to the patient strategy of a Valmont, are haphazard rather than purposeful. This is Laclos in the manner of Sterne.

But it would be wrong to dismiss 'Les Amours de Vienne' as an ironical parody designed for pure entertainment. Fritz, as we have seen, represents the kind of man who is envied by the remote and ineffectual dreamer precisely because his cold-blooded calculations achieve effective results. Nerval-Henri may disapprove of Fritz, but he would also like to be as successful as the type Fritz represents. Irony exists where there is a pretension to be deflated. One might even say that some kind of exaggerated claim is a condition of irony. Behind Fritz there is Nerval's wish to be casually successful in real relations with real women. And for all the irony, Fritz's pretensions are never definitively cut down to size. In the genre of pseudo-autobiography the author is too close to the hero to give a firm, distinct critical viewpoint. The self-irony of "nous sommes de bien pâles Don Juan" is partly cancelled by assertions which become persuasive by sheer force of repetition . The various

contradictory statements about the affaires with the "beautés de bas lieu" leave us in doubt. The account of his affaire with the "grande dame" ends enigmatically, but not before the positive claim has been made (in the first version): "je suis l'amant d'une grande dame" (1280).

The rule which governs Fritz's narrative appears to be that things get vaguer and more ambiguous as they come nearer. A positive affirmation is made; its further elaboration is postponed in favour of a digression; the digression is abandoned inconclusively and we return to the affirmation, only to find that it has been attenuated and that the expected details are not forthcoming. Thus the inconclusiveness, apart from its function as an ironical narrative device, means that the image of Nerval as Don Juan, although made fun of, is never completely dismissed.

If one considers Fritz as a version of Nerval, the striking thing is that he is a Don Juan only when he escapes from the habitual conditions of his life: first, because the women he pursues are outside his own social class; and second, because they are foreigners. He says specifically that the middle-class women of Vienna are uninteresting compared with the working-girls and the aristocrats (II, 46 and 1284). The majority of his "conquests" are not even Viennese: Katty is a Venetian, Vhahby is a Slav, one of the "grandes dames" is English, the other Italian. He understands their language so badly that his "seduction campaigns" are a tissue of misunderstandings. This Don Juan can only operate on foreign territory, with women of a different class from his own.

The side of Nerval which is concerned with coming to grips with reality and with ironical doubts about his ability to do so, reveals

affinities with the other side, the ineffectual dreamer. Fritz is not simply the everyday Nerval committed to living his life within its actual circumstances, but a Nerval whose sensibilities and sense of his own prowess are heightened by the stimulus of travel. The Don Juan fantasy, just as much as the dreamer's longing for the family paradise, is projected beyond the limits of everyday reality. And Fritz's pretensions are not only invalidated by ironical self-awareness. The attempt at the recreation of a "real" past is concurrent with Nerval's exploration of a mythical existence parallel to, but outside, his real one. The Don Juan image of Nerval is invalidated even more deeply by the fact that Fritz is less interested in women as individuals than as points of reference to something beyond themselves. For a Valmont, the bed is an altar on which the victim is sacrificed in the physical ritual of male supremacy. The only bed that figures in Fritz's escapades contains his rival noisily drinking soup, his gun hanging on the wall like a notice warning off trespassers[1]. Valmont's consummation is to taste the tears of surrender and humiliation; Fritz is not interested in consummation[2]. What interests him - and here, though Nerval never makes this explicit, he is following the Romantic concept of Don Juan - is not what a woman is, but what she stands for.

The wider frame of reference occurs repeatedly. In particular Katty is yet another example of the reddish-blond type (37). The suggestion is

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1. A shadowy version of the Double, showing a fraternal interest in Nerval, but also (potentially) excluding him from paradise by threat of arms.

2. It is significant that Nerval's Brisacier, in 'Le Roman tragique', evidently disapproves of the element of sadism in Racine's Néron.

not enlarged, but it refers us back to the search for an ideal type of feminine beauty which Nerval and Gautier were engaged on in 1836, and which has already been realised in the person of Jenny Colon. Katty is not seen simply as an individual, but as a possible incarnation of the dream-figure. There is continual reference, too, to the idea that these women belong to a certain racial type. The particular loses its sharpness and blurs into the general. Fritz is intoxicated not with this or that particular woman but with the idea and atmosphere of love, the odor di femina (43). The beauty of the women he sees is invariably explained by the theory that they belong to a pure, healthy stock - they are members of a calm, easy-going race, indolent and innocent. Don Juanism is a game. But Nerval does not play to win, because he is interested in the image of the player rather than the prize. Fritz's manoeuvres lack sharpness, in the end, because Nerval, for all his hankering after a decisive role in the real world, is already partly under the spell of the visions of 1841: he responds to women because they seem, however vaguely, like the uniformly beautiful, serene inhabitants of the promised land[1].

1. "Je prends le parti de te mander au hasard tout ce qui m'arrive, intéressant ou non, jour par jour si je le puis, à la manière du capitaine Cook, qui écrit avoir vu un tel jour un goëland ou un pingouin, tel autre jour n'avoir vu qu'un tronc d'arbre flottant; ici la mer était clair, là bourbeuse. Mais, à travers ces signes vains, ces flots changeants, il rêvait des îles inconnues et parfumées, et finissait par aborder un soir dans ces retraites du pur amour et de l'éternelle beauté" (35).

CHAPTER IX

ZEYNAB

'Les Amours de Vienne' can be seen as an attempt to blend, in the peculiarly Nervalian genre of pseudo-autobiography, what actually happened to him, with what he would have liked to happen. The past is re-invented, the doings of an autobiographical hero are superimposed on Nerval's own[1]. But neither element, neither the remembered nor the wished-for, is allowed to predominate: beneath the superficially Don-Juanesque activities of Fritz can be discerned the timidity and the hesitancy of his creator. In Nerval's attempts to create, or recreate, his own past, initial wishful thinking runs almost immediately into the barrier of self-knowledge, and flows uneasily in an indeterminate area lying between memory and imagination. He wishes he had had successful love-affairs, and begins to invent them; but he remembers that he did not have them, and the invention of the past turns into a veiled confession of inadequacy.

In 1846 and 1847 Nerval returns to the re-invention of his own past. Writing up his journey to the Middle East three years before, he uses his recollections as a frame on which to embroider his wishes and his dissatisfactions. Now that it is too late, now he is back in France with his

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[1] The Nerval of the 'Voyage', the pseudo-autobiographical hero, is a creation of the Nerval who wrote up his journey after his return. The one name must serve for both, since it would be tedious to keep referring to "the Nerval of the 'Voyage', etc." But it will be clear from the context when this is meant. I am indebted here to G. Poulet's remark that the hero of 'Sylvie' is "un certain jeune homme que nous appellerons Gérard pour plus de simplicité mais qu'il faut se garder bien de confondre avec le vrai Gérard Labrunie; c'est un Gérard plus parfait, plus poétique que nature, à qui le Gérard véritable attribue une histoire légendaire sans doute, mais qui allégorise sa propre histoire à lui" ('Sylvie et la pensée de Nerval', 'Cahiers du Sud', October 1938.)

fortieth birthday not far ahead, he wishes he might have found in Egypt or in Syria the woman who could have given him a new lease of life, retrieved his disappearing youth. And so, using the obviously meagre stock of real memories as a starting-point, he sets out to reconstruct the 'Voyage en Orient'. But the re-invented past is not simply a pleasant escape from the emptiness of the real past; it is a means of self-exploration. The impression left by the account of Nerval's search for a woman in the Middle East, so far from being one of self-indulgent fantasy, is of a man pre-occupied with a sense of sexual inadequacy. It should be stressed that this adjustment of wishes to actual happenings is retrospective. Nerval did not go to the Middle East in search of a woman. But in the literary recreation of the journey, he fancies that such might have been his aim. In writing up such slight encounters as he had, he interprets them as potential love-affairs.

At the same time, the 'Voyage en Orient' is a product of Nerval's determination to re-establish his reputation as a writer after the terrible set-back of 1841. Like Lamartine, Delacroix, Flaubert or Fromentin, he is exploiting the nineteenth century taste for eye-witness accounts of the exotic East. His aim is to entertain. And when, in the preface to 'Lorely' half-a-dozen years later, he writes that it was the conviction that no French bourgeois would accept him as a husband for his daughter which sent him to the Middle East in search of a bride (II, 741), this is partly an amusing boutade. The idea in any case is not his own: in the same preface he says that it was borrowed from the eccentric Puckler-Muskau,

with whom he evidently identifies himself, and who had brought a copper-coloured Abyssinian girl back from Egypt. As early as 1831 Nerval did a stage version of Byron's 'Lara', whose hero brings back a fiancée from the crusades disguised as his page, and another play of about the same date, 'La Dame de Carouge', is probably an adaptation of the same theme[1]. And in Nerval's account of the ballet 'Le Diable amoureux', based on Cazotte's novel, the hero "est parti pour l'Orient à la recherche de sa fiancée; il la rencontre enfin dans un bazar d'esclaves"[2].

The project of the Oriental fiancée is partly a literary idea. But for Nerval the literary hero is an image of the self. Underlying the boutade in the preface to 'Lorely', addressed to J. Janin, there is a deep bitterness, the residue of real anguish. Nerval considered that Janin's publication of his supposedly incurable madness in 1841 had ruined his chances of respectability and of getting married[3]. His fancy that he might have recouped his chances of happiness by finding a bride in the Middle East is basically a very serious one, as a glance at the chapters on Saléma will show[4].

'Les Mariages cophtes' tells the story of his search for a wife. The motive given is that local custom demands that the tenant of a house should

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1. Though in 'La Dame de Carouge' the roles are reversed: "un émir arabe ou sarrasin, ramené captif de Palestine par un baron croisé, devient amoureux de la châtelaine" - see Senelier, N°s 1,168 & 1,189; A. Marie, 52; J. Richer (Seghers), 31.

2. II, 1229-30, October 1840. Admittedly this is a European girl whom the hero follows to the Middle East - but the idea is there.

3. See above, p. 88.

4. See especially 'Le Prisonnier', chapter i (II, 339).

have a woman living with him. Why did Nerval borrow this implausible story from William Lane[1]? Is it not in order to motivate the half-heartedness of the search for a woman? The Nerval of the 'Voyage' presents the curious spectacle of a man looking for something he evidently does not want to find. The Nerval of 1846 is combining two opposites: on the one hand the fact that, after all, he did not marry while he was in the Middle East (with corresponding feelings of inadequacy); and on the other hand the retrospective wish that he had done so. Hence the autobiographical hero carries on a pseudo-quest. He passively allows negotiations to be entered into on his behalf but despite a certain curiosity, he prevaricates and invariably finds reasons (sometimes contradictory) for not concluding the contract. He takes care to insist on conditions that cannot be satisfied.

There is a strong idea that he will never succeed with women so long as he retains European dress and attitudes. True, the "affreux vêtements noirs" (118) give him a certain distinction (120), and he is advised to keep them by an old painter who also tells him that it would be absurd and unnecessary to marry a local woman, since a bedfellow can easily be picked up in the streets (119). But the black clothes attract unwelcome attention from the dogs (118 and 120), and excite the hilarity of some negress slaves enough to make him feel ridiculous (160 and 172). Nerval was

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[1] See the conclusions of Auriant, quoted in the Notes to 'Inconvénients du célibat', II, 1301-2. J. Richer notes that Nerval's plagiarism of Lane is personal and creative rather than slavish: "La connaissance directe que l'écrivain a eue de l'Egypte lui a permis de choisir dans l'ouvrage de Lane ce qui répondait le mieux à son propos et à ses impressions" ('Expérience', 360). We note that it is Nerval's context which makes the story implausible.

sensitive to possible ridicule of his person on the part of pretty women. In the same year as he published 'Les Esclaves' (1846), he writes up an encounter in Brussels with an attractive woman at whose house he had called to ask the way. Perhaps she thought his earnest request for directions was a pretext to get into conversation; or perhaps, as he suggests, his own embarrassed demeanour amused her: in any case, he could not help noticing a mocking little smile that hovered on the corners of her lips, and as he went out, he thought he heard a laugh. His discomfiture was completed when he caught his coat tails in the door and was left stranded on the step, unable to reach the bell, too aware of his own threatened dignity to take his coat off and afraid above all of making an even greater fool of himself in the eyes of the mocking lady. This is a touching and revealing passage. Nerval felt gauche and ridiculous with women, at any rate on occasion; afraid of their mockery, conscious that his dignity hung by a thread, he would become even stiffer and more awkward[1].

The old painter's advice is balanced by that of a travelling-companion, Soliman-Aga, who recommends that Nerval should become a Moslem and marry a Moslem wife (111-113). He smiles at the idea, but promises to think about it. And when he is confronted by the (apparently) Turkish husband of two veiled women he has followed, he has a sudden absurd impulse: "j'épouse, je prends le turban" (123). The story ends in farce:

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[1] II, 909-910: 'Lettres sur la Belgique'. Although the incident presumably took place earlier (1840 or 1844), it was written up at a time when the fear of being ridiculous to women was evidently preoccupying him.

"ce brave Turc était un Français comme moi," and the two women are his French wife and sister. But in the end, he has his appearance Orientalised, undergoing a "transformation complète": his head is shaved, he dresses in Oriental clothes. Ostensibly, this is so that he will pass unnoticed in the crowd. But he wants also to change himself, and the words "transformer, transfigurer" keep coming to his pen: "Je sortis enfin de chez le barbier, transfiguré, ravi de ne plus souiller une ville pittoresque de l'aspect d'un paletot-sac et d'un chapeau rond" (166).

He hopes to leave his old self behind with the dreary nineteenth century clothes. As a European, he feels awkward and rather ridiculous. His Oriental costume gives him (at first) a new confidence. He will even claim that by turning Oriental he will be able to recover the youthful attractiveness which in Europe has somehow slipped away and been wasted (see below, pp. 239-40). Nerval is casting himself in yet another role whose hero may, by this transformation, be able to achieve the success with women that he himself has never known. Yet beneath the embroidered coat and the wide trousers of blue cotton there is still the same old Nerval. A change of clothing is not, after all, a change of skin. He remains nervous about his ability to command a woman's respect. Even when he has decided that a slave will be more convenient than a wife, he still appears reluctant to find what he is ostensibly looking for.

With the slave Zeynab, Nerval draws a convincing portrait of an actual relationship. It is true that in the 'Voyage en Orient' he attributes to himself the purchase of a slave which was really made by his travelling-companion Fonfrède. But Nerval and Fonfrède shared the same

house in Cairo, and it would appear from letter 97 that Nerval felt the slave was a joint responsibility. The main difference here between reality and fictionalised narrative is that Fonfrède is left out of the picture; so that the Nerval of the 'Voyage' is more closely implicated with the slave than the real Nerval would have been[1]. We have what is almost a portrait of the domestic trials of married life.

Life with Zeynab causes Nerval more bother than pleasure. From the very beginning, he is jealous of even the most casual and incidental males, in whom he sees potential rivals: the slave-dealer, his Jewish friend Yousouf, his guide and interpreter Abdallah, a couple of Turkish household officers, the cook. He cuts a clumsy, portentous and rather ridiculous figure, and his dealings with her are a series of misunderstandings. His notions of what she is like are literary and conventional, comically at odds with the reality[2]. She clearly does not share his notions of Oriental fatalism, or indeed any other notions. She is a brainless, self-willed little chatterbox. While Nerval is thinking about Hindu mythology and pantoums, she is scheming naïvely to get some new clothes. Despite her childlike charm, which comes out especially in the French lesson (he gets her to say "Ze souis one bétit sovaze"), it soon becomes clear that he has made a bad mistake. She refuses to work, and instead of saving

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1. J.-M. Carré claims that "Zeynab a été, successivement et peut-être simultanément, la maîtresse des deux voyageurs " (Nerval and Fonfrède), concluding that Fonfrède passed her on to Nerval when they left Egypt. (J.-M. Carré, vol. ii, 22). But Nerval states in Letter 97 that the three of them left Cairo together, and Carré's theory that Nerval "took over" the slave (on the grounds that he offered her to Gautier) remains conjectural. It is very possible that with Fonfrède, too, Nerval was the "odd man out".

2. Nerval gives us two contrasting images of the girl: Zeynab as he now sees her to be; and Zeynab as he saw her with the eye of illusion.

him money as he had hoped, involves him in considerable extra expense. Having tried unsuccessfully to get rid of her, he is eventually forced to cut short his stay in Cairo and take her with him. The uncertainty and insecurity of his position comes to a head on the journey to Beirut. The supposed rival is a good-looking young Armenian scribe.

Nerval is drawn to the young man initially because his voice, singing a nostalgic folksong, reminds him of his own nostalgia. The boy's appearance strengthens the network of associations still further: "C'était un beau garçon aux traits circassiens, à l'oeil noir, avec un teint blanc et des cheveux blonds" (257). In 'Angélique' does not Nerval state that the original race of Franks (which he feels he himself belongs to) are "issus généralement de la race caucasienne"?[1]. Nerval's fascination with this person, which in the 'Voyage en Orient' he never really explains, is evidently a result of a deeply felt, perhaps unconscious affinity. The young man's features are clear-cut, and he has the beauty of "(les) races nées au berceau du monde" (287). He is another version of Nerval himself, belonging in the peculiarly Nervalian sense to a pure race whose folksongs are pregnant with an unstated nostalgia for what is lost. We are reminded that during the early stages of the 1841 attack, it was a young boy who, either in reality or in hallucination, sang the "vieux airs du village" which took him back to the family memories of childhood (J.Richer, 'Expérience et création', 427.)

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1. (I, 231). The Franks represent Nerval's ideal of the ancient race which has retained an original freedom, equality and purity of manners. He himself felt that he sprang from this race, through his mother: "Issu, par ma mère, des paysans des premières communes franches" (I, 456).

Yet this is not a simple case of unconscious identification. The equivocal nature of the boy's almost contralto voice is carried over into his appearance[1]: the dark eyes and fair hair refer us at once to Nerval's favourite feminine type, the "blonde aux yeux noirs" of 'Fantaisie'. His features have a feminine delicacy, and at the height of his jealousy Nerval will see him as a girl in disguise (287). He never responded to Zeynab as he does to this young man.

The attraction is the result of a sort of unconscious narcissism. This is strengthened by the fact that the boy is a writer like himself. He carries an inkhorn in his belt instead of the usual array of offensive weapons. "Je me sentis tout à coup plein de bienveillance pour ce confrère, et j'avais quelque honte de l'attirail guerrier qui, au contraire, dissimulait ma profession" (258). Later on he defends the lad against the contemptuous hostility of the janissary who is acting as his guide. The janissary dismisses the young man scornfully as "un de ces vagabonds qui écrivent des vers et autres sottises" (258). Nerval refrains from admitting that he too belongs to this category. But the feeling of solidarity is there, expressed cogently in the title of this chapter: 'Un Compagnon'. The young man appears to Nerval as a freer version of himself, who has no need for janissaries and the "attirail guerrier" of the bourgeois tourist.

It is quite possible that this identification involves a sort of latent homosexuality. The pattern of Nerval's feeling for the Armenian

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1. Cf Gautier's poem on the hermaphroditic charms of the contralto voice, suggesting that, as so often, Nerval's material derives partly from a literary theme held in common with his friend.

closely follows that of his ambivalent attitude to his friends. Identification contains both hostility and narcissistic love. The other man will do Nerval's loving for him. He is at once another self to be cherished and a rival to be envied. But the pattern shifts. As Nerval grows older, his attitude to the successful alter ego, fraternal in works like 'Le Magnétiseur', becomes paternal. The other man is an image of his own youth, like a son who may vicariously realise the happiness the middle-aged Nerval has never found. The pattern of later works like 'Le Marquis de Fayolle' and 'Les Confidences de Nicolas' is here already established. Once again one sees how Nerval's material, whether it comes from literary sources, from his own biography or the biography of another man, is powerfully shaped into recurrent patterns by his continuing imaginative preoccupations.

For a moment, the irony of reality obtrudes to puncture the superimposed imaginative scheme. The "nostalgic folksong" turns out to be no more than a "sotte chanson politique" (261). And it is clear that the Armenian, so far from returning Nerval's sympathy, is simply taking advantage of the chance of a free passage to Beirut.

Nevertheless, it is Nerval's imaginary view of the situation which dictates the course of the narration of the journey to Beirut: his sense of inadequacy vis-à-vis Zeynab, the feeling that his role is being taken over by the younger man. Nerval's uneasiness[1] is apparent from the beginning of the voyage.

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[1] The account is based on fact - compare Letter 98.

He is as usual over-conscious of his dignity, and on the look-out for threats to it. When he first catches sight of the vessel, it is with a little shock of dismay at its unwieldy and unseaworthy appearance. He looks at the men rowing the boat which is taking him out to the larger ship: "nulle idée railleuse ne perçait sous le masque bronzé des rameurs" (262). Clearly he is in need of reassurance. His anxiety is indicated not so much by any explicit statement as by a proliferation of minor detail and incident which could easily be missed in the vivid briskness of the narrative.

The title of one of the chapters, 'Andare sul mare', reveals his preoccupation. This comes from a Hoffmann story, 'Doge und Dogaresse', one of those translated by Egmont in 1836:

"Ah senza amare	(translated as:	"Suivre sur la mer
Andare sul mare		L'époux de la mer
Col sposo del mare		Las! ne peut charmer
Non può consolare"		Coeur privé d'aimer").

In context, it refers to a young wife, who is in love with another man, going in a boat with her eighty-year-old husband, who has been given the title of "sposo del mare". This is probably a reference, either conscious or unconscious, to Nerval's own situation: he is older than Zeynab, afraid she does not find him attractive even though he is her legal master, anxious lest she should be more interested in another, younger, man.

There are threats to his rights over Zeynab from the ship's crew, also. A linguistic misunderstanding leads Captain Nicolas, a wily Greek, to suppose that Nerval is sexually interested in the cabin-boy, and he offers

to exchange the boy for Zeynab. Worse, Nerval's ownership of the slave is contested by a religious fanatic on board. Nerval at first, though obviously uncomfortable, minimises the danger, but when his admonitions are ignored he reacts with uncharacteristic violence, seizing her arm and throwing her down on a pile of sacks. For a moment, things look dangerous. But the pistol Nerval automatically pulls out is not a serious offensive weapon, and in any case it is unloaded. The captain intervenes, rather wearily, the slave whimpers, the Armenian tries to smooth things over. The brief tension relaxes. Nerval's shaky command of the situation is restored by the display of a letter of introduction to an important Turkish official. His punishment of the slave after this seems unnecessarily harsh: he cloisters her in a cabin no larger than a locker, crawling with large red cockroaches, from which he himself had recoiled in horror.

But the centre of his insecurity is his jealousy of the young Armenian. This young man rouses Zeynab to an animation which Nerval himself has not been able to command, and he realises with regret how much his inability to speak her language (and, one might add, the awkwardness of his relations with her) has deprived him of (266). At first he reassures himself that their chatter is quite innocent. But one senses that he is not altogether at ease. He pretends not to notice them, feigning an absorbing interest in the captain's game of chess, but really he is peeping sideways trying to interpret their facial expressions, his ears cocked to catch the odd word in their conversation. Here again, he protests too much, piling one reason on another in his attempt to persuade

himself that all is well, that there is no cause for jealousy. Yet he talks about his position in terms which clearly reveal the way his mind is tending: "Je me comparais mentalement à ces époux aimables qui, dans une soirée, s'asseyent aux tables de jeu, laissant causer ou danser sans inquiétude les femmes et les jeunes gens" (267).

The crisis comes when they are waiting in quarantine before being allowed into Beirut. Nerval's lurking suspicions are brought out into the open by a hint from Captain Nicolas. At first he rejects the suggestion "avec une incrédulité marquée" (286). But "le soupçon me resta dans l'esprit, attaquant tout au moins ma vanité" (286). Nerval is already in a frame of mind to entertain such suspicions, and they make rapid inroads. Since the scene on the Santa Barbara, his relations with Zeynab have been, not unnaturally, rather strained. In fact, he says now, they had been permanently estranged: "Il s'était dit entre nous un de ces mots irréparables dont a parlé l'auteur d'Adolphe" (286). It is significant that the reminiscence is a literary one. Nothing had been said about "mots irréparables" at the time the incident was narrated. One has the feeling that Nerval has decided that the quarrel was irreparable just at the moment when he glimpses a way of bringing the relationship to an end. The reminiscence from 'Adolphe' is an unconscious preparation for what is to come.

In no time at all he has half persuaded himself that Zeynab resents belonging to a man of inferior race, although he cannot fully accept this idea, seeing that she is almost too naïve to be capable of dissimulation,

and too deeply religious to harbour such base sentiments. (The first point seems to fit the picture of her character we have been given; the second belongs to Nerval's rather literary, fanciful conception of her). Even if she does not resent belonging to him, there are positive reasons for supposing that she is interested in the Armenian. He is young, amusing, attractive, whereas Nerval, when he tries to speak her language, feels he must appear to her "comme un Anglais, un homme du Nord, froid et lourd, relativement à une femme de mon pays" (287). He is like Arnolphe[1], tyrannical, morbidly suspicious, repulsive as a lover, odious as a master.

Imagination leads rapidly from suspicion to near-certainty, reinforced now that the underlying sense of his own inadequacy, always latent, has been clearly formulated. There is almost a quality of hallucination in this excellent notation of the workings of jealousy: "De ce moment, l'avouerai-je? il me sembla remarquer des serrements de main, des paroles tendres, que ne gênait même pas ma présence" (287). What follows makes it clear that this was a result of auto-suggestion. Nerval decides to do the magnanimous thing, and there is a scene of pure fantasy. He begins to question the Armenian about his prospects, like any respectable father whose daughter has been spoken for. Full of a sense of his own generosity, he brushes aside the news that the young man is penniless: "Je pris les mains de l'Arménien, et je lui dis: 'Elle vous plaît ... épousez-la, elle est à vous!' " He is aware that he is play-acting, wishing that there could be spectators to appreciate "cette scène

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[1] The second time the comparison has been made - cf: "si la garde d'une femme est difficile pour un mari, que ne sera-ce pas pour un maître! C'est la position d'Arnolphe ou de George Dandin" (186).

émouvante, ... ce tableau patriarcal". When the lad simply looks flabbergasted, the veneer of "magnanimity" peels away: " 'Comment! lui dis-je, malheureux, tu hésites! ... Tu séduis une femme qui est à un autre, tu la détournes de ses devoirs, et ensuite tu ne veux pas t'en charger quand on te la donne?' " (288).

But the scandalised protests of Zeynab and the young man soon bring him to his senses. Changing his mind with the lightning speed of a man whose assessment of the situation rests not on observation but on subjective impulse, he sees the mistake he made: "Ainsi la capitaine Nicolas m'avait induit en toute sorte de suppositions ridicules ... On reconnait bien là l'esprit astucieux des Grecs!" (288). But it was not really Captain Nicolas who invented the story; he did no more than put a name to a vague suspicion that had been lurking in Nerval's mind since he first saw how Zeynab responded to the young man. He has been caught, Othello-like, in the web of his own suspicions; the whole episode was innocent in itself. It was Nerval's own sense of inadequacy that set his imagination working and produced the fantasy of a secret love affair between the two young people, giving it at the end almost the force of hallucination.

Feeling too old and too clumsy in his own person to attract Zeynab, he transfers the role of lover to a young man with whom he closely identifies himself, inventing a story about the situation in which he sentimentally shares the young man's happiness by adopting the magnanimous paternal role. Yet in the end the whole imaginative substructure is swept away by Nerval's lucid self-consciousness[1].

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[1] However, the plan to marry her off seems in the end to have been carried out, for in a footnote to the 1851 edition of the 'Voyage', Nerval tells his readers that "l'esclave indienne (sic)... est aujourd'hui mariée dans une ville de Syrie, et son sort paraît être heureusement fixé" (II, 694).

Of course, the intention of becoming Zeynab's lover is never avowed. But the references to Arnolphe reveal that Nerval is seeing himself in the same role as Molière's amorous domestic tyrant. And the threat to his rights as a master comes from a (supposed) rivalry which is sexual. By the impulse to marry Zeynab to a man who in one sense is a younger version of himself, Nerval is giving expression to the unstated wish that he had been more to Zeynab than a master. But this can only achieve a negative formulation: his sense of his own unattractiveness, the Armenian's scandalised denial of sexual interest and, later, Nerval's equally shocked rejection of the suggestion that he should marry the girl himself (347).

And now a familiar process is set in motion: as the chances of a successful outcome with one woman decline, so a new possibility is given increasing prominence. There is an interlocking pattern of possibilities which cancel one another out. A retrospective significance is attached to encounters which at the time seemed without importance; the autobiographical hero is never left entirely forlorn, but is always faced with a number of potential wives or mistresses, any one of whom would, if the matter were pursued singlemindedly, prove to be unsuitable, but who provide a sort of collective illusion that one day he may find happiness. This is a continuation of a pattern I noted in 'Les Amours de Vienne'.

As he becomes more and more disappointed with Zeynab, so his acquaintance with Mme Bonhomme[1] is built up until in retrospect it seems like a

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1. Keeper of a General Store, manageress of a cabinet de lecture and amateur actress. Her original does not appear to have been traced. J.-M. Carré implies that Nerval invented her (Carré, II, 26), but the circumstantial detail with which she is presented makes it more likely that she is a real person arbitrarily invested with a role like that of Jenny Colon. Nerval's idealisation of her contrasts oddly with the sturdy practicality which, we may assume, belonged to the real-life original. Again, it is Nerval himself who shows us both sides of the coin.

full-scale love-affair. He first sees her acting in a vaudeville at the Théâtre du Caire, noticing her only because her blond complexion makes a refreshing contrast to the negress slaves he has been inspecting. There is no more than the merest hint here that she corresponds to an ideal (164), but, precisely at the point when his relations with Zeynab are beginning to prove difficult, he begins to attribute to her a role exactly like the one Jenny Colon had played ten years before: "Je n'avais vu encore madame Bonhomme que dans la fameuse représentation d'amateurs ... mais le vaudeville qu'elle avait joué lui prêtait à mes yeux les qualités d'une excellente et obligeante personne. Le théâtre a cela de particulier, qu'il vous donne l'illusion de connaître parfaitement une inconnue. De là les grandes passions qu'inspirent les actrices, tandis qu'on ne s'éprend guère, en général, des femmes qu'on n'a fait que voir de loin. Si l'actrice a ce privilège d'exposer à tous un idéal que l'imagination de chacun interprète et réalise à son gré, pourquoi ne pas reconnaître chez une jolie, et, si vous voulez même, une vertueuse marchande, cette fonction généralement bienveillante, et pour ainsi dire initiatrice, qui ouvre à l'étranger des relations utiles et charmantes?" (191). The (extremely shrewd) general comment about falling in love with actresses, which clearly refers to his own experience with Jenny Colon, gives his interest in Mme Bonhomme the context of a love-affair.

As the possibility of a satisfactory relationship with Zeynab continues to fade, the assimilation is made even more closely. In a lyrical passage inspired by the prospect of their final meeting, he

reveals that Mme Bonhomme belongs to the famous reddish-blond Venetian-Flemish type (233-34). What was no more than a casual acquaintance is inflated into "un regret et un souvenir". This is the invention of the past actually taking place. As Nerval travels, he collects, not actual adventures, but the memory of imagined adventures. Later still, when the memory has mingled with that of other, overlapping "love-affairs", it crystallises into its final shape: what he regrets most about Egypt is now "une femme ...à jamais perdue" (438)[1]. This can only refer to Mme Bonhomme. In the melting-pot of memory, her image has fused with that of another woman loved and lost, Jenny Colon.

Another hypothetical alternative to Zeynab is Saléma. After the show-down with the slave-girl Nerval has retreated into a benevolently paternal attitude (345-46). Thus when it is suggested that he might marry Zeynab, he produces a plethora of reasons for not doing so (347). The unnecessarily elaborate explanation for his refusal reveals that he is at once very interested and appalled by the prospect. But at precisely the moment when the idea of marriage is broached, he meets Saléma, to whom, later, he will become engaged. Then, before deciding, as he will, that he cannot marry Saléma either (II, 436-37), he disinters yet another forgotten possibility. The last we heard of the Italian lady of 'Les Amours de Vienne' was that they had had an interview <u>tête-à-tête</u>: but the situation was left in mid-air. Now, when he is waiting to marry Saléma, the Vienna <u>affaire</u> is given a retrospective build-up.

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[1]. The same phrase will be applied to the actress: I, 99 & I, 389.

We learn from various link-passages written in 1849[1], about eight years after the original articles, that although the affaire turned out badly, it was serious enough to have kept him in Vienna all winter, and even perhaps for ever. Thus before cutting off the story of his engagement to Saléma he goes back and invents yet another possibility - no longer available, it is true, but one which now looms large as a very serious business, no doubt marriage, which might have changed his entire life.

The invention of a "real" past is a strange and contradictory process. When Nerval is introduced to a prospective bride of tender years, he notes that "(elle) ressemblait tellement à sa mère qu'on pouvait se rendre compte, d'après la figure de cette dernière, du caractère futur de sa beauté" (132). He is attracted not by the daughter alone, but by the daughter as an image of the rejuvenated mother, by an impossible amalgam of the two: "on pouvait prévoir entre ces deux âges une saison qu'il serait doux de voir fleurir" (133). He toys with the idea of bringing up the girl, Arnolphe-like, to be his wife. Instead of the experience of love itself, Nerval dreams of a literary substitute for experience. Is this not another form of the idea of arranging one's life like a novel, living a love that one invents and shapes according to one's fancy? When faced with a real situation, Nerval asks himself what might be made of it if one could live life as one imagines it.

The invention of a "real" past is a veneer spread thinly over the preoccupations with the dream-world which continue to haunt Nerval. His

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1. II, 64-65 and 93.

fancy about the mother and daughter reverts to the impossible union with a young girl who represents his mother. Even before the quest for the wife begins, Nerval has already evolved an image of Oriental marriage, and in particular Mohammedan marriage, which militates against any desire for fulfilment or possession. Moslem marriage is seen as a dream come true, as a union with the ideal woman, however illusory, as a foretaste of union with the Goddess[1]. Thus the longing for the transcendental love intrudes even in the process of re-creating, or inventing, the "real" past. At the very outset of the quest for a woman, there is a passage proclaiming the objective validity of dream-experience: "Il est certain que le sommeil est une autre vie dont il faut tenir compte"[2]; and he goes on to suggest that the importance and the reality of dreams are recognised in the Orient.

Behind every woman Nerval meets there is a range of association and imagination which continually refers one across to the other side of his creative endeavour: the search for an Ideal Woman belonging to the sphere of the dream. Even Zeynab is not simply herself. When he meets her there is a sense of recognition: he has seen the type before, in Dutch paintings (176). He thinks of her as representative of Oriental women in general (215). The Armenian (in Nerval's initial fanciful conception) is an image of his dream-self. Mme Bonhomme is a sturdy enough figure, with

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1. See 'Une Noce aux flambeaux', and II, 113.

2. II, 108. Cf 'Aurélia': "Le Rêve est une seconde vie" (I, 363). It is important to notice that this claim is already being made in 1846. We may certainly assume, with K. Haedens, that the <u>contes</u> inserted in the 'Voyage' and written during this period incorporate the vivid material of Nerval's dream-life.

her vigorous business sense; but she is also a re-incarnation of the famous Type, just as Katty had been. When writing the descriptions of her Nerval must surely have had in mind the notes he had already made in the little book he brought back from the Middle East: "Poursuivre les mêmes traits dans des femmes diverses. Amoureux d'un type éternel" (II, 706). Behind the reality, he is pursuing phantoms, whether in Vienna or the Middle East. Even a nubile girl who attracts him does so because she too is another version of the Jenny Colon type (II, 129-30). What is more, she is associated, as Jenny had been associated, with the Queen of Sheba, since she reminds him of "une jeune reine éclose au pays du matin".

The dichotomy between dream and reality, between literature as re-invention of the past and literature as projection of visionary experience, resolves into a single, continuous imaginative pattern whose guiding lines are those of the dream-experience. Nerval can see himself as a potential lover only when he has become (at least in appearance) a member of the chosen race. Yet it is the Armenian who shares Zeynab's culture and can speak her language and who, in his youth and innocence, has a right to the girl. Despite the fancy dress, Nerval remains a clumsy foreigner, belonging to the wrong side, to an inferior race. Only by the device of identification with the rival can he avoid the sense of exclusion, thus creating a re-arranged image of the united mystical family, with himself now in the paternal role. But this subjective construction is deflated by the ironical contrast of a belatedly recognised reality. He is not Arnolphe, Zeynab is not Agnès, the Armenian is not Horace. The idea of

family reunion is a fancy which has nothing to do with fact. And so Nerval, in the story of his relations with Saléma, will explore the possibilities of turning his back on reality altogether and living his life as a dream.

CHAPTER X

SALENA, SETALMULC, SABA

Nerval's two images of himself derive from deep but conflicting needs. 'Les Amours de Vienne' and the Zeynab story, for all the ironical self-deprecation, reflect his wish that he had been an effective lover in a practical and accepted sense, whereas works like 'La Forêt noire' derive from his need to affirm the validity of the supernatural experience. But neither aim can be carried through to its logical conclusion. 'La Forêt noire' and 'Le Roman tragique' both describe an attempt to live the dream within the limits of reality. Behind the adventures in Vienna and the Middle East, on the other hand, one senses the lure of the dream. And beneath the dichotomy of dream and reality there is a single imaginative pattern. Although the sphere of action of Fritz in Vienna and Nerval in Cairo is that of real life, their stories tend to conform to the imaginative preoccupations of Nerval the visionary.

Thus Kléber Haedens can claim that Nerval, in the 'Voyage en Orient', is deliberately setting up a façade of easy travelogue in order to conceal deeper preoccupations which appear in a disguised form in the two contes[1]. After 1841 he was serenely convinced that the world of his dreams and visions was the "real" world, in which his "real" destiny was played out. Haedens presents this as a voluntary choice between two courses of action. Nerval chose the world of 'Aurélia', and if in the 'Voyage' he carefully

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1. 'L'Histoire du Calife Hakem' (1847, II, 362) and 'L'Histoire de la Reine du Matin et de Soliman Prince des Génies' (1850, II, 509). I refer to these as 'Hakem' and 'Soliman' respectively.

concealed it beneath the trappings of reportage, it was only to prevent his friends from worrying. 'Hakem' is an exact account of his spiritual destiny, a preview of "le cours inflexible de la vie qu'il s'est tracée"[1].

There are two objections to this theory. Firstly, Nerval is committed to the real as well as to the supernatural. Secondly, Haedens' scheme is too simple. It would be more accurate to say that the 'Voyage' presents three layers of meaning. At the top is the Zeynab story, the travel-writer's account of what he saw and did. The deepest level is that of the contes, legends which incorporate a disguised account of Nerval's visionary experience. In the middle, combining the other two, is the Saléma story; here Nerval re-writes his life as though it had coincided with his dream-destiny.

It is true that at first sight the Saléma story seems to belong to the same level as the Zeynab episode[2]. Both are pieces in an interlocking pattern of love-possibilities. But behind Saléma, there is more than the wish to establish a normal, realisable relationship within accepted limitations. From the first glimpse he has of her, there is a hint of something special. She is "une gracieuse apparition" (a phrase which in later works like 'Le Marquis de Fayolle' and 'Sylvie' is invested with

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1. K. Haedens, 102. Cf a similar distinction in Richard's 'Géographie magique de Nerval', 578. But Richard goes on to say that Nerval's world consists of superimposed layers of reality.

2. There is of course constant interpenetration between the levels. The travel-writer's seemingly most casual observations take on a deeper significance from the dream, of which sometimes they seem to be no more than the reflections. Nerval as a conscientious traveller sends back descriptions of the gardens at Rodda (Letter 97 as well as the 'Voyage', 197 ff); but these same gardens form the background for Yousouf's love for the celestial Sétalmulc, in 'Hakem'.

magic); there is a glimpse of blond hair and "des mains blanches aux doigts effilés, avec ces ongles longs qui indiquent la race" (II, 344). The hint contained in the word "race" is very important. When she is presented to Nerval, he notes "des traits où la blancheur européenne s'alliait au dessin pur de ce type aquilin qui, en Asie, comme chez nous, a quelque chose de royal" (348)[1]. In the deep part of Nerval's mind where all things are one, Saléma and her father are identified as members of the chosen race.

Saléma belongs to the Druse nation. It appears at first that Nerval cannot be united with her, but gradually the obstacles are removed, the hidden providential pattern emerges, and their true affinities are revealed. Nerval is a Christian, a profane foreigner - hence, the wrong self, belonging to the race of outsiders. As in 'La Forêt noire', the girl's father at first angrily resists the claim to recognition (429-430). But the Druse faith is "un syncrétisme de toutes les religions et de toutes les philosophies antérieures" (358), symbolised by the castle at Beit-Eddin, "païen par ses colonnes et ses peintures, chrétien par ses tours et ses ogives, musulman par ses dômes et ses kiosques" (428-29). And Nerval, by mingling personal fantasy with pseudo-history, discovers a deep affiliation stretching back to the Middle Ages: he is the son of a Freemason[2]; the Druses, through the Knights Templar, are the Freemasons

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1. Cf Georges in 'Le Marquis de Fayolle'.

2. We may tentatively accept the Pléiade editors' suggestion that Nerval's claim that his father was a Mason is probably founded in fact. (See Note to chapter vi of '<u>Les Akkals</u>. - <u>L'Anti-Liban</u>', Letters 258 & 341, and the article by G.-H. Luquet, which concludes that Nerval's knowledge of masonic rituals came from his reading of eighteenth century sources). This includes Dr. Labrunie in the web of family relationships. Cf Richer, 'Expérience et création', 387-88.

of the Orient. Thus Nerval's "diplôme maçonnique" is recognised and he is admitted as a novice to their community (433-34). Ancient links, which may also have been family ties[1], between the French and the Druse nations are re-established. All the pieces of evidence suddenly fall into place: "mon rêve absurde devient ma vie" (432).

The story is devised to incorporate the essential points of the visionary experience of 1841. In the mountains of the Lebanon Nerval found, outstanding in contrast to the vulgar and variegated population of the coastal towns, a grave, dignified race (425-56), which clearly corresponds to the chosen race of 'Aurélia' who dwell on the heights, and whose proud serenity sets them apart (I, 373)[2]. Both races preserve in their unadulterated purity the innocent traditions of a golden age. In a Druse village, he observes the same collective identity, in which shared features seem to pass from one face to another, as in the family of 'Aurélia' (II, 322 and I, 376-77). Nerval's identification with the sheik and his daughter belongs to the same preoccupation: "il me paraissait à peine plus âgé que moi. Des traits nobles et mâles traduisaient dans un autre sexe la physionomie de sa fille; le timbre pénétrant de sa voix me frappait fortement pour la même raison" (II, 355). The moving effect of a remembered voice also parallels 'Aurélia' (I, 377 - compare Letter 313). And, as in the 1841 visions, the emphasis is not so much on personal union

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1. When the Druse prince Fakardin visited the court of the Medicis: "on voulut voir en lui le descendant de quelques vieux croisés réfugiés dans le Liban à l'époque de Saint Louis; on chercha dans le nom même du peuple druse un rapport d'allitération qui conduisit à le faire descendre d'un certain comte de Dreux" (302).

2. See also Letter 85 (31 March 1841).

with an individual, as on admission to the collective identity of the race. The deepest relationship is with the paternal other self. Here Nerval himself takes the role ascribed to the young Armenian in the Zeynab story. But whereas there the story was based on a firm reference to accepted standards of plausibility, so that the scheme broke down in the face of the Armenian's scandalised incredulity, here, where the story is geared to Nerval's visionary conception, the identification is accepted.

This section of the 'Voyage' also reproduces the 1841 idea of two races engaged in fratricidal strife. When Nerval joins the Maronites' punitive expedition against the Druse villages, he is in the now familiar position of fighting against those to whom he most deeply belongs. Yet once, the two peoples lived together in amity, and their divisions are fostered mainly by competing foreign powers (337-39). The Maronites, like the Druses, live a simple life in their mountain villages, and if it were not for their distressing dissensions, both races would be able to retain their original proud independence. Thus, just as Nerval's projected marriage will renew the broken ties between the French and the Druse nations, so there is the unstated hope that one day the Maronites (identified, in a revealing, if humorous, aside, with the Crusaders[1]) and Druses will also be reconciled. Once again, the conditions of the visionary experience are fulfilled: the original harmony of the world, shattered by the division of

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1. II, 339. Further points of contact are: the Druse doctrine that warring spirits intervene in the world's affairs by taking on a human incarnation (II, 358 - cf I, 367); the sense that Nerval's destiny, usually hidden, is showing glimpses, by seemingly trivial signs, of its pattern (II, 351-52 - cf I, 365); transmigration of the soul through magnetism (II, 360 - cf I, 368).

mankind into two hostile races, will be restored by their final reconciliation (see above, p.161f).

As in the dreams of 'Aurélia', the experience involves a rejuvenation that is at once individual and universal. Saléma, with her marks of royalty - the aquiline nose, the tapering fingers - is the Queen of Sheba, who presides at the birth of the human race (I, 422-23). She will realise Nerval's longing for union with "quelque fille ingénue de ce sol sacré qui est notre première patrie à tous", which will enable him to take renewed strength from "ces sources vivifiantes de l'humanité, d'où ont découlé la poésie et les croyances de nos pères!" (342) This is a return to the pure sources of human life in all its simplicity, beauty and vitality[1]. But it is also a return to Nerval's lost youth: "je me refaisais jeune à ce berceau du monde, jeune encore au sein de cette jeunesse éternelle" (351). The Druses are not only a chosen race surviving intact from an age of innocence; they are also simple villagers, and at the time of writing (1847) Nerval was already beginning to return to the Valois villages where his own lost childhood might still be found,

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1. See also 'Le Matin et le soir', in which Nerval brings in an elaborate, half-humorous dialectic to justify his hopes of recapturing in the Middle East the youthfulness and powers of attraction which had failed to reach fruition in Europe.

The Lebanon is only one of a number of regions felt to be a mother-country in which the human race originated. When the Druse village women offer him milk with the words "tourid leben?", he connects the idea of a life-giving source with the German leben (life), reminding us of "la vieille Allemagne, notre mère à tous" (II, 743). Germany has a special claim to veneration, since it is associated with his own mother (e.g. II, 740). Other cradles of humanity are: Egypt, "la terre antique et maternelle où notre Europe, à travers le monde grec et romain, sent remonter ses origines" (II, 181); Greece - "ce sont les os puissants de cette vieille mère (la nôtre à tous)"; the Lebanon itself - "le berceau même de toutes les croyances du monde" (II, 312).

to the idyllic and privileged region which in the dreams of 1841 had appeared in the guise of paradise[1].

As he recounts the story of his engagement to Saléma, Nerval has the recurring sense that he is reliving the past. The image of the broken clock, indicating the accelerated repetition of past time, comes in to link the experience with the exemplary destiny of Faust, enacted at once through history, with its recurrent cycles, and beyond it[2]. His union with Saléma takes place in the context of the idea that the feudal civilisation laid in the Middle East by the Templars once united Europe and the Orient. This comes out in apparently innocuous observations: we are told that the architecture of Beyrouth gives the country "un aspect féodal et en même temps européen" (285); or that it possesses "la physionomie d'une ville arabe de l'époque des croisades" (295). Again and again, in the course of touristic description, there are traces of this underlying sense of re-living a past in which Europe and the Middle East were closely united[3]. There are even episodes which did not stand out

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1. Cf J. Richer, 'Expérience et création', 290, and J.-P. Richard: "pour Nerval ... toute sensation authentique rajeunit ... Chaque spectacle émouvant nous ramène à la fois à un 'berceau du monde' et aux sources personnelles de notre vie, à un état d'enfance commun à l'homme et à la terre" ('Géographie magique de Nerval', 29).

2. Cf "Il y a des moments où la vie multiplie ses pulsations en dépit des lois du temps, comme une horloge folle dont la chaîne est brisée" (II, 425) with the quotation from the Preface to 'Faust' II, above, p. 160.

3. See 289, 291, 302, 315, 413 etc. On the sense of living in a past age, see also 307-8, and on the similarity of the Lebanon to Nerval's own native land, see 283 ("nuages de ma patrie"), 324 ("(le) Liban une petite Europe"), 334 ("ces choses de l'Europe"). See also below, p. 244.

particularly when we first read them, but which when viewed with hindsight reveal something like an identification with the Druses. Nerval walking alone through Beyrouth at siesta time remembers that the Druse warriors once took advantage of this undefended moment to occupy the town (296). Beneath the surface of the Saléma story, unstated but pervasive, is the idea that he is re-enacting a crucial phase of history.

We may suppose that, as Gautier suggests, the story of Saléma is a semi-imaginary structure built on a slender real-life experience[1]. The girl is simply a starting-point for fantasy, the heroine of an autobiographical novel. Nerval tells us nothing that places her as an individual in the way that Zeynab is placed. Details like the slim, tapering fingers belong not to reality but to the dream-type, and recur in the contes. Nerval is re-writing the story of his life as though it were a novel - a novel designed to realise in detail the essential pattern of the dream-experience. And this enterprise, which is in reality retrospective, is projected back to the time of the actual experience: "j'aime à conduire ma vie comme un roman", he tells us (342), introducing the same voluntary confusion between living one's life and imagining it, as was already present in the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon'[2]. He claims to have been doing then what he is really doing now as he writes: shaping his experience to

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1. Gautier calls it "ce petit roman oriental, moitié réel, moitié imaginaire, comme toute la vie et toute l'oeuvre de Gérard". See Gautier, 'Portraits et souvenirs', 63-64. Maurice Barrès failed to find the original for Saléma (see the Pléiade editors' Note to the 'Epilogue' of 'Les Akkals. - L'Anti-Liban' and M. Barrès, 'Une Enquête au pays du Levant', first published in the 'Revue des Deux-Mondes', 1923). M. Richer suggests that Nerval "a dû grossir beaucoup une mince aventure ou s'attribuer, en l'embellissant, une aventure qu'on lui aurait racontée" ('Notes sur Aurélia', 'Cahiers du Sud', No. 292, 1948.)

2. 'Lettres à Jenny Colon', IX, lines 36-37.

fit a pre-conceived, subjectively imagined pattern. Hence a plea for the reality of subjective passion: to think one is in love is to be in love, and such passions ("pour des actrices, pour des reines, pour des femmes poètes"), he urges, have the power to last, to change a life, to lead to heroic self-sacrifice, delirium, even death[1]. At the same time, this attempt to live his dreams, to "diriger mon rêve éternel", is given a measure of objective correlation when he talks of signs and coincidences which seem to indicate that the normally hidden pattern of a prearranged destiny is showing through the texture of daily life (354).

Nerval is now attributing to himself what previously he had ascribed only to a fictional alter ego, the Brisacier of 'Le Roman tragique': the attempt to shape and alter one's actual life to coincide with subjective dream-longings. But he cannot be consistently confident in himself. Just as Brisacier's heroic play-acting is repeatedly deflated by irony, so here Nerval cannot help revealing his doubts, his fear that his readers will find the whole story preposterous. "Mon rêve absurde", he calls it (432). Having established the crucial link in the chain of affiliation which joins him to Saléma by stating that he is the son of a Freemason, he adds: "Sérieusement, la maçonnerie est bien dégénérée parmi nous" (433 - my italics). A footnote shows him similarly on the defensive: "si frivoles que soient ces pages, elles contiennent une donnée vraie" (434). Without giving up the claim that all this has an objective foundation after all, he is admitting that his little "roman" is impossibly far-fetched.

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1. 'Le Prisonnier', chapters i and iii.

There is no essential difference between this and the Zeynab story. In both cases Nerval is reshaping his life to fit permanent imaginative conceptions. But there is an important difference in emphasis. In the Zeynab story he is trying to project an image of himself as a person capable of a normal relationship with a woman, and the attempted solution, although it conforms yet again to the recurrent longing, is necessitated by an ironical anxiety about his ability to sustain the role. In the Saléma story, on the other hand, Nerval begins with the conscious and defiant admission that this was not a normal love-affair, but an invented one shaped entirely by subjective longing. The enterprise is beset by rational doubts and, having been left suspended for three years, is summarily swept aside by a hasty epilogue in 1850. The uneasy mingling of life and dream can do no more than hold out a precarious promise for the future. The claims of rationality prevent it from being pressed to a conclusion.

And so Nerval, in the contes which represent the deepest imaginative level of the 'Voyage', abandons "autobiography" for legend. Hakem and Adoniram are vicarious selves who enact, once again, the drama of Nerval's dream-destiny. Here, one would think, he would be released from the difficult problem of relating life to dream. Yet we shall see that it was not so.

Nerval fashions the stories of both 'Hakem' and 'Soliman' so that they reproduce once again the essential pattern of his own dream-experience. As in the case of Brisacier, he is convinced that he is

writing the story, not of his actual past, but of the recurrent cycle of legendary experience which takes place at once through time and outside time, so that 'Hakem' is both history and legend[1]. Nerval never says that 'Hakem' is the story of events which, though they are historical, he has already experienced himself; but if we make the logical connections between various apparently innocuous passages, the statement is revealed. His own visions of 1841, he tells Janin, were a preview of the East (Letter 106), and when he walked through the streets of Cairo, it was as if he had been there before in a past age (Letter 100)[2]. Thus when Nerval says that the story of Hakem represents "des souvenirs du Caire ancien" which have been preserved by his "kinsmen", the Druses (II, 361), we know that for him the visionary adventures of Hakem are identical with his own. Similarly, Nerval regarded himself, through the alleged Masonic affiliation, as one of the "enfants de la veuve" (II, 433), which is to say that he is descended from the son of Adoniram and the Queen of Sheba (II, 607)[3]. The Masonic cult is also kept alive by the sheik and his daughter Saléma[4], so that the personages of the different stories, whether "autobiographical" or fictional, are all closely identified.

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1. "En Orient tout devient conte. Cependant les faits principaux de cette histoire sont fondés sur des traditions authentiques" (II, 361).

2. Cf II, 232 & the 'Carnet du Voyage en Orient', II, 706 & 717.

3. We may suppose also that Nerval would equate his own 'Chimères' with those which are cast in bronze by Adoniram (553). Both are the products of a creative Romantic imagination which has had glimpses of an heroic supernatural order.

4. The symbolic acacia, planted on Adoniram's tomb after his murder (II, 604), grows right through their house - an actual "family tree" (II, 435).

'Hakem' and 'Soliman' are variations of what is essentially the same story. In both there are two rivals for the love of the Ideal Woman. They are brothers[1], one royal and legitimate, the other a working man. In both cases it is the latter who wins the Queen's love. In both cases the union is designed to transcend the personal relationship by restoring the unity and purity of a chosen race. Thus, as in 'La Forêt noire', Nerval is working out both his own visionary longings and his delusions about being a noble bastard. However, whereas in 'Soliman' (published version) Nerval identifies himself unequivocally with the "good" self, 'Hakem' is a richer work in that it corresponds more closely to the essential ambivalence of Nerval's imagination: self-identification is divided between the two brothers, who are not uncompromisingly hostile, as in 'Soliman', but deeply attached to one another.

Hakem is the legitimate ruler whose position is usurped by the wicked vizir Argévan. On the cosmic level, Hakem is the god Albar, Argévan the prince of evil. At the beginning of the story, the young Caliph is still morally under the tutelage of Argévan who has been regent during his minority. In order to discover the true state of the realm Hakem has to go out at night in disguise, and it is during one of these <u>sorties</u> that he breaks the law by taking hashish with Yousouf. He is captured in a raid and, when he proclaims that he is the Caliph, he is imprisoned by Argévan as a raving madman. At one level, he is a rebel against law and order. But hashish opens the gateway to paradise, and Argévan's law and order is in fact a cloak for corruption and oppression. Hakem's "offence" is

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[1]. This is true in the case of 'Hakem' and, apparently, of an early version of 'Soliman' (see 'Carnet du Voyage en Orient', 711).

really the first step towards self-discovery. His position surely reflects that of Nerval in 1841. According to the authorities, he was a madman who must be shut up until he realised that he was not the privileged being he took himself for. His own reaction oscillates between doubt (the public view) and self-confidence (the subjective view).

But what happens to Hakem partly justifies Nerval. His alleged delusion - that he is the Caliph - is a fact. The belief that he is a god is given objective confirmation by a blind prophet. Even his doubts are seen as part of the inevitable discrepancy between his divine nature and his human form[1]. And if his belief in his own royal identity is sober fact, his other visionary convictions, by a logical extension, also come to seem true. When he leads a mingled crowd of criminals and madmen in revolt against Argévan, his action is justified on the social as well as the mystical level, for (like King Lear) he has had the insight that the criminals' only offence is their poverty[2]. The insurrection is a legitimate one against a usurping force of evil which is preparing to betray the country to its enemies.

Having regained power, Hakem is in a position to carry out his divine mission: to establish the true religion of which he is the god (true to Nerval's syncretism, this involves tolerance of other sects), and to marry his sister, "l'épouse de mon âme divine", thus restoring a vanished paradise of purity (II, 367). But the exalted lover meets with a frigid response[3]. As in the case of Nerval and Saléma, this love is entirely one-

1. 371, 380, 382, 394.
2. 387.
3. Cf Nerval with Jenny Colon, Frantz with Diana in 'Léo Burckart', Brisacier with Aurélie in 'Le Roman tragique'.

sided, a mere extension of his imagination. Sétalmulc is simply frightened and repelled by her brother's imperious and evidently unexpected demands. Strange and majestic in the effulgence of his divinity, he appears different from himself, like his own ghost (375-76)[1]. It is true that Sétalmulc's own appearance seems to match his own in its hieratic radiance: "(elle) faisait l'effet d'une de ces reines des empires disparus, qui avaient des dieux pour ancêtres"[2], so that Hakem's vision is given a kind of objective confirmation. But she responds, not to him, but to his brother and double, Yousouf, a poor fisherman.

Yousouf is the mirror-image of Hakem. When they meet, they are instinctively drawn to one another. Yousouf's hashish-dreams, also centred round Sétalmulc, are a slightly less detailed replica of his brother's (365-67). In their dreams they enter paradise together and know each other by their eternal appellations (381). Hakem calls Yousouf "frère"[3], and in a passage which he later cut out, Nerval explains that they have the same grandfather[4]. Yousouf is thus (presumably) the noble bastard, and he usurps Hakem's place.

His position is Hakem's in reverse. Hakem's dream of restoring the unity and purity of the race by marrying his sister is purely subjective and therefore unrealisable. But Yousouf's dreams are based on reality, for Sétalmulc loves him and visits him in the flesh. What Hakem dreams,

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1. Cf Nerval himself, above, p. 167f.

2. II, 375 - cf I, 422.

3. Yousouf does not reciprocate until their dying moments, with "O mon frère!" (399), his last words. Does this mean he does not recognise his kinship with Hakem until it is too late?

4. II, 1345.

Yousouf performs. Hakem, returning unannounced to the palace, finds it brilliantly illuminated for the wedding-feast for which, although it corresponds to his intention, he had not given the order. This is like the family banquet in 'Aurélia' (1841) and 'La Forêt noire'. But it is Yousouf who is recognised and accepted, whilst Hakem, as in a nightmare, passes unacknowledged like a ghost. His divine power is paralysed, and he is forced to withdraw.

His first reaction is to conclude that the usurper is one of the evil spirits with whom he, as the true god, is perpetually at war. But this interpretation (involving his definitive exclusion and rejection) is abandoned when he recognises Yousouf as his hashish-companion, and explains their (hitherto apparently unnoticed) resemblance by their probable kinship, though in the final version of the story Nerval never makes it clear that they are in fact brothers. After the recognition, Hakem's anger vanishes, and he resolves to bless the match, switching, like Nerval with Zeynab and the Armenian, to the protective paternal role vis-à-vis the young couple.

In terms of Nerval's visionary experience, this means that his fear of being excluded is being at once expressed and allayed. Yousouf does indeed take Hakem's place, reducing him to the status of an impotent ghost, and there is latent hostility. Yet Yousouf is also Hakem's proxy: passive where Hakem is active, he is the easy recipient of the joy Hakem struggles to bring about for himself. This reflects, surely, the tragedy of visionary experience. Since it cannot be rationally ordered, any

attempt at control leads to a sense of impotence. Dreams must be passively undergone, and whether they are happy or not does not depend on the dreamer. Yousouf is the lucky dreamer, the Nerval of the blissful dreams of 1841; Hakem is the Nerval who tried to "diriger son rêve", but in doing so succeeded only in disrupting a precarious harmony. But Yousouf and Hakem are two facets of the same personality, and Nerval sketches a solution by which Hakem's divine mission is divided between himself and his brother.

But the solution cannot be implemented. The brothers' hostility persists, more through the logic of the situation than through their intention, for Yousouf, apparently on the orders of Sétalmulc, leads an attempt on the Caliph's life, not knowing that he is his hashish-companion. When he recognises his friend, he turns his weapons against the other assassins. The two brothers die together.

The 'Carnet du Voyage en Orient' contains notes for both 'Hakem' and 'Soliman'[1], and in Nerval's original conception (reflected in the full title), 'Soliman' appears to have been closer to 'Hakem' than in the final version. Soliman and his brother Adonias are two halves of the same identity, since their attributes are interchangeable. The suggestion that they belong to rival dynasties eternally at war, rejected in 'Hakem', is here implemented. Soliman is the "enfant du ciel", his brother the "enfant de l'enfer", member of a rebellious underground race which will

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1. See II, 708 and 711 ff. 'Soliman', originally the libretto of an <u>opéra-comique</u>, was re-written in 1848-50 as a <u>conte</u>. Traces of dialogue remain in the story (see 'Petits Châteaux de Bohême' and J. Richer, 'Expérience et création', 170).

oust the ruling clan. The Queen of Sheba is destined for Soliman, but at the same time she belongs to Adonias since she too is a member of the Preadamite race. In the end brother kills brother. One gathers that the original version was, like 'Hakem', balanced and ambiguous.

The final version of 'Soliman' is based much more starkly on the black-and-white confrontation of a legitimate, but second-rate ruler, and a popular leader who, through his genius and his membership of the Preadamite race, has even deeper claims to power than his rival. The underlying rivalry is between two races: the race of Sem, the "enfants du limon", formed of vile clay, with only a parsimonious spark of the central fire to animate them; which is fighting a losing battle against the cold; and the "enfants du feu", descended from Eblis, Angel of Light, who engendered Cain, full of the creative fire whose home is the centre of the earth. This is the opposition between a jealous Old Testament God, of whom Solomon is the flabby and conceited servant, and a powerful race of outcasts, proud and rebellious, yet forced to serve their weaker brethren with their superior genius in the arts and sciences. Thus Adoniram's genius, exemplified by the forging of the Sea of Bronze, is at the service of Solomon. This is the paradox of Romantic Satanism: the "evil" race is really good. Solomon appears by contrast almost as the silly old bewigged classic, a venerable opponent of Adoniram's creative modernism, fearful of transgressing the narrow limits imposed by a jealous deity, a

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1. Adoniram represents not only the Romantic image of the artist as Promethean demiurge, but also, surely, that of the artist as master-craftsman. We may recall the stress laid by Dr. A. Fairlie on the conscious manipulating of poetic techniques in Nerval's own 'Chimères' ('Nerval et Richelet', 'Revue des Sciences humaines', July-September 1958).

neat copier of nature, a slave to elaborate symmetry in the arts and to a stifling etiquette in social life.

The theme of the "frères ennemis", apart from one or two vestiges[1], has disappeared. Whereas Hakem and Yousouf were simply dual aspects of the same good self, Soliman and Adoniram are on opposite sides in the eternal struggle between "good" and "evil". Furthermore, the "good" has changed sides. In 'Hakem', the masonic tau sign is connected with the wicked Argévan, who incarnates Eblis, prince of evil. But in 'Soliman' it is the hero Adoniram who founds the masonic cult and uses the tau sign to rally his men; Eblis is the angel of light, founder of the race of Cain from which Adoniram is descended. Nerval appears to have transferred his allegiance from the legitimate ruler to the usurper. However, the contradiction can perhaps be resolved if one considers Hakem as a revolutionary popular leader in opposition to the apparently legitimate order represented by Argévan. Both Hakem and Adoniram then stand for the principle of the legitimate rebellion of a supplanted dynasty.

Legitimate rebellion occurs when the true élite has been supplanted by those whose rights are less deeply rooted than its own. Soliman has a claim over Saba, but it is a dubious one, based on a piece of trickery (chapter iv). But the very first time she hears Adoniram's voice, she is troubled as by the echo of a distant memory (531), and infallible signs reveal that they are both members of the race of Cain, older and greater than the lineage of Soliman. Their union will thus liberate mankind from

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[1] II, 588.

the political oppression of Kings, and restore to the earth the pre-Flood cult of fire, the element which will make the human race immortal (567)[1].

But the golden age belongs either to the past or to the future, never to the present. Adoniram, like Nerval in 1841, descends into the other world where his ancestors hold sway[2]. Hakem, too, is received into the family tomb, where he is judged and recognised by his grandfather (II, 1345). Both encounter and marry, or plan to marry, the Queen who is the living incarnation of the mother of the race. But both are victims of a ritual murder. Yousouf himself is subjected to a mock-execution before he can be accepted by Sétalmulc. Only by passing through the ritual ordeal of death can the hero win through to the realm beyond time to which he truly belongs[3]. But it is striking that death, which might be the beginning of eternal union with the Family, appears in both stories rather as a final defeat. Sétalmulc is not present at Hakem's reunion with his ancestor, and indeed Nerval removed this passage from the final version. Similarly, the Queen of Sheba survives Adoniram, rather than following him into death. True, she is carrying his son - the son who is to fulfil their dreams of restoring the rightful race to power (593-94). Nerval almost certainly regarded himself as a descendant of this son[4]. But paradise is a condition which can only be glimpsed momentarily. Nerval

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1. Soliman's attempt to achieve immortality by subverting the spirits which properly owe their allegiance to Adoniram and Sheba, on the other hand, is a failure (607-9). For J. Richer, the Queen with her riddles represents "les forces inconscientes du psyché", while Solomon exemplifies the limitations of conscious rationalism ('Expérience et création' 180-181).

2. Chapters vi and vii.

3. See 'Les Pyramides', II, 228-229. Sheba appears to Solomon as "l'idéale et mystique figure de la déesse Isis" (II, 521).

4. See above, p. 244.

returned to everyday life; Hakem's dreams about union with Sétalmulc (despite the saving device of the brother-double who can do his loving for him) are clearly at odds with reality, and he frequently doubts the whole validity of his hashish-based visions; Adoniram can do no more than express his memories of his ancestor's legendary kingdom through his art - the end for him is exile and death after a love which was as brief and insubstantial as a dream[1].

Nerval's full-length portrait of the Ideal Woman is a complete failure. The attempt at the Voltairean tradition of the Oriental tale as ironical entertainment clashes with Nerval's conception of the goddess's dazzlingly hieratic array. Sheba is human to the point of silliness. Whereas Sétalmulc was described briefly from the outside, and appeared as a remote, august figure, a worthy representative of a royal race, Balkis is shown in detail, and the detail is second-rate. Her supposed wisdom comes out in the form of wise-cracks. The dialogue is stilted and unnatural, achieving at best a sort of music-hall pertness.

Death is an end, not a beginning, a failure, not a release. Even when Nerval identifies himself with the heroes of fairy-tales, there is no easy escape into the realm of fantasy. Hakem is like the Brisacier of 'Le Roman tragique', preoccupied with the difficult conjunction of dream and reality, not like Francesco Colonna whom Nerval envied but could not emulate. If we revert to the three imaginative levels of the 'Voyage en Orient', we see that Nerval's truest position is that of the pseudo-autobiographical Saléma story, where he tries to match life and dream.

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[1] 593.

Reality (the Zeynab story) aspires to the conditions of the dream, while the dream ('Hakem') struggles to achieve its justification by invading reality. One of the results is the tawdry incongruity of the Queen of Sheba.

CHAPTER XI

THE COUNTRY SWEETHEART AS ARISTOCRAT

"Excursions en Ile-de-France et au-delà" (R.A.T.P. Poster, 1964).

The three overlapping categories of the 'Voyage en Orient' may be used to provide a general scheme for all the works written after 1841. There is the supernatural figure of the contes; the aristocrat (Saléma, or Diane d'Alby in 'La Forêt noire'); and the simple girl of humble origin (Zeynab). Diane d'Alby in a sense is a combination of all three, since she belongs at once to a celestial family, with which the hero is united in paradise, and to a noble family, with whom he can be united in fact, whilst at the same time she is a little gypsy girl "qui ne sait que danser et chanter". In the deepest part of Nerval's mind the three categories merge, for his actual childhood memories are identified with the family paradise, and the delusion about being a noble bastard is a rationalisation of his visionary convictions. Thus as one goes more deeply into the imaginative structures of Nerval's writing one sees that, beneath their tensions and their diversity, they have the same basic pattern and that he is virtually telling the same story over and over again[1].

The pattern varies according to Nerval's current preoccupations, and is rendered more complex by the fact that the three ideals never appear in purely typical form, but invariably embody a blend of attributes. In 'La Forêt noire' the hero's discovery that he belongs to the noble

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1. This is no doubt what gives rise to statements like: "Je me nourris de ma propre substance et ne me renouvelle pas" (Letter 284 - see also Letter 287).

family provides a normal justification of mystical experience. The figures of the contes belong essentially to the dream world, and thus appear remote and hieratic (Sétalmulc), but when Nerval tries to give them too detailed an existence, they become tawdry and unconvincing (the Queen of Sheba). Zeynab, with her silly, if winning ways, was primarily a creature of reality, but she existed also in a wider frame of reference. Saléma was in between dream and reality: a possible descendent of Sétalmulc, yet also an ordinary person ("quelque fille ingénue"). The aristocratic affiliation acted as a bridge between the two sides of her nature.

In the works of 1849-50 we shall find the country sweetheart tending to be identified with the girl of noble blood. After his return from the Middle East - from about 1847 onwards - Nerval continues the imaginary search for "quelque fille ingénue", no longer in the haunts of an imaginary past, but in those of his actual past. He creates the Valois experience as a continuation nearer home of the Middle Eastern experience [1]. Not that the dream of marrying a simple

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1. In the Zeynab story Nerval identifies himself with the young Armenian because the lad's singing reminds him of a French folksong, so that his offer to marry him to Zeynab prefigures his own search for a lost Valois sweetheart. At the same time this adumbrates the imaginative structure of works like 'Le Marquis de Fayolle' and 'Les Confidences de Nicolas', with their French country setting. And Nerval makes a connection between the dancing of the girls on the island of Syra in 1844 and that of the girls of Senlis in 1850 (cf II, 88 and I, 215). See also a brief, joyous notation in the 'Carnet du Voyage en Orient': "Il m'est né le soleil de mes 15 ans" (II, 716).

accessible country girl starts here. On the contrary, it dates back, as we have seen, to the very beginning of Nerval's life as a writer, and can be traced from the 1828 preface to 'Faust', through Hoffmann's 'Sylvesterabend' to 'Léo Burckart' (1838-39). That he is deeply interested in this theme in 1848 can be seen from the second of the two articles on Heine written in collaboration with Gautier and published in that year, which speaks with emotion of the sweet, perfectly ordinary little girl loved and lost in the poet's youth: "Qui n'a dans ses souvenirs de jeunesse un portrait de ce genre à moitié effacé?" The fibres of his being, touched by a secret chord, vibrate in sympathy[1].

Nerval's exploration of the idea of reviving a simple childhood love in a French setting does not at first take a directly autobiographical form. Works like 'Le Marquis de Fayolle' (1849), the scenario 'La Main de gloire' (1849-50) and 'Les Confidences de Nicolas' (1850) ascribe the search to a fictional or fictionalised hero, whilst 'Angélique' (1850) is divided between autogiography and historical parallels to his own experience. It is only in 'Sylvie' (1853) that he will ascribe the search for a lost love to himself. Thus as he gets older his preoccupations get nearer and nearer home[2], and patterns which are at first vicarious culminate in direct self-projection.

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1. O.C.I, 87 (my italics). That certain themes are held in common with Gautier does not make them less significantly personal to Nerval (see Chapter I).

2. The setting of 'Le Marquis de Fayolle' is Brittany, that of 'Les Confidences' Burgundy, but 'La Main de Gloire' is associated with Soissons from which Nerval's mother's family originated, according to his family tree, whilst 'Angélique' describes the exploration of the Valois region where he had spent his boygood.

This movement corresponds to an increasing emphasis on the normal, accessible love. For, whereas in the Saléma story the fantasy of reunion with the noble family is vitally connected with the dream of the ideal woman, in works like 'Le Marquis de Fayolle' it is attached to the notion of marrying a simple village girl. It is significant that in 'La Main de gloire', which has the same imaginative structure, the hero's supernatural powers appear as a temptation which he must resist if he is to achieve recognition of his aristocratic status and the hand of the noblewoman he loves[1]. In the novel, Gabrielle playing with Georges, the "enfant trouvé", is indistinguishable in her dress and in her lack of affectation from a little village girl; but she is the daughter of the Comte de Fayolle and Georges is the bastard son of the Marquis, her father's elder brother.

Simply stated, the underlying (and partly hidden) imaginative pattern of the novel is as follows. Georges has been deprived of the rights which could have been his had his mother recognised him as her son. Ignorant of his origins, he becomes a Republican, an enemy of the caste to which he belongs by birth, and to which he is affiliated by the unmistakable marks of a superior race. He runs the risk (which is only just averted) of meeting his own father in battle. He represents a justice which is likely to condemn his father to death, and is himself responsible for his arrest.

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[1] Cf 'Le Magnétiseur' (above, pp. 172-73).

The duties of his assumed status clash head-on with his "rêve de bonheur" of being re-united with his parents, and in particular with his mother. Only by discovering the secret of his birth and going over to the other side, could he be restored to his family and marry his cousin, his true love.

But the Republican tendency of the novel militates against the underlying imaginative conception, which points to a reactionary solution. Within the terms set, it is much more likely that Georges' father (who has fought with La Fayette for the cause of American Independence) should become a Republican, than that Georges should be converted to Royalism and be re-united with Gabrielle and his family. The trend of the plot runs counter to Nerval's dream-wishes[1]. Hence there is a deep ambiguity, which shows especially in the hero's relationship with the two priests who take a fatherly interest in him: Huguet and Péchard.

Like Antoine Boucher, Huguet is the little boy's true spiritual father. On the other hand (like Nerval's own father), he is a stern figure responsible for taking the boy's mother away from him. Yet

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1. This is probably one of the reasons why Nerval could not complete the novel. Here, as in the case of 'L'Alchimiste', it is likely that the two collaborators had conflicting conceptions of the work (see Senelier, No. 738 and I, 551-553), for Edouard Gorges, in his prefatory note to the version he published after Nerval's death, claims he provided the idea for the novel, and the first chapter of the Prologue appears to confirm that Nerval ("le simple rêveur") is working on material provided by his collaborator. M. Richer suggests further reasons for the novel's being uncompleted ('Expérience', 236).

it is to this harsh man that love and allegiance are owing, and Péchard, who is Huguet's bitter enemy and rival, and tries to entice Georges away from him, is presented as the voice of temptation. But is not this the voice that Georges secretly most longs to hear? Péchard confirms his resentment[1] at having been abandoned by his father and mother. He tells Georges who his mother is, tries to find his parents for him so that he will know he is of noble birth and be able to marry Gabrielle, the girl he loves. He serves Georges' dearest wishes. The two priests represent the two sides of Nerval's attitude to his father.

It is through Péchard that Georges is confronted with his mother, Hélène de Maurepas. In expiation of her sin, she has become abbess of a Benedictine convent deep in the forest of Rennes. As chance (?) will have it, Georges is sent with a detachment of troops to liberate the nuns. His speech to them eloquently pleads his own cause: the soldiers are not their enemies, but the brothers and sweethearts from whom the chill monastic life has separated them. Liberation means reunion with those most dear to them. Georges and his mother recognise one another, but his longing for her love is met by an icy rejection. She remains faithful to tradition. Georges is her enemy (690-92). His "rêve de bonheur" (693), so close to realisation, is not fulfilled.

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1. The hero's resentment against his parents is an undercurrent, breaking out only occasionally (615, 635, 706).

Georges is like a younger version of his father[1]. The Marquis is a bachelor, who looks back on a libertine youth and forward to a lonely old age. His brother describes him as one of those men "qui aiment souvent ... mais qui n'épousent jamais" (598). But when he sees his niece Gabrielle: "un nuage passa sur ses yeux, et ses sourcils se contractèrent ... Un souvenir venait de traverser son esprit comme une flèche" (587). For his niece (although the point is never explicitly made) is the image of his long-lost love, Georges' mother. Both are touchingly childlike (a point whose great importance will emerge later), and are described in strikingly similar terms[2].

1. Compare the description of the Marquis de Fayolle (559) with that of Georges (565): they are strikingly similar both in the general impression and in detail. Further, Georges is recognised by Volney, specialist in racial characteristics, as belonging to the Frankish type, a natural aristocrat descended from a military élite, a line of conquerors: "Les narines se dilatent dans la colère; comme chez les carnassiers, le nez est fort, l'oeil est perçant ... Tels sont les signes les plus communs de la race pure" (584). The hero belongs to a race apart. Compare 619f and 560 to see how similar are the mysticophilosophical readings of Georges and his father. - Georges' books have been abstracted from the library of Huguet, and this again suggests that the "good" priest may be modelled on Antoine Boucher, for in "La Bibliothèque de mon oncle' Nerval talks of how his own interest in transcendental philosophies derived from the books of his uncle's library. See too chapter ix of 'Sylvie', where he also mentions his uncle's interest in collecting Roman remains (and in 'Aurélia', 397); Huguet also has humanist interests (566). Georges' interest in 'La Nouvelle Héloise' may also derive originally from Nerval's uncle, if we are to believe the account of the engravings illustrating Rousseau's work given in 'Sylvie' (284).

2. Georges' mother at the time of her affaire with Fayolle: "une petite femme de vingt ans à peine ... avec de beaux cheveux châtain clair sans poudre, frêle et mince comme un enfant ... grands yeux bleus ... ... sourcils bruns" (556, 562). Gabrielle, too, is a virginal variant on Nerval's reddish-blond type: "enfant de seize ans à peine, (elle) avait de beaux cheveux châtain clair, presque blonds; ses grands yeux, d'un bleu pâle, lui donnait une expression de douceur et d'ingénuité charmante ... ... ses beaux grands yeux bleus, et ses longs cils bruns relevés et ses sourcils si finement dessinés" (565, 587).

When the Marquis sees Gabrielle, it is like the ghost of his youth suddenly rising before his eyes: "ces blancs fantômes de la jeunesse, dont le souffle fait revivre mille pensées mortes, et reverdir l'arbre dépouillé par l'automne" (588-89)[1].

What has happened is that the sight of Gabrielle has aroused a sudden, vivid memory of Hélène de Maurepas. And Fayolle goes to the convent to try, like his son, to re-establish the potential family tie which has been broken. But the emotions of the past which have been so vividly resuscitated are quenched by Hélène's present state of icy withdrawal, represented by the cold austerity of the convent. The attempt to revive his lost youth fails (607 - 611).

Yet the idea of having a second youth, the desire for a renewal through love, is not abandoned. His main concern anyway was to find his child: and the wish for rejuvenation is now transferred to the child. The cold rejection of both Georges and his father by Hélène may thus be compensated for in the younger generation. Gabrielle conjures up in Fayolle's mind the "blancs fantômes de la jeunesse" - and the same phrase will be used of the son's experience with the young girl, just as the phrase "rêve(s) de bonheur" is used in connection both with Georges' longing for his mother (693) and with his love for Gabrielle (618 and 716). Possession of Gabrielle will provide a substitute for the love his mother has refused him, and will involve the restoration of the rights and privileges from which she had

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1. The same image occurs in the early lyrics.

disinherited him. His dreams about Gabrielle shade off into dreams about being of noble birth, and he is drawn to the Château d'Epinay at once in the hopes of catching a glimpse of the girl as she runs about in her muslin dress and straw hat, and by a sort of instinctive feeling that this is where he belongs (566). Péchard holds out the possibility of discovering that he has aristocratic parents as a means to marrying Gabrielle. The relationship with Gabrielle promises to realise the withered happiness of Georges' parents.

Thus although this love is bound up with dreams about the future, its main setting is the past. It is a childhood love. Only as children, only in the world of innocent fantasy, can these two come together. Their walks together always take them to the farm which was the scene of Georges' early childhod. The affaire, modelled consciously on 'La Nouvelle Héloise'[1], has something of the precocious play-acting of children. Gabrielle's vow is childishly earnest. When it comes to the ears of the girl's father and he expels Georges from the château, it is like the expulsion from the paradise of childhood innocence. We are reminded yet again of the return of Dr. Labrunie. And as the lovers grow up, they grow apart. The realities of adult life, with its misplaced loyalties, come between them.

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1. If the parallel had been carried through to the conclusion of the book, Gabrielle would have married another man but continued the relationship with Georges on an exalted and purified plane. Something like this happens in 'Sylvie' (based this time on 'Werther'). The influence is described by J.W. Kneller, 'Nerval and Rousseau', PMLA, March 1953, who concludes somewhat hastily that Nerval is trying to "escape his own personal experiences and invent characters and situations," implying that this results in the novel's lack of originality.

Gabrielle's love for Georges begins to seem to her impossibly naive[1], something to be ashamed of and kept hidden from sophisticated people (601). Her father persuades her to break with the young man. During their interview[2] they adopt a tone of careful, haughty politeness, keeping up the pretence that their love was a childish thing of no consequence. Yet Georges' irony rings false. It is stretched thinly over a love which has been instantly resuscitated by Gabrielle's appearance, and cannot conceal the fact that she is still his "rêve de bonheur" (618). When Gabrielle asks him to return her mother's ring, with which they had performed a childish mock-marriage, Georges' façade of haughty indifference breaks down, and Gabrielle too cries like a child. We see how closely being grown up is connected with her consciousness of her social role.

The return to their love is a return to the childhood state when she was allowed to run free like a little peasant girl and they were unaware of the difference in rank. It is now that Georges recalls the marriage-game, which so far has only been referred to obliquely, and which only now, with the added relief of nostalgia, takes on its full importance: "Cette bonne femme[3] nous avait conduits dans sa chambre et elle nous avait fait voir ses vêtements de noce et ceux de son mari ... Vous le rappelez-vous? Ce n'était que velours et taffetas. Si bien

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1. Georges in being dismissed from the <u>château</u> was referred to as "ce petit jeune homme" (572), whilst Gabrielle's father reminds her that she is no longer a little girl (603). Their love is referred to as "enfantillage(s)" (571, 589, 599, 602).

2. 617-622.

3. Yvonne, Georges' foster-mother.

que nous eûmes l'idée de nous en revêtir; nous nous trouvions assez grands déjà pour avoir l'air de deux petits mariés (621). He agrees that it was no more than a game, and that is why he is prepared to give her back the ring.

Once again, there is a profound ambiguity. The simulated marriage, the gift of the ring, were at once a childish amusement, and at the same time of great significance. It is not the innocent attachment of Georges and Gabrielle which seems unimportant, but their pretence of having grown out of it. Instead of breaking altogether with Georges and relegating their love firmly to childhood and the past, Gabrielle swears a most solemn oath to renew it. And she swears by her mother's ring.

The marriage-game has roots which stretch deeply into the past. Since Yvonne married at around the time of Georges' birth, the wedding-finery must be contemporaneous with the love-affair between his parents. The wedding-game is enacted with Gabrielle's mother's ring. To draw the relationship even closer into a circle of kinship, the girl may be Georges' foster-sister - both of them would no doubt refer to his foster-mother, as Nerval does in the text, as "la mère Yvonne".

Behind Gabrielle is the mother of Georges. The moment the girl came into the room, the sight of her took Georges straight back to an earlier time: "l'apparition de Gabrielle avait quelque chose de céleste. Toute la méfiance de Georges, tout son ressentiment, tout son indifférence affectée disparurent comme un brouillard que percent les rayons du jour. Qui n'a admiré, avec un charme mêlé de tendresse, ces vieilles peintures de jeunes femmes du temps passé, dont la beauté fraîche et radieuse se détache sur le fond bruni d'une ancienne toile

tout écaillée? L'oeil est vert, le sourcil trace un arc délié qui fait ressortir la blancheur mate du front, la chevelure d'or crespelé fuit sur les tempes en boucles légèrement tordues, la bouche petite et ferme a pris la teinte du grenat, la ligne majestueuse du nez révèle une haute origine; - il y a dans ces figures quelque chose de l'aïeule et quelque chose de l'enfant ... Seulement elles sont un peu pâles" (616). We remember that Gabrielle is exactly like Hélène de Maurepas. The beloved is like the fresh beauty of an old painting come to life. Here Nerval, with the author's comment ("Qui n'a admiré..."), comes close to the surface of the narration. The identification is as explicit as in the Heine article. Nerval is speaking for himself even as he describes the effect of Gabrielle on Georges. Once again, he is thinking of that eighteenth century allegorical portrait representing Modesty, after Prud'hon or Fragonard, which was shown him in early childhood and which resembled his mother. Here again is the dream that was worked out in 'La Forêt noire', of falling in love with a young girl who is a living version of the lost mother. Her fresh youth gives life to the dim but lovely figure recorded on the canvas. Georges' mother - to return to his circumstances rather than those of his creator - may have been as cold and insubstantial as a ghost: but her she appears again in the form of Gabrielle. And the childish marriage-game is like the enactment of the marriage which never took place between the Marquis de Fayolle and Hélène de Maurepas. At the second interview between Georges and Gabrielle the clock has stopped, emphasising that their relationship is the preservation of lost

time[1].

Love in this novel is a function of memory. The sight of the young girl brings back in all their poignant actuality a flood of emotions from the past, opening up the receding perspectives of bygone experience[2]. It is this Proustian experience of involuntary memory, in the case of both Georges and his father, which brings about the deepening of tone, the sudden sweep of feeling[3]. Nerval is practising a double self-identification[4]. He is the middle-aged Fayolle in whom a sudden longing to recuperate the lost chances of a youthful love is aroused by Gabrielle's resemblance to Hélène de Maurepas. He is Fayolle, too, when he hopes to realise this recuperation of youth vicariously through his son who is another version of himself[5]. But at the same time he is Georges, for whom also love is an attempt to recapture the past, both by renewing his love for a childhood sweetheart whom he meets again in later years, and by finding in her a living incarnation of his mother.

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1. The second interview between the lovers follows the same pattern, with the vivid emotion of childhood memory breaking through the self-consciously adult façade which recognises the difference in rank (707-711). And the "vieille bague de famille" which Nerval says he sent to Aurélia (I, 421-22) may have belonged to his mother.

2. There are many images to express the sudden vividness of these memories - for example, the image of a fire blazing up (620).

3. G. Poulet points out that, thereas the Proustian experience is the sudden revivification of an affective memory, for Nerval the past lies all around him in "vies semblables" ('Les Métamorphoses du cercle', 248).

4. The point is made by Norma Rinsler, 268.

5. Fayolle, the uncommitted womaniser, is like the Fritz of 'Les Amours de Vienne' ten years later (see above, p.261).

The theme of family reunion is continued in two other works written in the following year: 'La Main de Gloire' and 'Angélique'.

'La Main de Gloire'[1], a rather confused scenario, is based on the story published in 1832, but has been considerably modified in the sense of Nerval's current preoccupations. The hero, Cyprien, is a new character who does not appear in the story. Like Georges in the 'Marquis de Fayolle', Cyprien has been brought up by an old man who is obviously based partly on Antoine Boucher, for his library, which the hero has inherited, contains "plusieurs livres sur les sciences occultes" (683). The old man was a Doctor, which suggests that (like Huguet) he is an amalgam of Antoine Boucher and Nerval's own father. The Doctor has died without revealing to Cyprien the secret of his birth, but having got possession of "la main de gloire" - the severed hand of a hanged man, which empowers him to open all doors and freezes those present into a state of suspended animation - he resists the temptation to use it to steal the treasure of the Louvre, which would enable him to marry the noblewoman with whom he is hopelessly in love, the Countess of Soissons (there is a tie-up with 'Angélique' here). The second temptation is to take possession of the papers which prove his birth,

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1. Found by J. Richer in the papers of Auguste Maquet and published in the 'Mercure de France', December 1949. It figures in the 'Projet d'oeuvres complètes' as "'La Main enchantée', 5a., reçu à la Gaîté avec Maquet" (I, 472), and must be the same play of which Maquet writes: "J'ai avec Gérard une pièce qui sera jouée à la Gaîté d'ici à trois mois au plus" (Letter XXIV, dated 22 January, 1850). The ms is in Nerval's writing.

but again he resists, this time "en voyant signé sur un parchemin le nom loyal de son père". The manuscript, says M. Richer, is not easily legible here - it could read: "le nom royal de son père" (688). This is a moment of great emotion in which the hero discovers his true affiliation to a family of royal blood.

The third temptation is when he goes to the Hôtel de Soissons, and there is nothing to stop him from abducting or seducing the Countess - for he has found out that she is to marry the very man to whom the King was thinking of giving Cyprien's birthright. But again a scruple ("une image de Vierge, ce qu'on voudra", writes Nerval) stays his hand. This is the theme of the usurping rival who threatens to rob the unrecognised hero of his rightful position and of his love. But in the end Cyprien is rewarded for having abjured illegitimate means to a legitimate end: he receives his birthright and the hand of the Countess - wealth, position and love (688).

Here Nerval's dream of discovering that his father is not his real father but that he belongs to a noble family and may find an exemplary destiny by marriage to a lady of rank, is fully realised. The Republican tendency of the novel made this impossible; and in any case Nerval's fantasy appears to find a more uninhibited outlet in scenarios for plays. It may be also that the conception of Gabrielle as the country girl whom the orphan lad could meet on equal terms, worked against the other tendency to cast her as the unattainable aristocrat who could only become attainable if the daydream of illustrious parentage is fulfilled. For the works of these years, intimately and profoundly connected though they are with the dream

of reunion with a noble family, will tend to mirror Nerval's real-life image of himself.

In 'Angélique',[1] the possibility of renewing a youthful love, triggered off anew by his "recognition" of Heine's experience in 1848, explored in fictional form in 'Le Marquis de Fayolle' and developed through Nerval's version of Restif's single-minded love for Jeannette Rousseau in 'Les Confidences de Nicolas', is transposed partially into autobiography. Nerval's wanderings in the Valois district, which it records, are occasioned by his researches into the history of the Longueval de Bucquoy family, and are only incidentally a return to the scenes of his own past. On the one hand, vague but insistent memories of his own youth; on the other, the imagined story of the Abbé de Bucquoy, continuing what Nerval had begun in the 'Marquis de Fayolle' - the vicarious working-out of his dream about union with a young girl of an ancient, pure-blooded family.

The uniform beauty of the girls at Senlis, and especially their singing and dancing, bring back vivid personal memories (214-216). The general impression left by the girls and the intonation of their songs is like a piece of childhood miraculously preserved. Out of this generalised resuscitation of the past, a particular memory surges up. At a mystery play given in a girl's school, a beautiful blond

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1. This was originally part of a feuilleton published in 'Le National' from October to December 1850. The feuilleton was later split up and divided between 'Angélique' and 'L'Abbé de Bucquoy' in 'Les Illuminés'. I shall refer to the feuilleton under the general title of 'Angélique'.

girl played the part of the angel presiding over the descent of Christ into hell. Again, it is the singing which makes the memory live - the actuality of voice and accent which makes the past vibrantly present. He comments nostalgically: "Ceci se passait dans une époque monarchique. La demoiselle blonde était d'une des plus grandes familles du pays et s'appelait Delphine. - Je n'oublierai jamais ce nom!" (217).[1]

If one analyses these unfocussed memories one can glimpse the future pattern of 'Sylvie'. On the one hand there are the humble village girls. Here, no single face stands out, but the older girl who leads the singing is a shadowy sketch for Sylvie. On the other hand there is Delphine: a girl of noble blood with whom, he suggests, there was some kind of liaison which he now regrets. It is true that the little girls' singing reminds him presumably of the humble background of his early upbringing. And the friend who accompanies him on his later peregrinations is called Sylvain - "le féminin est le gracieux nom de Sylvie", Nerval reminds us (239), again linking 'Angélique' with the idea of the village sweetheart. But the singing is part of an ancient tradition passed on from mother to daughter, dating from the period with which the noble Bucquoy family and the

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1. The names Nerval assigns to the Valois girls of his youth are probably invented - one might deduce as much from the fact that he is always changing them. For example, the scene described here reappears in 'Sylvie', but the girl is called Adrienne. In 'Promenades et souvenirs' there is a plethora of different names. - Nerval may be thinking here of Delphine Gay, whom he described in January 1840 as "une femme grande et belle, au noble visage auréolé de beaux cheveux blonds" (O.C. I, 171). There may be an association with the Delphine of 'Angélique', who has blond hair and appears with "une auréole"(216).

connected dreams are associated. What lies behind this is the dream that through his mother he too might belong, like Bucquoy, to an ancient Valois family.[1] The historical past parallels his own. Personal memory is almost identified with his interest in the Bucquoy family

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1. It is significant that he goes to Senlis on All Saints' Day - "le jour des Morts" (214). This would seem to have special importance for Nerval, for in his study of Quintus Aucler, published in the year following 'Angélique', he writes of the First of November: "C'est le jour où les mânes se répandent sur la terre. - Ce jour-là, le monde est ouvert; Les ombres viennent juger les actions des vivants et s'inquiètent de la mémoire qu'on leur a gardée" (II, 1206). Nerval's mother died at the end of November, and there are indications in the letters of November 1853 that in this month he observed a solemn cult of her memory: "Aujourd'hui, jour anniversaire de celui où ma pauvre mère est morte en Silésie, suivant le drapeau de la France, mais laissant son fils orphelin, je me suis promis de vivre enfin sérieusement" (Letter 273 - see also Letter 270). Letter 273 is dated November 27th, and Nerval's mother died on the 29th - we can assume that the solemn thoughts and resolutions with which he associated her memory were not only celebrated on the actual date of her death. And surely he was thinking of her at the beginning of the month of November in 1850, writing about his memories of the maternal traditions of the Valois, this "terre maternelle". He was also thinking of the shades of Angélique and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for, speaking of a pilgrimage he intends to make to Rousseau's tomb, he says: "Mais demain, jour des Morts, c'est un pélerinage que j'accomplirai respectueusement, - tout en pensant à la belle Angélique de Longueval" (204). The memory of his mother is connected loosely, through this cult of the dead on the occasion of All Saints' Day, with that of Angélique. Nerval was at this time working on a play whose subject was the alleged suicide of Rousseau. J.W. Kneller suggests that the example of Rousseau may have turned him towards the confessional writing of the later years ('Nerval and Rousseau', PMLA, March, 1953). Later, Kneller shows that the "transfiguration of the ephemeral past into an eternal present, which is the poetic essence of the Confessions, is also the intrinsic poetry of Sylvie".

when he writes that their name "a toujours résonné dans mon esprit comme un souvenir d'enfance" (211). When his quest takes him to Senlis, the sense of history is all-pervasive. In this region that has been bypassed by the new railway, the ancient customs have been preserved intact. "J'ai vécu sept ans dans ces pays", he tells someone, recalling his early upbringing; "j'y ai même quelques restes de propriétés". The Bucquoy family, too, belong to the region and once possessed a castle which is now ruined and which he hopes to discover (212-3). He feels revivified by this renewal of contact with the land that mothered him: "je reprends des forces sur cette terre maternelle. Quoi qu'on puisse dire philosophiquement, nous tenons au sol par bien des liens. On n'emporte pas les cendres de ses pères à la semelle de ses souliers, - et le plus pauvre garde quelque part un souvenir sacré qui lui rappelle ceux qui l'ont aimé. Religion ou philosophie, tout indique à l'homme le culte éternel des souvenirs" (213). Although "cette terre maternelle" is balanced by "les cendres de ses pères", one should remember that it was Nerval's <u>mother's</u> family that came from the Valois, and the bodies of his mother's sister and his <u>maternal</u> grandparents that were reinhumed at Mortefontaine in 1836[1]. The "restes de propriété" he refers to are his share in the "clos de Nerval" in Mortefontaine which he tried to buy up, with a view to reconstituting the original property, in 1853[2].

The Valois folksongs lead him to the story of Angélique, whose

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1. Cf 'Promenades et souvenirs', I, 165 and J. Richer's comment ('Expérience et création', 46).
2. See Letters 255 bis and 258.

resistance to her father's authority recalls that of the daughter of 'Le Roi Loys' (219). This is typical of the way in which this apparently artless, inconsequential narrative fits together into a single pattern.

Angélique is headstrong, passionate, romantic, independent - a real frondeuse. Her first lover, a gentilhomme in the service of her father, was mysteriously killed - sacrificed, one presumes, to family pride. Another suitor, Saint-Georges, was murdered by his valet who was also in love with Angélique. Finally, she falls hopelessly in love with La Corbinière, son of a charcutier, whose military uniform and courage raise him, in her estimation, above his humble origin. She steals some of the family silver and runs away with him. She bears him a child and they wander round Europe as man and wife, with him finding desultory employment as a mercenary but drinking away their funds, while she struggles to keep the household going. This proud girl is reduced to taking in lodgers, to running a tavern, where her husband spends all day drinking with the guests and picks a quarrel with a man who has paid her a compliment. He is a swashbuckling, hard-drinking ne'er-do-well, and Angélique devotes her life to him with all the generosity of her proud and passionate nature. It is a good story, which might have appealed to Stendhal. After the death of La Corbinière Angélique returns to France and evidently ends her days in poverty.

What was Nerval's imaginative interest in Angélique's story?

There are certain loose connections, apart from the general colourful appeal. The period, Louis XIII, would link her with the "blonde aux yeux noirs" of 'Fantaisie', a fascinating dream-figure beckoning to him from an earlier age, that is, an historical counterpart

of Delphine. Her love for La Corbinière elevates this commoner to the status of an officer and a gentleman, and Nerval may have identified himself with this aspect at least of a character who was otherwise probably antipathetic to him. There is also the suggestion that La Corbinière used magic charms or potions to enslave the girl and force her to ruin her life by this disastrous mésalliance (231 and 238), which connects with similar temptations rejected by Cyprien in 'La Main de gloire'. And Nerval is surely shaping Angélique in his own image when he finds in her love "un platonisme digne de celui de Pétrarque", since his account is in blatant contradiction to her own frank admission that she was a demi-vierge.[1] Finally, in describing her cult of the memory of her first lover, Nerval must have seen a parallel to his own experience with Jenny Colon: "Le déchirement que cette mort fit éprouver à Angélique lui révéla l'amour. Deux ans entiers elle pleura"; even when she had partially got over it, she set about looking for "quelqu'un à mettre en son esprit à la place de ce mort éternel" (205). And like Nerval, Angélique never refers by name to the person who played such an important part in her life (221).[2]

The biography of Angélique is interspersed with accounts of visits to Châalis and Ermenonville. But the apparently random movements have a goal: the home of the Bucquoy family at Longueval, near Soissons.[3]

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1. See 209 and note 47. The point about her Platonism is also made on page 232.

2. Unless we are to count Nerval's scribbled note to Duchatre (I, 743-4), or reviews of plays.

3. Cf 'La Main de gloire'. According to Nerval's "family tree", his maternal grandfather, Pierre Laurent, came from Laon, near Soissons (J.Richer, 'Expérience et Création', 38). J. Richer shows that Nerval adapts his sources to fit his private memories and preoccupations ('Expérience, 295).

Nerval speaks of "la course que je fais... vers le château de ses pères".[1] The castle is "le but de ma tournée" (262). Wherever he goes, he is aware of the receding layers of the past buried beneath the civilisation of the present. His remarks about Senlis remind one strongly of a similar experience in Cairo:[2] "la Renaissance, le Moyen Age et l'époque romaine se retrouvent ça et là - au détour d'une rue, dans une écurie, dans une cave" (243; see also 252, on Ermenonville). When he gets to the Bucquoy castle, it too has been buried under the present, the towers rased and only the cellars remaining; the site has been covered with modern buildings (262-3).

In the same "feuilleton", published 7 December, he begins the story of the abbé, (259), which is not in itself very interesting: Nerval is concerned mainly with the abbé's spells in prison and his various escapes. But all the time he is speculating about how he would shape his hero's life if the recent law on "roman-feuilletons" did not forbid his making a novel of it (see 185). There is some doubt about the abbé's identity: he is referred to in a police report as "le <u>prétendu</u> comte du Bucquoy" (192), which Nerval recalls later (263). The doubt is increased when it transpires that he was originally arrested because he was mistaken for someone else. How could Nerval resist the

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1. I.e. of the abbé de Bucquoy (244). See also 239.
2. See Chapter X, p.244.

temptation to appropriate him as another historical doppelgänger? - And in the end he gives an outline of the historical novel he would write[1], if historical novels were not forbidden, thus once again asserting that the subjective truth of the imagination is superior to that of documents and archives (though these exist, as though to give a public authenticity to the imagined version).

Bucquoy has been rescued from prison by the "faux saulniers" - salt-smugglers and outlaws - who hope that he might become their leader; but at the same time he is their captive. They take him to the castle at Longueval, "berceau de sa famille". "Il retrouve là, comme un héros de Walter Scott, les souvenirs de son enfance" - including "la chambre du roi, où la belle Angélique recevait La Corbinière - amours éteintes du passé, fleurs du vieux temps, fanées, mais encore odorantes, comme ces tiroirs de grand'mère où sont conservés mille souvenirs chéris" (II, 1467). On the walls are portraits of his ancestors in the costumes of successive periods, in whose faces he recognises the family likeness in which his own features are also cast: "cet oeil où brille parfois un feu sombre, ce front haut, ridé de bonne heure par le souci de la guerre ou des aventures, ces joues pâlies ...

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1. 451. After the end of 'Angélique' as published in I, the feuilleton is continued in what is now published as 'L'Abbé de Bucquoy' in II (see Note 142 to 'Angélique'). Other parts which I also refer to were omitted both from 'Les Filles du feu' and 'Les Illuminés'; they occur as 'Fragments des Faux Saulniers', I, 438ff.

cette lèvre mince" (1468)[1].

The portraits of the ladies of the family also form a series, culminating in a young face: "Supposez maintenant un certain portrait de jeune fille aux cheveux cendrés s'échappant en grappes sous leur fontange, ce sera là, si vous voulez, le portrait d'une cousine qui aurait été perdue pour lui, soit par un mariage, soit comme appartenant à une branche protestante de sa famille et forcée de suivre ses parents dans l'exil" (1468) - and Nerval notes that there does in fact exist a Protestant branch of the family. This lost love would explain many obscure points in the abbé's life. The <u>dénouement</u> is left open. Perhaps the girl, on the run with her family, has taken refuge in the castle which is surrounded by Louis XIV's archers. Then there would be a conflict between the abbé's love and his religious faith, complicated by the possible rivalry of the rebel captain who has rescued him: "l'ironique et majestueuse figure du capitaine Roland" (1468). This brief plan is clearly modelled on 'La Forêt noire', and it is not surprising that Nerval goes on to propose a development in which Bucquoy and his cousin (he presumably having gone over to the Protestant cause and rescued her) are received by the Margravine Sybille at her "Château de la Favorite", where her portrait, in a hundred and fifty

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1. Cf the descriptions of Georges and his father in 'Le Marquis de Fayolle'. Was Nerval also thinking of his own father whose official description at the age of 32 reads: "1 m, 75 - le front haut (like Nerval's), les cheveux bruns, les yeux noirs, le nez bien fait" (A. Marie, 8)? It would not be logical, of course, to associate Dr. Labrunie with the image of the "real" father - but Nerval's imagination is not logical. There were probably times when he thought of his father himself as being of illustrious lineage.

different disguises, appears painted on the mirrors (a variant on the series of family portraits at Longueval). Finally, after his magnificent reception, Bucquoy would be recaptured and taken back to the Bastille, "forcé de redevenir un simple abbé" (1469).

Like 'Un Roman à faire' and 'Le Roman tragique', this is another of Nerval's "romans manqués" - the sketch of the story he would have liked to make out of his own deepest longings, but whose flowering is inhibited in one way or another. This version can perhaps be best illuminated by drawing the parallels with 'Le Marquis de Fayolle' and 'La Forêt noire'. Bucquoy is not a bastard like Georges, but he belongs to the wrong side of the family: he is a Catholic owing allegiance to Louis XIV. He is the enemy of those he loves and to whom he most deeply belongs. For his cousin is a member of the proscribed Protestant branch which eventually finds refuge in the Schloss Favorite - appearing here, as in 'La Forêt noire', as the magical demi-paradise to which the hero is transported, and where the lovers can come together under the protection of the mysterious Margravine with her multiple portraits. For him, as for Georges, love is the reunion with a young girl remembered from childhood, who is connected with a portrait. And just as Georges seems able to realise a relationship that will somehow repeat, and compensate for, his father's and mother's, so Bucquoy sees himself and the cousin as the latest pair in a family series. (Gabrielle was Georges' cousin, too). Bucquoy's emotion when he visits the chamber where Angélique kept her assignations with La Corbinière also places his love in the emotional context of the past. And the reference to

the faded finery of a bygone age, steeped in the fading scent of nostalgia, recalls the wedding game which is the centrepiece of the love story in the 'Marquis de Fayolle', and which Nerval will return to again with reference to his own life. Finally, Bucquoy's happiness, like Nerval's in 1841, is tragically short-lived.

In this tentative form of a novel that might have been written, the dream of the hero who has been cut off from his true family, but is (temporarily) reunited with them through marriage to a young girl, is again powerfully expressed. But Bucquoy fails where Brisacier in 'La Forêt noire' was about to succeed. The rival is a shadowy but potent threat who may usurp the hero's place; and after a glimpse of paradise Bucquoy is led back to prison.

The pattern of identification emerges even more strongly if one goes back to Nerval's reflections on the historical affiliations of the Bucquoy family. This is something perhaps only half-conscious and therefore not clearly delineated, to be deduced as much from a host of tiny hints as from any outright statements, but the main outline can be established.

The Bucquoy are associated with the inhabitants of the Valois region: Gallo-Romans descended from the Sylvanecte tribes of the original Celts. When the Franks came (though they are mainly associated with the district known as "La France"), they did not at first subjugate the local populations: "Issus généralement de la race caucasienne, ces hommes vivaient sur un pied d'égalité, d'après les moeurs patriarcales" (I, 231). Later, however, they created fiefs, and the suggestion seems

to be that Clovis was the first to institute the tyrannical ways of monarchy (260). But some Gallo-Romans retained their freedom and their property ("terres de franc-alleu"). After this a split develops: those Gallo-Romans who had been subjugated later became slavish supporters of Henry IV and the absolute monarchy of the Bourbons; but the more independent race were on the side of the Ligue, in opposition to the dynasty which usurped the position of the Valois.

The Bucquoy family belong to this ancient tradition of opposition to the usurping absolutist monarchy, and Nerval even explains the persecutions to which the abbé de Bucquoy was subjected in the eighteenth century, by suggesting that the Bourbons had had a grudge against the family ever since his ancestor had been a general in the armies of the Ligue. For Nerval, the complexities of history are reduced to an ancient conflict between two rival races, a perennial rivalry which is evident especially in the wars of religion in the sixteenth century. Angélique, too, is "l'opposition même en cette hardie" (231). Now, it is clear that Nerval associated himself with the tradition of freedom and opposition. Bucquoy tells the "faux-saulniers": "Je suis un de ces fils de grandes familles militaires qui ont lutté contre les rois, et qui sont toujours soupçonnés de rébellion. Je n'appartiens pas aux protestants, mais je suis pour ceux qui protestent contre la monarchie absolue et contre les abus qu'elle entraîne" (II, 958). Nerval subtly associates himself with this protest when he complains that under the influence of the absolute monarchy instituted by "le Béarnais" - whom he himself admits to finding "peu sympathique" (I, 246) - the history of France has been deformed; and

it is the task of the historical novelist to return to a purer tradition which absolutism has pushed out - a task, though, which he himself is prevented from carrying out precisely by the repressive measures of his own day (I, 451).

A few pages further he protests against the peremptory nature of an eviction order he has received, and although he protests that "Je ne voudrais pas ici faire de la politique", he adds: "Je n'ai jamais voulu faire que de l'opposition", and he explains the origin of his keen sense of individual liberty: "Issu, par ma mère, des paysans des premières communes franches, situées au nord de Paris, j'ai retenu des impressions d'enfance le vif sentiment du droit qui règne dans la Flandre française, - comme en Angleterre et dans les Pays-Bas. C'est pourquoi, me retrouvant dans ce milieu, je vous écris ces lignes" (456-7). He too descends, through his mother, from the pure and ancient race whose independent traditions still flourish in the Valois. In a letter written at about the same time he says: "Je retourne dans le Valois pour continuer l'Abbé de Bucquoy et revoir Soissons et Laon - d'où nous sommes originaires tous deux - moi du côté de ma mère - je crois fermement que cela explique les relations et les sympathies" (Letter 168)[1]. His own property belongs to the very domain which is the cradle of the opposition dynasty: "Dans ces contrées, - qui faisaient partie des anciens apanages de Marguerite de Valois et des Médicis, - qui y avaient fait du bien, - on avait contracté une haine constitutionnelle contre la race qui les avait remplacés" (230). He associates himself closely with this when, in 'Promenades et Souvenirs' (1855), he describes his maternal great-grandfather's house - the same house in which he himself spent the first

[1] See Note 3, p. 275.

six years of his life, and which is situated on the "quelques restes de propriétés" (see A. Marie, 12) - as "un ancien pavillon de chasse aujourd'hui ruiné, qui avait fait partie des apanages de Marguerite de Valois" (158).

It is characteristic of these half-conscious patterns of identification that they are never fully formulated, and certain inconsistencies remain. The religious affiliation of the opposition race, for example, would appear to change: in the sixteenth century they are Ligueurs, but by the end of the reign of Louis XIV they are Huguenots. What is important is not the continuity of doctrine, but the continuity of opposition - the idea of an ancient race whose position has been usurped by tyrants but which yet preserves the purity of its traditions.

Nerval's attitude to the Franks is also slightly ambiguous. This may reflect his ambivalent feelings about his mother, whom he associates with the Franks and with Germany. On the one hand he connects her with the "Frankish" tradition of freedom and racial purity. But on the other hand there is a certain resentment. The Germanic tradition, he says, is for the women to go into battle alongside their husbands: "les femmes guerrières sont de la race franque". But "la masse des femmes françaises redoutent la guerre, à cause de l'amour qu'elles ont pour leurs enfants" (234). There is evidence that Nerval connected his mother here with the Germanic tradition: "Je n'ai jamais connu ma mère qui avait voulu suivre mon père aux armées, comme les femmes des anciens Germains" ('Aurélia', I, 397). Her decision to follow the warlike calling of her husband made him an orphan, and deprived him of the mother's love which Frenchwomen generally put

above the pursuit of glory (Cf Letter 273). This connects with Georges' resentment at being abandoned by his mother.

In 'Les Confidences de Nicolas' Nerval turns his back on the dream of the hero who is reunited with a long-lost noble family and works out, through his version of the life and loves of Restif de la Bretonne, the concurrent tendency of the works discussed in this Chapter, and which in 'Sylvie' he will apply to his own life: the possibility of renewing a childhood love for a simple village girl.

CHAPTER XII

THE COUNTRY SWEETHEART AS ONE-IN-MANY

> "Unam petii a Domino, et hanc requiram omnibus diebus vitae meae! (Je n'en ai demandé qu' une au Seigneur, et je la chercherai tous les jours de ma vie!)" ('Les Confidences de Nicolas', II, 1017).

'Le Marquis de Fayolle' was a partial synthesis of Nerval's different longings: the return to the normality of a simple country sweetheart incorporates the theme of reunion with a noble family, which has strong links with the dream-experience. 'Les Confidences de Nicolas' (1850) represents a more complete synthesis. The temptation of the dream-experience is here apparently accounted for entirely in terms of the normal, attainable love. This is an attempt, through Nerval's version of the life and loves of Restif, to gather together all his own imaginative longings into a single rational pattern. Here for the first time (following up the synthesis adumbrated in 'Corilla') Nerval explains both the affaire with the actress and the insistent memory of a village love in terms of a single situation. All Restif's loves remind him of Jeanette Rousseau, daughter of the local notary, so that 'Les Confidences' presents a chain of substitutions stretching back to the little village girl. The hero loves her. He cannot possess her. All his life he seeks a woman to replace her.

He first meets her when he is fifteen and she a year or two older.

This is given as a circumstance making marriage impossible[1], but the real obstacle is surely that the idea of approaching her physically fills Nicolas with awe and embarrassment. She is an "apparition", "une céleste beauté", to be worshipped rather than met. The innocent adolescent love is kept pure by being transferred to an older woman. The episode culminating in Nicolas' sexual assault on Marguerite Pâris is a fascinating closed system of substitutions, whose law is that the loved one always stands for someone else.

Nicolas' love for Jeannette, in being transferred to Marguerite, is transformed into a sexual passion. It is as though Marguerite is given the body which Nicolas' reverence for Jeannette denies her[2]. The girl's appearance is hardly mentioned; she is a vague, ethereal presence. Marguerite, on the other hand, is described in some detail. Nicolas looks at her in a way he would never dare to look at Jeannette; he is clearly captivated by the warm physical presence of the older woman. She is housekeeper to the curé of Courgis, Nicolas' half-brother, with whom he is staying. There is an easy, comfortable relationship.

Marguerite is associated in Nicolas' mind with Jeannette from the very beginning. She does her hair in the same way. Like Jeannette,

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1. See II, 1017 & 1019.

2. "Nicolas se jeta sur les mains de Marguerite," (who has promised to help him win the girl's hand in marriage)"et inonda de larmes ses bras délicats et beaucoup plus beaux que ceux de Jeannette, qui, comme toutes les jeunes filles, ne les avaient pas encore formés".

she has black eyes (cf 1021 & 1088). Nicolas watches her as she prepares a salad, but he is thinking about Jeannette (1018). The connection is drawn closer because Marguerite has a special interest in Jeannette, and hence in Nicolas' love for Jeannette. M. Rousseau, Jeannette's father, had once asked for her hand in marriage, but her jealous uncle had prevented the match, and he had married another woman, "de sorte, dit-elle, que j'aime cette jolie fille, en me disant que j'aurais pu être ... sa mère! " (1019)[1]. Her attitude to Nicolas is also maternal, so that he and Jeannette could consummate the union which never took place between herself and M. Rousseau. Sexual passion arises between Marguerite and Nicolas because each represents for the other the living, desirable image of a lost love.

After M. Rousseau, Marguerite had another suitor, Louis Denesvre, who was as bold as M. Rousseau was timid, and would no doubt have carried off Marguerite if he had not been shot by the uncle one night when he was paying court to her at a downstairs window.

As Marguerite is telling Nicolas about this, the memory revives all her feelings: "elle passait ses mains dans les cheveux de Nicolas et ne pouvait s'empêcher de le regarder avec attendrissement, car il lui rappelait M. Rousseau par son amour pour Jeannette, et le pauvre Denesvre par son exaltation, par ses regards ardents, par la douceur même qu'elle sentait à se voir par instants l'objet d'un trouble qui

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1. To make the point about Marguerite's vicarious motherhood even stronger, Jeannette's real mother is also called Marguerite.

détournait sa pensée de Jeannette" (1025). Nicolas represents both of the two men in Marguerite's past. His timid, respectful love for Jeannette is a repetition of that of Jeannette's father for herself. His sensual passion for her repeats that of Louis Denesvre. She, on the other hand, is the sexual image of his chaste passion for Jeannette.

The end of the episode is that, in a kind of double dream, Nicolas re-enacts the role of Denesvre on the night he was fatally wounded. As in the past, Marguerite is in a ground-floor room with the window open[1]. The image of Denesvre's exploit comes to Nicolas' mind with such imperious vividness that he feels he <u>is</u> the other man, and he slips out into the garden in the direction of Marguerite's window, half-awake, half-asleep. Marguerite, her hair loose as on the other occasions when there has been passion between them, is sleeping in the moonlight, and in this favourable half-light she looks "belle et jeune comme autrefois" (1025). As Nicolas climbs in over the sill she murmurs in her sleep: "Laisse-moi, mon cher Denesvre, laisse-moi!"

The double illusion is complete. Marguerite is about to savour the moment of climax which never came. Nicolas, the chaste side of his love supressed, is given over entirely to sensuality. But this substitute sex-act, once again, is not allowed to take place. The <u>dénouement</u> is exactly parallel to the uncle's pistol shot: the severe Jansenist half-brother, the abbé Thomas, intervenes and "d'un pied

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1. "Une fenêtre basse" - the phrase is used both for the Denesvre episode and for Nicolas' attempt.

brutal, il l'enleva en un instant à toute la poésie de la situation" (1025). Nicolas is sent away[1].

He becomes an apprentice printer in Auxerre. When he meets Mme. Parangon, the young wife of his master, her smile recalls a vague memory of childhood: Nicolas knew her when she was a little girl, and there is a moment of confusion between "toi" and "vous", between then and now[2]. Thus she is in a literal sense an image of the childhood sweetheart. But she has become a mature married woman (we are not told her exact age) and he is only a lad. The attitude she takes up towards him is protective - she gives him a watch to reward him for having been discreet about one of he husband's amourettes, which establishes a kind of complicity between them. At first he adores her respectfully, but under the corrupting influence of a libertine monk, Gaudet d'Arras, respect turns to sexual desire, and one night he creeps into Mme. Parangon's bedroom. But where Marguerite had offered a tempting disarray, Mme. Parangon sleeps as chastely draped as a lay figure on a tomb. He feels no desire for her, and is glad to steal out without being discovered.

But he has been discovered, for she is a light sleeper. She realises that he is in love with her, and proposes that one day he shall marry her sister Fanchette, who is rather like her (1038).

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1. The theme of passion for the legitimate object of love being suppressed, only to break out indirectly in a way that looks like a crime, also runs through an episode which is woven into this one: a visit to a Jansenist household.

2. See above, p.133.

However, another more determined assault on her honour makes this impossible: "Tu n'as pas voulu être mon frère" (1042). Soon after, he leaves for Paris.

The affaire with Mme. Parangon reproduces the essential features of the affaire with Marguerite. Mme. Parangon's image exists in the hero's imagination alongside Jeannette's, chaste and sisterly, before she develops into a sensual counterpart of the young girl. Having announced her plan to establish a vicarious relationship with Nicolas by marrying him to her sister, she cuts short the young man's effusive and equivocal gratitude, just as Marguerite had done when she promised to sue for the hand of Jeannette on his behalf[1]. Like Marguerite she is maternally solicitous (1030, 1034), though she is too closely identified with Jeannette[2] to release sensuality as freely as the

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1. Cf 1021-22 with 1038-39.

2. Like Jeannette, she is described as "une apparition" who changes the course of his destiny (compare 1015-17 with 1027). He worships her, as he does Jeannette, like a divinity. Her image can co-exist chastely with that of Jeannette, whereas the image of a sensually troubled Marguerite pushes out that of the younger girl (compare 1019 with 1032). Nicolas' love for both Mme. Parangon and Jeannette is described in terms of religion. Both enchant him by their tone of voice (compare 1016 with 1038). There is a good deal of ambiguity as between Mme. Parangon and Jeannette. At the soirée when Nicolas first meets Mlle. Guéant, he tells the story of his "premier amour" (1004). This seems to refer to Jeannette - the same phrase is applied to her later (1038). Yet we are told that "il venait de raconter ses amours pour une femme qui était morte quelques mois auparavant" (1005), and this can only apply to Mme. Parangon. Since Mme. Parangon herself is remembered as a childhood playmate, she is another Jeannette.

more homely figure of Marguerite. The stronger sense of a family tie tends to preclude sexual feeling. Yet, like Marguerite, she represents dual aspects of the maternal image. When the woman is recognised as a mother (as in 'Le Marquis de Fayolle') she has a death-like coldness and an invulnerable chastity. This is the negative side of Nerval's feelings about his own mother: death has petrified her into an icy statue, for ever unresponsive to human warmth. On the other hand, when the maternal figure is being used as a substitute for the young girl, that is, as an indirect or unavowed image of the mother, she can become warm and sensual, especially when, as with Marguerite, she is a servant. (Marguerite stands perhaps for the nourrice, someone who, though motherly, can be treated with familiarity). Maternal solicitude, which is warmth without sensuality, represents an intermediate stage.

We note that Nerval's image of his dead mother does not release easy dreams of transcendental reunion. The cold fact of death is clearly in the forefront of his mind when he imagines his hero (particularly in 'Le Marquis de Fayolle) seeking his mother's love. The chilly withdrawal of Hélène de Maurepas mirrors Nerval's abandonment by his own mother and the ultimate withdrawal of her death. Only with a humble, warm-hearted person who is of no importance in herself can the semblance of love be enjoyed. Behind this, too, lies the unresponsiveness of Jenny Colon and the possibility of obtaining a vicarious response from an easy woman who resembles her.

Mme. Parangon dies, and her place is taken by the ideal image of Mlle. Guéant, the actress. The rapture inspired by her stage presence

is a sterile illusion, and his determination to make his dreams about her break into reality by following her home, has an air of desperation. At close quarters, she is cold and statuesque[1]. It is not what she is, but what she represents, that arouses feeling. In particular, Restif's emotion is a response to the ingénue role of 'La Pupille' (1000). And since Mlle. Guéant resembles Nicolas' "first love"[2], Nerval is surely suggesting that Mlle. Guéant as "la pupille" recalled the daughter of the village notaire[3]. In 'Corilla', he has already brought the two poles of his imagination together by having the majestic singer act the part of a simple village girl. In his presentation of the Restif-Mlle. Guéant affaire the process of integration is completed. Again, love is the Proustian surging up of the past. Mlle. Guéant as an individual is cold and unapproachable, but she responds to Nicolas' enthusiasm for his first love (1004).

As in his comments about Mme. Bonhomme, Nerval shows great lucidity in analysing the subjective and illusory nature of his own love for

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1. 1001 and 1004. See above, p.262.

2. 1004. In the context, this seems to refer to both Jeannette and Mme. Parangon (see above, p.290, Note 2).

3. 'La Pupille', by Fagan. The play is based on a long-drawn-out misunderstanding: Julie loves her guardian, Ariste, but is too shy to say so, and everyone, including Ariste, thinks she is in love with a fatuous marquis. Ariste is held back by modesty and bachelor caution from seeing the truth. But it ends happily. The moral is that middle-aged husbands are best (Ariste is 40), which would apply more nearly to the author than to the hero of 'Les Confidences'.

the actress[1]. But Nicolas' affaire with Mlle. Guéant, unlike Nerval's with Jenny Colon, is not a dead-end. It is one of a series of substitute-experiences in each of which the hero finds a partial satisfaction of his yearning for Jeannette Rousseau. And at the end of his life he will be united with Jeannette, so that each fragmentary love will be given its place in a complete pattern, will be justified on the plane of normality. The attempt to make a dream break into life was, as ever, bound to fail. But the dream was really about another person, a village sweetheart who is still available and to whom he will go back. Hence the coldness of Mlle. Guéant-Jenny Colon can be discounted, and will melt when the identification with the village love is made. This is the other side of the coin we were shown in 'Corilla' or 'Sylvie', where the actress refuses to stand for a subjective image. Here she accepts the appropriation.

The pattern works as follows. Nicolas, too shy to approach his idol, transfers his love to older women whose mature charms arouse the passion he dare not or cannot feel for Jeannette. His feelings are also those of the adolescent deprived of maternal affection (Nicolas' mother is scarcely mentioned). But when he is middle-aged his interest turns again to two young girls, Zéfire and Sara[2], who,

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1. The fact that Nicolas as a humble working man is too poor to approach the actress recalls Fazio's hopeless adoration of La Maddelena in 'L'Alchimiste', as described in Nerval's own review of the play (see Chapter IV).

2. The two episodes are not in fact contemporaneous. When Nicolas has his affaire with Sara he is 45 (1064), three years older than Nerval at the time of writing. At the time of meeting Zéfire he is presumably about 30, since we are told that it was while he was still a compositor, before he had published his first book (1053),

.../contd. p.294.

however, have something equivocal about them. Their innocence is problematical - they are both more experienced than they look. And in each case there is a hint that the girl is a younger version of her mother, which provides the link with a mature woman. Sara is physically well-developed. The point here is that these young girls (15 and 18 respectively at the time of their affaires with Nicolas) recall the more statuesque forms of the maternal-sensual figures, Marguerite and Mme. Parangon, who in their turn recalled the innocent Jeannette Rousseau. So the pattern is circular: Marguerite and Mme. Parangon (also Mlle. Guéant) are mature substitutes for the adolescent Jeannette; Zéfire and Sara are substitutes for these substitutes and lead Nicolas back to his point of departure for at the end of his life he will return to Jeannette, whose youthful beauty still shines through the mask of old age.

'Zéfire' is the story of a threatened innocence redeemed by love. The theme is virtue shining through the paint of vice. She is a girl-prostitute; but childishly[1] innocent and charitable in spite of the appearances forced upon her by her milieu. Nicolas and his friend Loiseau set about making a respectable girl of her. When Nicolas is ill, she looks after him: "Nicolas... ne voyait plus qu'une

Footnote continued from p.293:
which means that it was before 1766 when Nicolas was 34 (see 1093 & 1095). Thus there may be ten or fifteen years between the Zéfire and the Sara affaires. Nevertheless it is my contention that they belong psychologically, and in Nerval's conception of Restif's life, to middle age. Nerval situates the Zéfire episode in a middle period between the "amours de jeunesse" and his adventure with Sara "qui clôtura bien tristement sa carrière amoureuse" (II, 1048).

1. "(Une) pauvre enfant" (1054); "une main d'enfant" (1056).

fée bienfaisante dans cette pauvre fille qui montait à lui de l'abîme, comme les autres viennent du ciel" (1056). The values of conventional morality are reversed: an angel rises from the underworld.

As with Mlle. Guéant, it is only after Zéfire's death that the full significance of the relationship is brought out. So far she has been associated only loosely, and then mainly by way of contrast, with the earlier loves. But when she has died Nicolas says: "J'ai donc achevé de perdre Mme. Parangon", which is explained as follows: "les traits de Zéfire lui avaient rappelé ceux de cette femme adorée, comme elle-même lui avait semblé avoir quelque ressemblance avec Jeannette Rousseau, son premier amour" (1063). Here the links in the chain are clearly enumerated, and the meaning of his love for Zéfire emerges.

The prostitute has been appropriated, the venal love purified. The phrase Nicolas applies to Zéfire when she is looking after him ("fée bienfaisante ... qui montait à lui de l'abîme") is revealing. It also occurs in the letter to Mme. de Solms of 2 January 1853, where the vision of "la princesse Brouhaha" administering charity to a starving family in an attic is directly reminiscent of the richly dressed Zéfire bringing consolation to Nicolas' wretched room[1]. This is a case of literature shaping life. In both these cases the loose woman is given the role of ministering angel. Zéfire, the child-

1. See Chapter II.

prostitute, becomes a "cousin" from the same region as Nicolas[1], and after her death is assimilated to the line of substitutes for Jeannette Rousseau, the pure village sweetheart. The woman who is available becomes an image for the impossible ideal.

Sara, too, is associated with the more opulent beauty of Marguerite (1061, 1075), and, by her sympathetic response when the hero tells her the story of his liaison with the actress just before they attend a performance of 'La Pupille' at the Comédie[2], with Mlle. Guéant. Similarly, Sara's feelings for Nicolas are aroused by a sympathetic response to his regrets about Mme. Parangon (1074). She associates herself with his unhappy past. And when she confesses the tragedy of her own past, telling him how she was ravished with her mother's consent, he identifies the crime against Sara with his own crime against Mme. Parangon. Nicolas feels that his life is being woven in a single piece in which the present repeats and completes the unfinished patterns of the past.

Even before he gets to know her, she becomes the centre for a web of fantasy, "une image que je créais en moi-même, ... une chimère, fugitive comme un rêve, et que je ne songeais même pas à réaliser, ... une de ces impossibilités que j'ai poursuivies toute ma vie, et

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1. "Mais je vous dis que c'est mon cousin Nicolas, puisque j'arrive du pays" (1055). Here the prostitute pretends to be the village sweetheart. Nicolas intends to marry her (1058). It is significant that Nerval's version stresses both that Zéfire pretends to be a cousin of Nicolas and that she is dressed like a prostitute.

2. 1077. My italics. So Mlle. Guéant had responded to Nicolas' emotion about Jeannette.

que je ne sais quel destin a quelquefois rendues possibles" (1071). Here is the peculiarly Nervalian juggling with dream and reality: he knows that imaginings have no substance, do not exist as realisable possibilities; yet the sense of destiny, the conviction that this new possibility can combine with the fragments of the past to form a valid experience, blurs the distinction between "impossibilités" and "possibles". The dream strengthens when Nicolas sees Sara with her young suitor, Delarbre, and the machinery of identification becomes more detailed. His feelings about Sara, vitalised by the "faible souvenir des impressions de la jeunesse" which her youth evokes, are superimposed on the image of the loving couple (1072).

The vagueness of "impressions de la jeunesse", referring to the composite figure rather than to one in particular, reveals the lack of rational analysis on which this sort of process depends. The sight of Sara with her young man plunges him into the pungent shadows of memory, and when he emerges into the light of reality, the emotion gathered is accreted round the figure of Sara. Subtly, the domain of the imagination, the privileged field of genius, is given a greater validity than the actual: "Amitié, amour, qu'est cela? Suis-je bien sûr moi-même d'avoir aimé? Les images du jour sont pour moi comme les visions de la nuit! Malheur à qui pénètre dans mon rêve éternel sans être une image impalpable!... Comme le peintre, froid à tout ce qui l'entoure, et qui trace avec calme le spectacle d'une bataille ou d'une tempête, nous ne voyons partout que des modèles à décrire, des passions à rendre, et tous ceux qui se mêlent à notre vie sont victimes de notre égoïsme, comme nous le sommes de notre

imagination!" (1072). True, the sphere of the dream is ostensibly criticised; the writer is a victim of his own imagination. But the very fact that Nicolas the lover should have called on his reputation as a writer shows that self-criticism is not the main purpose here. The writer's prestige is called upon to extend the dubious field of influence of the daydreaming lover. This is another plea for the validity of subjective emotion.

Nicolas writes a story in which the hero, Chavigny, is based on Delarbre and the heroine, Adeline, on Sara, projecting into the figure of Chavigny all the passion and fire which Delarbre seems to him to lack, but which he himself would have felt had he been in his place (1073). His timidity with J. Rousseau has undergone a radical transformation. The fire of his creative enthusiasm as he pours this out draws Sara into the magic circle of his imagination: "maintenant... je te trouve jeune et beau"[1], she cries; "oh! que j'envie celles que tu as aimées! " (1073). Momentarily, reality is coloured by the dream: he appears to her as young as he is in his fantasy. She is projected into his past.

After expressing his feelings for Sara vicariously in the story, Nicolas tries to transfer this love from the domain of the imagination, where it has been engendered by the power of associative memory, into reality. He is manoeuvred by Mme. Léeman - so we deduce by reading between the lines - into becoming Sara's protector. He pays for her to be kept at home, so that she can stop going out to work. "Vous seres

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1. The same phrase was applied to her and Delarbre.

son père", Mme. Léeman tells him, "et nous ne ferons qu'une seule famille" (1075). Nicolas is at once a paternal protector and a lover. From the start, therefore, this is an ambiguous relationship, resting precariously on a commercial basis.

As usual, the attempt to transfer the imaginary into the domain of the real sets up an uneasy compromise. There is a discrepancy between what Nicolas wants Sara to be and what she is. As with Zéfire, he appropriates a girl whose interests are fundamentally venal, and tries to make out of her someone sweet, innocent and naïve.

The whole story of the rival, too, is shrouded in ambiguity: we never find out whether his intentions are honourable or not. Once again, Nicolas' imposed view of the situation obscures reality. The clash between them, in fact, is precisely the typical clash between the dreamer who sees things as he wants them to be, and the practical man who sees them as they are. With Montette as with Delarbre, Nicolas is given the typically Nervalian position of the best man losing. The dreamer, by the intensity of subjective passion, has a better claim on the girl. But just because his passion is subjective, he is defeated by his practical rival.

Nicolas' negligence in coming late to a <u>rendezvous</u> on three occasions at a crucial juncture seems like an abdication in the face of his rival's more solid claims. When Sara's coolness persuades him that all is finished and that he has lost her as a lover, his impulse is to give her away as a father (1081). We are reminded of Nerval trying to turn defeat into magnanimous acceptance by the paternal

offer of Zeynab's hand to the young Armenian, when he fears that other man has stolen her affections, and of Hakem with Yousouf. But this resignation to the paternal role is precarious, for it is conditional upon the lover's pride remaining unscarred, and he cannot keep up the pretence when his supposed advantage as a lover is called in question. In the end, defeat is complete. The attempt to salvage his pride has failed; he has not even the consolation of feeling that his emotional superiority over Montette has secured Sara's affection, and that she is only marrying Montette for his money. His device has been exploded - though he is careful to avoid facing the whole truth (1084). However, since Sara was only an image of the lost adolescent love, his break with her does not cut him off irremediably from happiness.

At the age of sixty, Nicolas returns to his village: "Il pense à Jeannette Rousseau, la seule des femmes qu'il a aimées, à laquelle il n'a jamais osé dire un mot. 'C'était là le bonheur, peut-être! Epouser Jeannette, passer sa vie à Courgis, en brave laboureur, - n'avoir point eu d'aventures, et n'avoir pas fait de romans, telle pouvait être ma vie" (II, 1087-88). He enquires after her, finds her still unmarried, realises that her image has been with him throughout his life. They decide that they are destined for each other, and: "puisque nous ne pouvons plus nous marier pour être heureux, épousons-nous pour mourir ensemble" (1089). We are reminded of the earlier lament: "tout ce que j'aimais est ainsi dans le tombeau" (1077). Even in this version of Nerval's imaginary love-life, according

to which every woman is an image of the accessible village girl to whom the hero returns, there is no consummation. The total scheme culminates in the prospect of a transcendental union.

Once again we see how closely Nerval's desire to recuperate the chance of mundane happiness is bound up with his dreams. When the maternal Marguerite promises to help Nicolas marry Jeannette Rousseau, who resembles her and is like her spiritual daughter, we see that this is a transposition of the dream of family reunion. So too, when Nicolas returns to Jeannette, the face of the young girl seems to smile at him through the wrinkled features, so that she becomes a composite figure, at once the venerable spirit of the race and the mother as a girl. Even the unlikely figures of Mme. Léeman, Sara and Montette are organised into the same pattern. Thus the apparent imaginative structure, focussed on the image of an attainable happiness, is underpinned by the deeper scheme. The carefully rational explanation of <u>ressemblances</u>[1] betrays Nerval's constant preoccupation with the idea of a single racial identity refracted into different individuals. And the ceaseless rearrangement of the pattern is a consequence of the impossibility of finding a definitive satisfaction, in terms of Nerval's own life, of the desired happiness. His memories of childhood are inseparable from their idealised form, the family paradise glimpsed in dreams, to which the beloved (whether he is thinking of his mother or Jenny Colon) has been transported, and to which he may one day return. And indeed, the most significant moments of his hero's love-life seem to pass as in a dream.

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1. II, 1063.

Jeannette herself is an incarnation of "la figure idéale que toute âme jeune a rêvée (1016). The image of Mme Parangon floats up from the shadows of childhood memories "comme le souvenir d'un rêve" (1029). Before Nicolas' encounter with Gaudet d'Arras, his feelings for the older woman are described as "ces charmantes sensations d'un esprit de poète auquel suffisait le rêve" (1032). Similarly the image of Sara before he becomes acquainted with her is "une chimère, fugitive comme un rêve, et que je ne songeais même pas à réaliser" (1071). There comes a moment when he tries to make the dream come true. Mlle Guéant, like the others, is initially no more than an image in his mind, "le rêve d'un fou" (999), but a sense of reality intrudes, and the dreamer forms a desperate resolution to force the dream to a climax. This is what happens with Marguerite: when Nicolas attempts to seduce her, he is "moitié éveillé, moitié soumis à une hallucination fiévreuse", and the experience is a double illusion (1025). But there can be no climax in this hall of mirrors except, as here, the brutal return to reality. So with the seduction of Mme Parangon: "comment dire ce qui se passa dans cet instant fugitif comme un rêve?" (1041). Because the women Nicolas loves are all incarnations of Jeannette, who is herself an incarnation of a dream-figure, union with them is as fleeting as a dream.

The dream is not subject to time. Sara is an image in his "rêve éternel" (1072). Jeannette is "un souvenir immortel", following him through his life and at the same time for ever receding: "fuyant toujours, comme Eurydice, que le destin arrache au bras du poète parjure" (1088). We are reminded of 'Aurélia' and 'El Desdichado'[1],

[1] Is not Jeannette also the first and the last, as in 'Artémis'?

of the beloved lost and sought in death. Nicolas and Jeannette are destined for one another by nature, and they are united in this life. But they are also, more deeply, destined for each other by heaven, and will be united beyond the grave.

Nevertheless, the underlying dream-structure shows only occasionally through the surface of this otherwise rational account of Nerval's imaginary love-life. The longing for normality is uppermost, so that the dream of reunion with a composite mother-figure can find only a disguised expression. We have seen from 'Le Marquis de Fayolle' - and this reappears in Nicolas' attempted seduction of Mme. Parangon - that when Nerval pictures the hero's direct approach to the mother-figure, he is confronted with the icy withdrawal of death. The happy conviction of family reunion beyond the grave is intermittent, and if Nerval seeks to adapt his dream to the real-life circumstances of a possible happiness, it is because in his sadder moments his mother seems for ever separated from him by her death.

We shall see in the next Chapter, through a detailed study of the way Nerval adapted Restif's autobiography, how he developed the original according to patterns which are essentially his own.

CHAPTER XIII

NERVAL'S APPROPRIATION OF RESTIF

In 'Les Confidences de Nicolas', Nerval fashions Restif in his own image. The result is a partial betrayal. The compulsive sexual activity of 'Monsieur Nicolas'[1], the puerile insistence on tedious circumstantial detail, the misplaced confidence of the autodidact, leading to rare flashes of insight concealed in a welter of extravagant nonsense - such aspects, which would make up an essential part of any objective account of Restif's work, although they receive a scanty acknowledgement in the critical-descriptive passages of 'Les Confidences', are entirely omitted from Nerval's reconstructions of certain key episodes, and hence from the vital part of his portrait of Restif. As usual he is writing more as a novelist than as an historian.

Yet the betrayal is only partial. Critics have pointed out the

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1. 'Monsieur Nicolas, ou le Coeur humain dévoilé', Pauvert, 1959 (6 volumes), referred to in this Chapter as "MN, I, II..." etc. Restif's autobiography, of course, is already considerably fictionalised, but it is beyond my scope to measure the distance between 'Monsieur Nicolas' and the facts of Restif's life. See A. Tabarant, 'Le vrai visage de Rétif de la Bretonne', 1948. Some variation in the spelling of proper names occurs as between this and the preceding Chapter, as I have thought it appropriate here to follow Restif's spelling.

Although Nerval's chief source is 'Monsieur Nicolas', he also, no doubt, used other works such as 'Le paysan perverti'. The Pléiade editors have shown that Restif's tardy (and imaginary) marriage to Jeannette is taken from 'Le Drame de la vie' (II, 1483-85).

profound similarities between the two men. Like Nerval, Restif invented a "family tree"[1]; like Nerval, he attached great importance to anniversaries; like Nerval, he was fond of punning and "hieroglyphic" signatures[2]. He too had a feeling for popular folksongs and nurtured a lifelong nostalgia for his village childhood. He too holds that dreams are superior to reality, that memory is an enhancement of experience[3]. Just as Nerval in Vienna declares himself in love with the idea of women as a collectivity rather than embarking on the risks of an individual relationship, so Restif appropriates the girls of Auxerre for his imaginary harem: "c'était la pluralité qui m'empêchait de me livrer à un goût; l'impression ne creusait jamais assez profondément"[4]. Like Nerval in the Saléma story, Restif tries to create his experience like a novelist: "lorsqu'il manquait de sujets ... il se créait à lui-même une aventure romanesque"[5]. And like Nerval, he identified himself with the heroes of his love-stories[6].

Nerval's appropriation of Restif, then, is not entirely unscrupulous. Profound affinities exist: he did not invent them. This is a

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1. MN, I, xlvi.
2. "Nid-coq-las rets-if" = Nicolas Rétif. Cf Nerval's "geai-rare"= Gérard.
3. E.G. MN, II, 91.
4. MN, II, 218.
5. II, 1093.
6. See 'Les Confidences de Nicolas', Part Two, chapter iv (II, 1073 etc).

two-way process: Nerval is at once attributing his own imaginative experience to Restif and developing Restif's experience into a fuller formulation of his own[1]. In 1843 Nerval had noted: "Poursuivre les mêmes traits dans des femmes diverses. Amoureux d'un type éternel" (II, 706). When he came upon what he calls Restif's "théorie des ressemblances" (II, 1063)[2], he must have felt that he was discovering his own. As a young man, Restif created an ideal woman in his imagination, and when he saw Jeannette Rousseau he recognised her as an incarnation of this ideal. Subsequently, he fell in love with women like Mme. Parangon because of their resemblance to Jeannette: "Combien d'hommes qui, s'ils rentraient en eux-mêmes avec autant d'attention que je scrute mon propre coeur, trouveraient qu'ils n'ont jamais aimé qu'une femme, quoiqu'ils en aient recherché, possédé plusieurs! C'était toujours le goût pour la première aimée, son genre de beauté, qui rendait les autres aimables"[3].

This theory, applying a single motivation to disparate love-affairs, is both simpler and more systematic than anything we have found in Nerval to date. Nerval has never made the village girl the prototype of all his loves. She first appears simply as the sweetheart to whom one might return, and later as an aspect of the aristocrat. She belongs essentially to Nerval's idea of family reunion, appearing as one facet of a multiple identity.

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1. See above, p. 159 (on Nerval and Goethe). Again, cf Baudelaire and Poe.
2. There is no evidence that Nerval had studied Restif before 1850 (see above, p. 132, Note 1.
3. MN, II, 71. See also MN, I, 442; II, 235, 313, 360 and <u>passim</u>; IV, 527.

In the two-way process of merging his own experience with that of Restif, Nerval will merge Restif's theory with his own experience. As well as fashioning Restif in his own image, he fashions himself in the image of Restif. "Les ressemblances tiennent presque toujours à une même origine de pays ou de race ... Aussi Restif suppose que Zéfire était, par sa mère, issue des mêmes contrées" (II, 1063). In point of fact, Restif supposes something rather different. He suggests in a footnote that the resemblance between Zéfire and Mme Parangon can be explained by the fact that they both possess the racial characteristics of the Gallic stock of Basse-Bourgogne (from which he also derives), in particular reddish-blond hair (Zéfire) changing to ash-blond, chestnut or brown with maturity (Mme Parangon)[1]. In 'Monsieur Nicolas', Restif is Zéfire's father: her mother was a village girl possessed in a stable when our hero was nine years old. But there is nothing in Restif about Zéfire's racial affiliation through her mother - indeed he fails to recognise the mother until after Zéfire's death, when she recalls their encounter in the stable[2]. In any case, the notion of a racial type is marginal in Restif. Nerval makes it central, using the very same phrases that are applied to his own sense of belonging, through his mother, to an original Gallic race[3].

And his application of the theory will be more systematic than Restif's.

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1. MN, III, 190.

2. MN, III, 220. One reason for his failure to recognise her, apart from the fact that she has changed, is that he is too ashamed to look at her properly (III, 118).

3. Cf Nerval's use of these phrases ("issu, par ma mère... ces contrées") when describing his own racial affiliations, above, pp. 282-83.

By leaving out Restif's numerous secondary love-affairs, Nerval creates the impression that all Restif's loves were reflections of the first. Nerval imposes his own sense of unity.

It must be admitted that Nerval passes over one instance of "ressemblance". Restif's story of how he was tricked into a hasty and imprudent marriage to an English girl, Henriette Kircher, makes ecstatic references to her striking resemblance to Zéfire (and another girl), as well as linking her with Mme. Parangon[1]. Nerval's account, abbreviated but otherwise substantially accurate, leaves this out, partly because his creative imagination is not engaged, but also, no doubt, because Henriette as a foreigner could hardly belong to the regional type. In other minor episodes, for which his main interest is artistic rather than imaginative, on the other hand, Nerval will insert an apparently innocuous detail which reveals the underlying preoccupation. Thus in his version of Restif's marriage to Agnès Lebègue, he gives "nostalgie du pays" as a reason for his hero's desire to return to Auxerre (1044).

In his treatment of Restif's brief liaison with Mlle. Guéant, the actress, he retains only the merest outline of Restif's narrative. For Restif this is no more than a secondary incident. But Nerval gives it pride of place, both by placing it at the beginning of his study, and by filling out Restif's narrative with lively detail of his own. There is no hint in 'Monsieur Nicolas' that the actress resembled his other loves. Restif's party-piece in the original is to describe an adventure in a Parisian brothel; in Nerval's version, he tells

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1. See MN, III, 250-51 and 257.

the story of his "premier amour" for Jeannette Rousseau/Mme. Parangon[1], and it is Nerval who invents the reason: "Quant à la personne que j'ai aimée, elle vous ressemblait" (II, 1004)[2]. The idea that the actress remains frigid until she is moved to respond to Restif's emotion over the lost love, is also an invention of Nerval's. So is the reaction of the blasé audience: "dans tous ces coeurs perdus il sut réveiller une étincelle du pur amour des premiers ans" (1004). Here Nerval is subtly preparing the reader for the effect of Sara on the middle-aged Nicolas: "un souvenir de mes jeunes années me revint à l'esprit"[3]. The way in which Nerval binds his stories together by echoes and stylistic links of this sort forges them into a single pattern far more coherent than the effect Restif achieves through his explicit comments.

By extending the network of "ressemblances" to cover the actress, Nerval is fully realising for the first time what in his own work so far had been no more than adumbrated. It is significant that, on Restif's bare indication of the titles of the plays she acted in, Nerval suggests that the hero's feelings for the actress may have been coloured by the ingénue part of 'La Pupille'[4].

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1. See above, p.292.
2. Nerval also makes a stylistic link between Mme. Parangon and Mlle. Guéant. In the case of both women, it is the smile which triggers off the process of memory (see II, 1028 & 1004).
3. II, 1073 and Part Two, chapter iv, passim.
4. See above, pp. 291-92.

This application of the theory of "ressemblances" is Nerval's own, and all the comments about the illusory, subjective and sterile nature of falling in love with an actress, are interpolated by him. He is using Restif's story as a back-cloth to project yet another version of his affaire with Jenny Colon. It is Nerval, not Restif, who went to the theatre "presque tous les soirs" (998)[1]. It is Nerval who insists that Nicolas was too poor and insignificant to gain admission at the stage-door[2]. Restif's adoration at a distance appears to last only about a month; in Nerval's version it lasts a year (999), as in the first chapter of 'Sylvie'. The detail about Restif walking up and down outside her window half the night watching for her shadow on the curtains (999) is not in 'Monsieur Nicolas', and Nerval may have recalled it from the time of his own hopeless passion for Jenny[3]. Certain passages directly recall the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon', particularly in the fearful analysis of the moment when the idol has to be confronted as a living person[4]. Nerval is using Restif to project an image of his own love-life in which the failure with Jenny, whilst being critically

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1. Cf 'Sylvie, I, 265. Note that 'Sylvie', like 'Les Confidences', begins with the hero's hopelessly subjective love for the actress and branches out into a search for an alternative.

2. Cf Nerval's earlier comments on the hero of 'L'Alchimiste', which clearly reflect his own experience (see above, p.109).

3. Cf the Hoffmannesque 'Portrait du diable' (1839), which presumably reflects something of Nerval's own humiliation at the hands of Jenny Colon after she had rejected him: "je consumai tout mon temps à courir les rues de Paris, dans l'espérance de rencontrer des personnes qui m'auraient interdit l'entrée de leur maison" (the hero's application for the hand of his beloved has been refused).

4. "De ce jour, Nicolas se sentait amoureux de la femme et non plus seulement de la comédienne" ('Les Confidences', II, 1000) - cf "ce n'était pas alors la femme, c'était l'artiste à qui je rendais hommage" ('Lettres', I, 730). The idea of the statue descending from its pedestal, and the dread of discovering the idol is not what she seemed, are also common to both texts. Cf also the passage on Mme. Bonhomme, II, 191; and O.C. VIII, 73.

presented, is discounted.

In the story of Restif's dual passion for Marguerite Pâris and Jeannette Rousseau, Nerval's appropriation is less blatant, the transformation more subtle. The starting-point is given by Restif, who tells us that Marguerite did her hair in the same way as Jeannette (MN, I, 268); that Nicolas, returning with his imagination full of Jeannette, sees Marguerite (MN, I, 268); and that having caught a glimpse of Jeannette's foot he takes possession of the older woman's slipper with the thought: "Que cette mule serait jolie dans le pied de Jeannette! " (MN, I, 273). Nerval uses the details of the hair-style and the slipper[1], but he makes Restif's identification of the two women much more explicit, as for example when his hero says to Marguerite: "ma pensée est à elle, et c'est vous cependant qui m'agitez le coeur si fort que je ne puis respirer"[2]. The explicit association develops what in Restif was only juxtaposition and contrast. It is Nerval who notes that Marguerite's arms are more developed than those of Jeannette (II, 1021) - and we recall that Sylvie's transformation from childhood to maturity will be similarly described (I, 274)[3]. Yet Restif does tell us of making love to <u>another</u>

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1. II, 1018 & 1020. Nerval improves Restif here: the incongruous "dans le pied" becomes "au pied"; and whereas in 'Monsieur Nicolas' Jeannette is sewing, Nerval's version is far more graphic: "Nicolas l'avait vue assise sur un banc, filant près de sa mère, et son pied, suivant les mouvements du rouet, l'avait frappé" (II, 1020).
2. II, 1023. See also 1018 and 1019.
3. Nerval will use the same observation to evoke Sara's combination of youth and maturity (see below, pp.317 -18).

Marguerite (omitted in Nerval's simplified and bowdlerised version) whilst thinking about Jeannette (MN, I, 254); and when Restif has a spontaneous ejaculation whilst embracing Marguerite, and does so without losing consciousness, which has always been the case before, his thought is: "je pourrais être le mari de Mlle. Rousseau"[1].

In 'Monsieur Nicolas', Marguerite is sympathetic to Nicolas' love for Jeannette, and promises to tell her of his feelings (MN, I, 281), but she also plans to marry him to her god-daughter (really her daughter), Marianne Taboué, who resembles Jeannette (274-75). In Nerval, there is no mention of Marianne Taboué, and Marguerite promises not only to speak to Jeannette, but to approach her parents and try to arrange the match (II, 1021). Marianne and Jeannette have fused. Similarly he draws together into a compact narrative detached comments scattered through this part of 'Monsieur Nicolas': that Marguerite has maternal feelings for Jeannette because M. Rousseau had wanted to marry her, so that she might have been the girl's mother (MN, I, 245); that she is touched by Nicolas' passion because it reminds her at once of M. Rousseau and of Louis Denêvres (MN, I, 277f); that her feelings for Nicolas himself are maternel: "elle me traitait en mère"[2]. Nerval incorporates these comments in his narrative. In 'Monsieur Nicolas' Marguerite is unmoved by Restif's first passionate advances; but Nerval makes her respond because her feelings are aroused by her sudden memory of Jeannette's father (II, 1019), whereas in Restif's version this

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1. MN, I, 270.
2. MN, I, 271 (see also 276).

revelation had been made some twenty pages earlier (MN, I, 245).

Similarly, when Nerval is describing the hero's second assault on Marguerite's honour (MN,I, 285 ff), although this time he follows the original by making her fail to respond, he motivates the lack of response by suggesting that Marguerite here is acting in her maternal role: "allons-nous en, mon fils!". In 'Monsieur Nicolas' this is no more than a conventional appelation, (MN, I, 286) and does not refer to the earlier suggestion that Marguerite's feelings for Nicolas are those of a mother. Nor does it quench the boy's ardour. But in Nerval's version the words are spoken "avec un accent si attendri, que Nicolas crut entendre sa mère". He is filled with a sense of veneration, "et ce fut alors Marguerite qui lui donna un chaste baiser sur le front" (II, 1023-24). For Nerval, the maternal figure becomes inviolate the moment she is distinctly recognised as such.

As for the dénouement, Nerval has entirely re-imagined it. In 'Monsieur Nicolas', Restif deliberately plans the seduction of Marguerite before they return (MN, I, 291), whereas Nerval's hero, acting under the influence of the confused memories of the day, has the hallucination that he is young Denêvres risking death to visit Marguerite, so that what follows is a dream-like re-enactment of the past. All this is invented by Nerval. So is the parallelism of the dénouement, which he underscores (II, 1026), following the merest hint in Restif that Marguerite, conventionally, was having an erotic dream at the moment Nicolas slipped into her bed (MN, I, 292). In 'Monsieur Nicolas', Restif does not climb in through the window: this, and the introduction of a "fenêtre basse" both in Marguerite's story about Denêvres

and in the account of Nicolas' visit to Marguerite, is Nerval's invention. Above all, there is no suggestion in 'Monsieur Nicolas' that Restif imagines he is Denêvres; on the contrary, he is very wide awake. In Nerval's hands the story becomes, for both Marguerite and Nicolas, a vicarious renewal of past experience[1].

The treatment of Restif's love-affair with Mme. Parangon, too, reduces the diffuse narrative of the original to a strongly marked dramatic situation. In particular Nerval is very discreet in his use of Restif's "ressemblances". Restif states repeatedly that Mme. Parangon was the image of Jeannette, so that he loved them as one person: "j'associai Jeannette à la céleste image qui se gravait dans mon coeur", and again: "habillées de même, on les aurait prises pour les deux soeurs"[2]. Nerval puts these two notations together:

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1. In 'Monsieur Nicolas', Restif discovers that Marguerite has had several illegitimate children. She will also have one by him. Nerval of course leaves all this out. However, there is evidence that he read the passages which he omitted, for in his description of Restif's return to the Jansenist household he states that the daughter's pregnancy had been discovered by the "raccourcissement de sa jupe" (II, 1026), a detail culled, not from the corresponding passage in 'Monsieur Nicolas' (MN, I, 321-22), but from Restif's discovery of Marguerite's pregnancy (MN, I, 320). A striking detail is stored in the memory for use elsewhere. Similarly, Nerval omits the detail of Marguerite's "sourire rajeunissant" (MN, I, 280 - cf II, 1021), which one would have expected to strike him. Perhaps it did, for in the climax of Nerval's account, Marguerite is described as "belle et jeune comme autrefois" (II, 1025), which does not occur in 'Monsieur Nicolas' (MN, I, 292). Nerval weaves into the fabric of his narrative a detail which in Restif featured in an interpolated portrait.

2. See MN, I, 250, 366, 381 & II, 71, 313, etc.

Mme. Parangon is "cette image si chaste et si noble qu'elle ne repoussait pas même dans son coeur celle de Jeannette Rousseau, et s'en faisait accompagner comme d'une soeur chérie" (II, 1032). Restif's literal observation has been internalised. Nerval's version makes a stylistic link between the first meetings with Mme. Parangon and Jeannette Rousseau, by applying to both a word which is not in Restif's version, but which is peculiarly Nerval's own: "une apparition"[1]. And it is Nerval who re-invents the meeting with Mme. Parangon so that it causes the sudden illumination of a childhood memory, with the characteristic confusion of "tu" and "vous". In 'Monsieur Nicolas' Restif is aware before meeting Mme. Parangon that she is the Colette he has known since he was a little boy, and indeed he has seen her quite recently.

For, Nerval, then, Restif finds in Mme. Parangon both Jeannette Rousseau and the little girl he once played with. He also adopts Mme. Parangon's promise to marry him to her sister, which in 'Monsieur Nicolas' is made before any attempt on her honour. Nerval, skilfully integrating scenes whose order he has inverted, makes the offer a consequence of her having woken up the night Restif steals guiltily into her bedroom. The offer is thus made, Nerval remarks, as a kind of reparation (II, 1039). And whereas in 'Monsieur Nicolas' it is Restif who notes that the two sisters are alike, in Nerval's version it is Mme. Parangon herself who points it out (II, 1038), so that, very

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1. See II, 1017 & 1027. Cf 'Le Marquis de Fayolle', I, 567 & 616 (Gabrielle), and 'Le Voyage en Orient', II, 344 (Saléma).

discreetly, Fanchette is being presented as a substitute for herself. Nerval underlines the point with his own observation that when Nicolas asks to be allowed to hold Mme. Parangon's hand, he is enjoying a kind of mirage of his future happiness (II, 1040).

Nerval's treatment of 'Zéfire' introduces no fundamental changes, beyond the fact that he takes Restif's comment on her death ("j'ai donc achevé de perdre Mme. Parangon": MN, III, 213) as the occasion for his own interpretation of "ressemblances"[1]. There is the usual tightening of narrative, though Nerval makes the point about "ressemblance" more firmly than Restif, who says only that Zéfire, with Mme. Parangon and Jeannette, was "la troisième partie de ce tout, mon unique passion", and that like Mme. Parangon's, her hair was blond[2]. Nerval's incidental additions are interesting here. In 'Monsieur Nicolas', Zéfire pretends to be Restif's cousin simply so that his suspicious landlord will admit her to his room. It is Nerval who makes her say: "mais je vous dis que c'est mon cousin Nicolas, puisque j'arrive du pays" (II, 1055), preparing us for the central idea, which is to be introduced a few pages later, that all these women belong to the same regional type[3].

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1. See above, p.307.
2. See MN, III, 140 & 189-90.
3. The phrase "une fée bienfaisante ... qui montait à lui de l'abîme" (II, 1056) is also Nerval's invention (see above, p.295). And Nerval's comment on "amours à distance" (II, 1059-60), once again seeks to justify his own experience by generalising it.

In the Sara story, Nerval as usual imposes economy and coherence on diffuse material. Here he re-writes more freely than in the episodes of Marguerite-Jeannette & Mme. Parangon. From one or two slight indications by Restif (such as the Delarbre story), he builds up a picture of Sara as a living allusion to the past.

In 'Monsieur Nicolas', Restif loathes Sara's mother, Mme. Léeman, "qui avait été belle et que je n'avais jamais trouvée aimable" (MN, IV, 321). But in Nerval's version, Mme. Léeman is still beautiful (1065) and it is suggested that the hero might be less interested in the daughter than in the mother (II, 1083). And, as in the Zéfire episode, Nerval has invented the suggestion that the daughter reproduces the racial type of the mother (1065). Another passage added by Nerval provides the link with Jeannette and Marguerite: "(Sara) passait le bras autour de son cou, ce bras de juive déjà parfait, bien qu'elle n'eût que quinze ans, cette petite main effilée[1] dont les doigts roses traversaient les boucles encore bien fournies de la chevelure de Nicolas" (1071). We recall that it was precisely the reference to Marguerite's well-rounded arms that provided the contrast with the more childish beauty of Jeannette, whilst the hair-stroking was associated with the older woman's vicarious response to Nicolas[2]. Sara, in Nerval's conception, is an amalgam of Jeannette and Marguerite.

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1. In Nerval's mind, this is another indication of purity of race. Of Saléma: "ces ongles longs qui indiquent la race" (II, 344).

2. II, 1021 - 1025. All these notations are inserted by Nerval.

Nerval has also invented her association with Mme. Parangon and, even more strikingly, with Mlle. Guéant, since in Nerval's version several visits to the theatre are reduced to a single one, and he specifies that the play is 'La Pupille', which connects Sara not only with the actress, but also, through her, with the village girl (see above, p.292). This also gives rise to the characteristically Nervalian lament: "tout ce que j'aimais est ainsi dans le tombeau", which is not in 'Monsieur Nicolas'[1].

It is Nerval who presents Restif's love for Sara as a revival of the past: "après quarante ans, chaque douleur du moment réveille les douleurs passées" (1065). Here he is adapting to Restif's situation a passage from his own 'Marquis de Fayolle, written in the

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1. II, 1077. The original for this in 'Monsieur Nicolas' is probably Restif's reaction to hearing of Mlle. Guéant's death: "J'en quitterai Paris avec moins de regret, puisque tout ce qui me le rendait aimable en est disparu" (MN, III, 215). Nerval has transformed this by applying it also to Mme. Parangon, eliminating the reference to Paris, and deepening "disparu" into "dans le tombeau". This profound appropriation of the other man's words, keeping their general drift but radically altering their significance, is really more striking than obvious changes (for example, Restif's actress dies in childbirth, the consequence of her encounter with him; Nerval's dies of consumption). - Similarly, Nerval has authenticated the invented detail that when he and Sara go to the theatre, the play they see is 'La Pupille', by bringing in an observation about destiny of a kind which occurs frequently in 'Monsieur Nicolas'. And the next passage (the blond woman of whom Sara is jealous) is copied faithfully from the original. Thus 'Les Confidences' cunningly interweaves invented and authentic elements.

previous year (I, 588). It is true that Nerval's "L'avenir l'épouvante, et il se cramponne au passé pour tenter de ne pas mourir; il veut recommencer la vie, et plus la femme aimée est jeune, plus aussi les émotions deviennent vives et délicieuses" (1066), in which his own observation about rejuvenation is woven into an anodine sentence from Restif[1], can be traced to other passages of 'Monsieur Nicolas'[2]. And it was Restif who originated the idea of writing a story, based on the love-affair between Sara and Delarbre, which enabled him to fancy himself in the young man's place and pour out his feelings for Sara, as it were, by proxy (MN, IV, 343). But Nerval, while keeping the outline of this, including the detail of the initials carved by Nicolas on the Ile Saint-Louis, entirely transforms it. The picture of the creative genius for whom dreams are more real than reality, who analyses and imagines his life rather than living it, for whom other people are no more than models to be ruthlessly appropriated -

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1. "Si l'on a les sens moins combustibles à quarante-cinq ans, le coeur est beaucoup plus tendre; et plus la femme est jeune, plus l'émotion est vive et délicieuse" (MN, IV, 324).

2. See MN, IV, 360 & 374: "elle m'avait reporté aux années heureuses de ma jeunesse; elle me les rendait présentes, et l'illusion était si forte, que j'avais, en ce moment, cette gaîté, cette fleur d'espérance, qu'il est si délicieux de sentir ... nouveau Tithon, je me voyais dans les bras de l'Aurore". Nerval was also no doubt struck by Restif's frequent remarks to the effect that whilst writing 'Monsieur Nicolas' he was recapturing or even experiencing fully for the first time the emotions of his youth - see MN, I, 513f, 531; II, 39 & 139; and III, 72 for a typical effect of memory. Such passages prefigure Proust's revelation of the involuntary workings of memory.

all this is inserted by Nerval. He is no longer talking about Restif, but about himself[1]. Never has he commented so lucidly on the creation of an imaginary love-life as when he is ostensibly reporting the experience of another man! The most acute self-analysis works through self-identification.

Restif's self-identification with Delarbre, in 'Monsieur Nicolas', is straightforward: "je me figurai que j'étais à sa place; que c'était moi qui t'aimais" (MN, IV, 343). It is Nerval who establishes his own contrast between a conventional emotion and the superior intensity of subjective feeling, and it is only in Nerval's version that Sara, fired by the hero's enthusiasm, shares the illusion of youth recaptured which it had created[2].

The process is taken further by Nerval's addition to the story of the initials carved by Restif on the parapet of the Ile Saint-Louis:

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1. Cf a similar passage in 'Les Amours de Vienne' (II, 61), and the chapter on Mlle. Guéant. - The passage from "Et pour qui? dit Sara, levant vivement la tête" (1071) to "j'ai encore la folie de t'aimer; pardonne-moi" (1074) is all invented by Nerval except for the bare detail of the story and the initials.

2. Just as Nicolas had forecast: "malheur à qui pénétre dans mon rêve éternel", taking up a phrase from 'Paradoxe et vérité' (I, 432). Conversely, how neatly he incorporates phrases of Restif's into passages which are almost entirely his own: the only phrases taken from the original in the paragraph beginning "Non, je l'ai choisi pour le jeune Delarbre" (II, 1073) are: "je me figurai que j'étais à sa place; que c'était moi qui t'aimais" and "j'exprimai les sentiments que tu m'aurais inspirés" (MN, IV, 343). Contrast MN, IV, 342: "s'il fallait choisir absolument entre un jeune homme et un tout à fait vieillard, c'est le vieillard que je préférerais".

"Adeline adorée". Adeline is the name given to Sara in the story. In Nerval's version the two of them engrave their real initials "sur ces chiffres à demi effacés" (1077), symbolising surely the hope that the imaginary love-affair is to be transferred to real life[1].

Thus Delamontette, the rival who is to take Sara away from Nicolas, will be seen in Nerval's version to bear the same type of relationship to the hero as did Delarbre: inferiority of feeling, superiority in the practical sphere. Once again Nerval unifies Restif's rather sprawling story. In 'Monsieur Nicolas', Delamontette is as much the dupe of Sara and her mother as Nicolas has been. He makes himself just as ridiculous as his rival by absurd and aggressive behaviour[2]. They are on more or less equal terms. But Nerval develops Restif's version into a dramatic contrast between the man of passion and imagination, and the cool, calculating man of fashion. Nerval's Delamontette[3] knows perfectly well, as Restif's did not, that Mme. Léeman's plan is to sell her daughter to the highest bidder: "j'ai de l'expérience, et j'avais compris tout cela". Nevertheless, he is not buying Sara, for she loves him (1083). His superiority is effortless. Nicolas' impulse to challenge him gives way to a sense of his own impotence. Nerval's Delamontette is a suave country

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1. This is not in Restif, but Nerval probably took the idea from a scene which occurs much later in 'Monsieur Nicolas', in the part which Nerval omitted: "Je fis avec Sara une promenade à l'Ile Saint-Louis: elle ne me fut agréable que par des ressouvenirs" (MN, IV, 496).
2. See MN, IV, 430 & 479.
3. Nerval calls him M. de la Montette, Restif Delamontette.

gentleman: "le lendemain, M. de la Montette fit les honneurs de sa villa avec beaucoup de convenance; sa conversation marquait de l'esprit, du moins il savait compenser par l'usage du monde ce que Nicolas avait de plus élevé par l'imagination. La journée fut terrible pour ce dernier; partout éclatait la superiorité de l'homme de goût et du propriétaire" (1082). Restif, on the other hand, makes it perfectly clear that Delamontette's "country property" is a diminutive and disreputable bachelor establishment only just outside Paris. As for his worldly manners, Restif writes of "les afféteries indécentes et ridicules de mon rival" (MN, IV, 421). In Restif, Delamontette is described as treating Sara "d'un air de propriétaire" (425). The idea of making him a man of property is all Nerval's. It is Nerval who subjects Nicolas to the humiliation of hearing Mme. Léeman's perfunctory explanations in the presence of his rival[1].

Curiously, this process of shaping another man's imaginary autobiography to fit the patterns of his own, shows us Nerval's creative potential as a novelist. In correcting the feebleness and tautology of Restif's narration, he draws on the techniques of fictional creation. Borrowing a word from Restif himself, we may say that Nerval novelises 'Monsieur Nicolas'[2].

He improves the narration, first, by condensing and unifying it. In the process, something of the richness and life-like muddle of 'Monsieur Nicolas' is inevitably lost. But there is a corresponding gain in clarity and dramatic concentration. More than Restif, Nerval is writing for his reader. In his version of Restif's marriage to

1. II, 1080 - cf MN, IV, 393.
2. See MN, III, 196: "'La Malédiction paternelle', ou je romanise un peu l'histoire de mes amis".

Agnès Lebegue, Nerval creates suspense by withholding until after the wedding the revelation that M. Parangon has arranged the match in order to avenge Restif's seduction of his wife (1044-46). In 'Monsieur Nicolas', we know of the plan of revenge, and its motive, from the outset[1]. At the same time, Nerval unifies the story by developing occasional remarks from the original into a series of reflections about destiny, thus providing a coherent theme. In the Septimanie episode, Nerval eliminates an implausible coincidence by making Nicolas follow the mysterious lady into la Macé's establishment, bowdlerises the story by changing Restif's brothel into a tripot and his "matrullé passablement fameuse" (MN, III, 46) into a "baronne de lansquenet" (II, 1050), and romanticises it by making the lady pick out Nicolas from a hiding-place. Further, in Nerval's version, the encounter takes place in the dark, which not only increases the romantically mysterious atmosphere, but also gives credence to Nerval's theme of the dream-like nature of Restif's sexual experiences, and at the same time prepares for a detail of a later overheard conversation from which he realises that Septimanette is his daughter: "Elle l'a vu, sans qu'il la pût voir" (1052).

Nerval is also concerned with bringing out the dramatic conflicts in Restif's story. Thus in his version the hero remains innocent until meeting Gaudet d'Arras, which allows him to create a clash between Nicolas' loyalty to the past and the voice of sexual temptation,

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1. See MN, III, 67f & 409.

represented by the subversive ideas of the monk (1031-32). Similarly Nerval establishes a well-defined contrast of temperament between Nicolas and Delamontette.

Not that Nerval's version tends mainly towards the strong Romantic situation. On occasion, we have a refinement of Restif's schematic psychology. In 'Monsieur Nicolas', we are told that four passions (love, hate, jealousy, vengeance) characterised Restif's feelings for Delamontette, but no attempt is made to motivate his switch from one to another (MN, IV, 423). Nerval omits the crude enumeration, but gives us a motive for the sudden change from love to hate in Delamontette's insulting suggestion that Sara's mother would be a more suitable match for Nicolas (1083).

Restif's more outrageously sentimental episodes, such as that of Zéfire, are tempered by Nerval's irony. When Restif shows us Loiseau weeping with emotion before counting the money Zéfire has brought, he is merely trying to wring our hearts (MN, III, 132). It is Nerval who points the humour of the scene by making the two actions simultaneous: "Loiseau se laissa aller à ouvrir le sac et à compter les écus en versant des larmes d'attendrissement"[1]. The hint of self-indulgence in Loiseau's behaviour is also brought out. Nerval further punctures the inflated <u>sensiblerie</u> of the two friends with the comment that their conscience was softened by their penury (1057),

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1. II, 1057 - cf MN, III, 132: "il versait des larmes qui ruisselaient jusque sur sa poitrine. Il recompta l'argent".

and when Nicolas serenades his beloved with verses in which the word "Zéphir" figures large, Nerval remarks: "l'amour fait de l'esprit comme il peut" (1060). It is Nerval, too, who brings out the contrast between Restif's naïve idealism and Loiseau's vulgar conventionality, at the same time shrewdly characterising their project of reforming Zéfire as "un mélange douteux de bien et de mal" (1059).

Nerval, then, improves the narrative by simplification, unification and dramatisation, whilst hardening it with an admixture of irony. Further, certain scenes are completely recreated. Nicolas' recognition of his daughter Septimanette on the coche d'eau becomes a gripping piece of melodrama (II, 1051-53). The meeting with Mlle Guéant, through being radically re-imagined in terms of Nerval's own experience, produces an analysis of subjective love which is at once lucid and passionate. Dull episodes are made interesting and actual. Minor characters take on a life which they had failed to achieve in 'Monsieur Nicolas'. Nerval makes us see the priggishness of Loiseau, or the way the disapproving heart of Restif's landlord is softened by Zéfire. Florimond, Léeman's lover and general factotum, becomes a convincing individual. In Restif, he is a conventionally degraded drunkard, but Nerval makes him live for us by observing that he keeps up a show of good manners in order to convince people that he has known better days, developing the idea, on the strength of a bare indication in 'Monsieur Nicolas', into the amusing little scene where Florimond having denied with the dignity of outraged honour that he has concealed the fève in the gâteau des rois in order to avoid treating the

company, is appeased by Restif's generous pretence of having swallowed it himself (II, 1068). Or again, Nerval's treatment of the episode in which Nicolas and Sara get rid of Florimond, who is acting as their chaperone, makes Restif's perfunctory and untidy narration into a finished sketch full of convincing detail[1].

So too, in his lively reconstruction of the visit of Nicolas and Marguerite to the Jansenist household, it is Nerval who imagines the hero's amorous ardour being cooled by "les guimpes solennelles de la nièce", and Nerval who, by incorporating in the scene itself details from the subsequent conversation between Marguerite and Nicolas, establishes the hero's self-identification with the young husband who has been deprived of his conjugal rights, strengthening this by extending the Jansenist mother's condemnation of sexual interest to Nicolas himself (1022-23)[2].

Often Nerval will retain only the best of Restif, reducing a whole page of overwritten narrative to a terse detail which gives the epitome of the situation. Thus when Sara finally returns after an unannounced absence of two days, Nicolas rushes to open the door to her: "Sara lui dit d'un air glacé: 'Eh bien! qu'est-ce donc? me voilà! " And Nicolas is forced to defend himself as though <u>he</u> were

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1. II, 1076. It is Nerval who comments that Florimond, worn out by dissipation, was dull company and that he followed the lovers about like a sheep-dog; that Mme. Léeman wanted <u>tulip</u>-bulbs because, coming from Brabant, she is "curieuse de tulipes"; that Florimond gets drunk and is sent back with a note telling Mme. Léeman as much, which he does not bother to read.

2. Cf MN, I, 283f.

in the wrong. By pruning Restif's version down to this salient detail, Nerval gives us a sharp impression of the defiance of the faithless girl and the abject dependence of the man who is being deceived[1]. So with another little scene: Nicolas, unable to bear the sight of Sara enjoying herself with the other man, goes to a window to hide his tears (this much is in Restif). Sara passing by, gives him a tap on the shoulder and asks him if he is coming down to the garden: "Il ne se retourna pas, n'osant montrer son visage décomposé. Sara s'écria brusquement: 'Eh bien, restez ... Vous êtes bien ennuyeux! " (1082-83). Nerval, eliminating Restif's rather stilted description of his internal struggle[2], produces a cameo of thoughtless cruelty.

Nerval's treatment of Restif varies from transcription to total re-invention, passing through intervening stages of close paraphrase, adaptation and lightning summary. In some of the best chapters, such as those devoted to Mme. Parangon, he uses a mosaic technique, drawing together indications scattered through different scenes in 'Monsieur Nicolas', changing their order, giving them his own significance. For example, he makes Mme. Parangon's gift of a watch to Nicolas a reward for his discretion about her husband's <u>amourettes</u>. This not only gives consistency and coherence to the narrative but also establishes the beginnings of complicity between the two[3]. In this way the literary

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1. Cf II, 1081 and MN, IV, 417.
2. Cf II, 1082-83 and MN, IV, 421f.
3. Cf II, 1029 and MN, I, 466. See above, p. 317.

treatment reinforces the demands of Nerval's shaping vision. Thus, too, Nerval dispenses with the presence of Delarbre in the Sara story, at once giving more freedom to Nicolas' self-identification with him, and clearing the ground for the dramatic confrontation between Nicolas and Delamontette - whereas in 'Monsieur Nicolas' Delarbre clutters up the story line by his continued involvement with Sara. Here imaginative and artistic concerns are one.

Thus Nerval has realised, in this version of the life of another, an account of his own longings in which all are ostensibly integrated into the single urge towards normality. All Restif's loves were facets of the quiet union for which he was destined and which he finally achieves.

The state is set for 'Sylvie', whose heroine is another version of Jeannette Rousseau[1]. But there is an important variation: when Nerval goes back to look for the village sweetheart, he finds she is about to be married to his foster-brother (I, 297). The synthesis of the imaginary love-life could only be worked out vicariously; Nerval will be unable to apply it to his own autobiography.

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1. 'Les Confidences': "c'est Jeannette; c'est bien cette figure de Minerve, à l'oeil noir, souriant à travers ses rides" (II, 1088); 'Sylvie': "le sourire athénien de Sylvie illumine ses traits charmés" (I, 297). Sylvie, too, has dark eyes.

CHAPTER XIV

THE COUNTRY SWEETHEART AS REFUGE

'Les Confidences de Nicolas', by making all the women the hero loves into substitutes for the village girl, establishes the primary imaginative preoccupation around 1850: the normal, humble happiness. The girl of noble family does not appear, and we recall that when she did, in 'Le Marquis de Fayolle', it was in the guise of a country playmate. Yet Jeannette Rousseau was also the incarnation of the hero's ideal woman, and the fact that crucial passages of his love-life are dream-like indicates Nerval's concurrent (but suppressed) commitment to the supernatural.

Thus in the works of 1851-52, at a time when Nerval's madness is gaining ground[1], we find the constant incursion of dream into reality and the concomitant interest in the idea of union with a supernatural figure, associated with either Jenny Colon or his mother, in the realm beyond death. But at the same time these works continue 'Les Confidences de Nicolas' in expressing the desire for a sweet normality. Indeed, we shall find that the conscious desire for a

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1. From 1849 onwards Nerval underwent repeated crises (alternating with false cures), which became more and more frequent. In October 1854 he became a permanent inmate of Blanche's clinic at Passy. But he never accepted the total abdication of responsibility which this entailed, and obtained his release a year later. This last heroic attempt to find his place in the real world lasted a bare three months, and ended in his death in January, 1855.

a normal relationship as a refuge from madness will be formulated more and more clearly in proportion as the ambiguous appeal of the dream-figure grows stronger. Even the casual and apparently disengaged works of 1852 ('Petits Châteaux de Bohême', 'Les Nuits d'octobre' and the preface to 'Lorely') have a latent structure which suggests that reality is a saving alternative to the lure of the dream[1].

As Nerval grows older, the idea of a return to childhood and to the village sweetheart strengthens in his mind. In the little poem 'La Cousine' (1852, I, 49), he recalls a childhood friendship in Paris with a cousin, with the hint of a cosy home presided over by "la mère". The pure folksong tradition is linked with his own youth in the pages on 'Chansons et légendes' written during this year (I, 298), and indeed his own early verse is seen as part of an attempt at renewal of this tradition ('Petits Châteaux' - see also 463-64). In May, on his way back from Holland, he misses a festival at Lille in order to be present at the "grande fête des tireurs d'arc à Creil"

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1. During the winter of 1852 Nerval was haunted by the fear of destitution and death (see the poems to Mme. de Solms, I, 72-73 and Letter 218), and from 1850 until his death he was thinking of a scenario based on the supposed suicide of his beloved Rousseau (see 'Angélique', Note 136, I, 1192; Letter 268, 'Sylvie', 291 & 286 ; and 'Aurélia', I, 384 where, in imitation of Rousseau, he turns his eyes towards the sun when he thinks he is about to die). This makes the longing for security all the more urgent.

(Letter 204). In August, and again in September, he is clearly spending a good deal of time in the country round Paris, especially the Valois (Letters 213, 213 bis). In 1853 he states that Goethe's Gretchen (that prototype of Sylvie) was inspired by "un amour de jeunesse"[1].

'Petits Châteaux de Bohême' gives yet another reinterpretation of the affaire with Jenny Colon, telling us, as usual, more about the current state of Nerval's imagination than about the events described. Whereas in 'Les Confidences de Nicolas' the actress appeared as an image of the country girl, here Nerval, in his first directly autobiographical account of the affaire, tells us that "(elle) réalisait vivante mon rêve idéal et divin" (I, 95). She was the real-life counterpart of the Queen of Sheba, the radiant but enigmatic figure who haunted his dreams, and by writing for her the opera of 'La Reine de Saba' he hoped to fuse "dans un trait de flamme les deux moitiés de mon double amour" (95). Here the present colours the past. At the time of the affaire, Nerval did indeed attempt to reconcile imagination and reality by writing plays in which Jenny (or another actress associated with her) would act out the parts he wished her to play. But 'L'Alchimiste' and 'Piquillo' recreated her character only in the direction of straightforward compensation within a real-life situation. It was only later, and vicariously (through the hero of 'La Forêt noire'), that Nerval expressed his project of embodying the dream-experience in a theatrical performance.

1. II, 784. See also 1853 preface to 'Faust', Gibert, 27. In both texts Marguerite is presented in terms of an image of light offsetting the sombre, otherworldly side of the drama, showing once again how much Nerval is preoccupied at this time with the idea of the normal love as a refreshing refuge from the terrors of the dream-world. Cf earlier passages in which it is suggested that the great Goethe might even have married his Gretchen

As far as we know from the evidence of Nerval's pen, the assimilation of Jenny to the Queen of Sheba dates only from the visions of 1841[1]. But now he recreates the affaire as though his main purpose had been to use Jenny Colon to establish his dream-figure in three dimensions, as though the ultimate aim was union, or simulated union, with the ideal woman. The affaire is presented, as it will be in 'Aurélia', as the banal pretext for a subjective cult[2].

And yet, Nerval recalls, the project was never realised. He never reached the dream-castle where that historico-mystical incarnation of Jenny Colon, the "blonde aux yeux noirs", awaits him. On the contrary, he has lost her for ever and passed through the hell of deprivation (99-100). The inspiration associated with her is characterised by the image of the Muse uttering cries of despair as she recedes beyond his grasp[3]. Even when the well-loved and well-remembered features are momentarily turned towards him, they only emphasise the poignancy of loss (89). And by following the Muse (that

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1. See above, p. 163 .

2. The available evidence confirms that 'La Reine de Saba' was originally conceived in dramatic form (see Richer, 'Expérience et création', 169 ff). But what of the date? M. Richer appears to accept the version given in 'Petits Châteaux', suggesting that the notes on the subject which figure in the 'Carnet du Voyage en Orient' (1843) represent a continuation of the project ('Experience', 173). But, as M. Richer says, the assimilation of Jenny to the Queen of Sheba dates from 1841. Is it not therefore more likely that the idea of the opera dates from 1843, and that Nerval, typically, is synchronising two different periods of his life? Thus in 'Sylvie' he claims that at the time of his affaire with the actress he wrote an opera for her (not 'La Reine de Saba') which in fact corresponds to a project he is engaged on at the time of writing (see below, p.349).

3. Similar scenes in 'Aurélia' make it clear that the image belongs to Nerval's dream-experience (see I, 382, 388, 395).

is, on one level, by keeping an appointment to discuss the projected opera with Meyerbeer), he misses the opportunity of acquiring a real-life mistress, which gives rise to the comment: "j'avais quitté la proie pour l'ombre...comme toujours!" (97). This is in the first place a rueful admission that he is an incorrigible dreamer. But we have just seen that even in his visions of the Muse the tragedy of loss is played out, and the comment also carries a note of regret that he let the woman of flesh-and-blood slip from his grasp[1].

This pattern reappears in 'Les Nuits d'octobre', which was published while 'Petits Châteaux' in its original form was still appearing. This is a curiously gripping collage of incident and encounter - like 'Angélique', apparently heterogeneous but secretly unified - situated at the meeting-point of reportage and fantasy. The theme, occasioned by reading an article by Dickens (103), is realism: life in the raw is multifarious enough to provide continuing interest without literary arrangement or embellishment (104). Yet throughout there is the sense of something underlying the surfaces with which realism is concerned. Everywhere Nerval sees mythological allusions[2].

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1. Nerval specifies that it was Dumas, who as we have seen represents the successful rival, who caused him to miss his chance of forming a liaison, and whose opera, already accepted by Meyerbeer, was responsible for his own being passed over (98).

2. E.G. 117 and 123.

Ordinary people and ordinary events are the local forms of a permanent, universal life. Nerval's exploration of mid-nineteenth century Paris-by-Night is a Dantesque[1] descent into Hades, penetrating the circles of Purgatory toward the centre (109, 112, 116, 118-9, 126-7). Thus the two women he encounters at Meaux on his devious way to an otter-hunt belong to dream more than to reality. The "femme mérinos" is half-woman, half mythological monster. He is fascinated by her placid bestiality, and sketches in a possible romance, based once again on 'Le Roman tragique'[2]. Her companion, a pseudo-Spanish dancer, is really a siren, though Nerval never makes this explicit[3].

But Nerval's fascination with these semi-monstrous, semi-mythological creatures, one of whom is like an animalised version of Janny Colon[4], is balanced by terror and repulsion. In the dreams which follow and continue the encounter, a sense of guilt

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1. Nerval probably knew Dante through his friend and fellow-patient, Antony Deschamps, who published a translation of the 'Divine Comedy'.
2. See 129-137.
3. See I, 132, and Nerval's insistence on the fact that he is staying at the sign of the "syren". See also 'Octavie', 'La Pandora', and the Frisian waitresses who are as cold as ice beneath their vivacious manners, and belong to "la famille des antiques sirènes" ('Les Fêtes de Hollande', II, 832-33-also written in 1852).
4. The Venetian type again (134).

and dangerous confusion is figured by a vertical and horizontal labyrinth of corridors and scaffolding, with underneath black water churned by mill-wheels (this is a memory of the river at Meaux). The invasion of reality by the dark, potent forces of the dream-world, so far from offering an easy salvation, is frightening as well as fascinating. On the other hand, getting away from Paris after the "night in Hades" brings a sense of freshness and solace (127). Similarly, the return of daylight and normality after the nightmares of Meaux, offers a sweet relief (131-32). And the fresh, untrained girl singer he hears at a sort of café-concert in Pantin is like an antidote to the equivocal figure of the siren. She is a radiance on the confines of the dream-world (116), and the image which opens 'Les Nuits' transposes the darkness of the circles of hell into light and warmth: "Avec le temps, la passion des grands voyages s'éteint, à moins qu'on n'ait voyagé assez longtemps pour devenir étranger à sa patrie. Le cercle se rétrécit de plus en plus, se rapprochant peu à peu du foyer" (103). This sense of returning home, now that his youth is past, of drawing nearer to an atmosphere and a place where he belongs, is inseparable from the desire to settle down with a simple village girl.

The same kind of balance is present in the preface to 'Lorely', addressed to Janin. On the one hand there is the dream figure, enchanting but dangerous: Lorely, signifying at once "charme et

mensonge;[1] et une fois déjà je me suis trouvé jeté sur la rive, brisé dans mes espoirs et dans mes amours, et bien tristement réveillé d'un songe heureux qui promettait déjà d'être éternel" (II, 733-34). This is a reference to the visions of 1841, in which he encountered his mother in the realm of death. But the dream-figure is two-faced, angel and harpy, holding out the promise of ecstasy, but dangerous, treacherous, liable to leave you stranded[2]. The shore is both the bank of the Rhine and the dull bank of reality on which he was cast up when the tide of madness had receded. (In Letter 311 the crossing of the Rhine is again assimilated to the passage over the Styx into the Underworld, the world of madness and death[3].) Just as the pursuit of the dream-counterpart of Jenny Colon had led to despair and ultimate loss, so the ambiguous mother-figure and the lure of the other world are fallacious.

And it was precisely his madness which prevented him from marrying and experiencing a decent, normal happiness. For all the

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1. Lure (leurre) + lie? J. Richer points out another of Nerval's bilingual puns which identifies "Lorely" with "l'Aurélie" ('Expérience, 373).

2. "Une constante ambivalence apparaît sans cesse dans les relations de Nerval avec l'Allemagne, pays de la Mère perdue" (Richer, 'Expérience et création', 373).

3. The point is also touched on by C. Baudouin, 'G. de Nerval ou le nouvel Orphée', 'Psyché', January 1947. And through Germany, Nerval adds, he may reach that other image of the dream-land: "J'irai peut-être jusqu'en Bohême ...c'est toujours l'Orient" (my italics).

irony of the Preface, it is clear that Nerval still considers, as he had considered in 1841[1], that Janin's publication of his madness had spoiled his chances of getting married. The importance he attaches to marriage can be measured by the implication that his primary reason for the journey to the Middle East had been to look for the wife he could not hope to find in Europe (741).

Each of these works contains the struggle between dream and reality which has been played out between the different publications of the 1840's. The Zeynab story primarily expresses the image of a normal, real-life relationship, while the longing for the transcendental love is worked out in the contes. But around 1852 Nerval is seeking a more complex and comprehensive formulation of his conflicting impulses. Whereas in the Zeynab story (or, later, in 'Les Confidences de Nicolas), the pattern of the dream-experience was only glimpsed as a substructure secretly shaping the real-life image, the works of 1852 show the two directions of Nerval's desire in opposition to each other. But they are juxtaposed rather than consciously related, just as in 'Angélique' Nerval had kept the return to his own past separate from the story of Bucquoy into which the dream-longings were projected.

If we see Nerval's imagination as a pendulum oscillating between the twin poles of his desire, we may say that in the 1840's

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1. See above, p.88

the swing takes place between the different works, whilst in 1852-53 an accelerated rhythm causes it to occur within them. And in 'L'Imagier de Harlem' and 'Sylvie', the opposition which had been only suggested by juxtaposition in the three works discussed above, is fully and consciously formulated.

The loyalty of Coster, the hero of 'L'Imagier de Harlem'[1], is divided between his homely wife, Catherine, and Aspasia who, like Goethe's Helen, is the ideal beauty rescued from time through successive incarnations as the famous courtesans of history. On the positive side, she is the ideal woman of Coster's imagination, and it is (literally) her image which has inspired his invention of printing (184f). Like Helen, she is conjured up from the world of the dead (221, 236), and there is a scene where her portrait becomes animated. We recognise by now that this represents Nerval's longing for union with his dead mother. As in 'La Forêt noire', the hero is imprisoned and then transported to an enchanted castle where she receives him, urging him to kill the devil (appearing

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1. Performed at the end of December 1851, the play was written in collaboration with Joseph Méry. But since the plot derives from the two versions of the Faust-story which Nerval had already used (continuing a play like 'L'Alchimiste'), since it incorporates some of the most important themes derived from Goethe's 'Faust' (see Chapter VII), since it is based on the typically Nervalian contrast between the humble wife and the courtesan, and since the overall structure recalls Nerval's 'La Polygamie est un cas pendable', it is clear that his responsibility is a large one. I refer to the text published in C. Dédéyan, 'Gérard de Nerval et l'Allemagne', vol. iii.

here in the guise of an Austrian count) who has her in his power. In the other world, twelve years pass like hours - once again we are reminded of 'Faust' I[1], And in Coster's near-execution we may see another version of the mock-death which, for the Nervalian hero, is an entry into the spirit-world. Later, Aspasia appears in the guise of a Queen whose harmonious influence has reconciled the opposing factions in a civil war (284). Here is the distinctive pattern of Nerval's dream-experience. At the same time Aspasia represents the courtesan redeemed by love, which makes her, like Sylvia in 'Piquillo', a projection of the actress. Indeed, the whole notion of the ideal woman appearing in multiple incarnations, is probably based on the original experience with Jenny Colon.

Opposed to her is the figure of Catherine, representing a humble domestic happiness. At the beginning of the play she is presented as an obstacle to her husband's genius, whereas through the influence of Aspasia, Coster would achieve all that Nerval most longed for: not only union with the transcendental mother-figure, but also, in this life, recognition of his genius, a distinguished career,

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1. The 'Ballet des heures' also provides a point of reference for 'Artémis'. "La treizième revient" may be a reference to the cyclical nature of his madness, reappearing (if the poem was, as seems likely, written in 1854) thirteen years after the first attack. (Cf Richer, 'Expérience', 592ff).

wealth, and the gratitude of men for the enlightenment which his invention brings[1]. In another sense, too, Catherine represents the thwarting of the Nervalian hero, since in order to marry her Coster has quarrelled with his noble family and renounced his birthright (177-79), whereas in the circles to which Aspasia belongs he is recognised as a nobleman.

But Aspasia is an ambiguous figure. She owes her immortality to the devil, who forces her to further his aim of perverting Coster's invention so that it brings about the degradation, rather than the illumination, of the human race. The paradise where she receives him is also a lotus-land which makes him forget his duty, and renders him incapable of the hard work without which his invention cannot be brought to fruition (307 and 315). Furthermore, there are passages in which it is Catherine, and not Aspasia, who appears as the inspiration of genius (250). The humble happiness represented by Catherine is persuasively presented, and Nerval's dream of family reunion is also invested in her, since their daughter Lucie is the image of her mother and, when the latter dies, carries on her role of interceding with the heavenly powers on Coster's

1. This is the Romantic image of the Renaissance hero. At the same time (and here, as always, Nerval's private concerns coincide with contemporary themes), Nerval identifies himself with Coster more directly, since he himself was the proud inventor of a printing machine (see Richer, 'Expérience et création', 136).

behalf, thus playing the part of Goethe's Gretchen. In the end, it is the heavenly intervention obtained by this intercession which ensures that Coster's invention shall achieve its proper function of enlightening mankind. And the final tableau combines Nerval's dream of a humble domestic happiness with the dream of union with a family whose members resemble one another.

Thus once again the two directions of his longing are brought into balance: over against the dream-figure who is both fascinating and dangerous is set the saner promise of happiness and achievement on earth. The ending is modelled on 'La Polygamie est un cas pendable': Aspasia, having been redeemed by love from the devil's power, presides over the triumph of Coster at the side of his wife[1] and daughter. Thus in 'L'Imagier' the conflicting impulses of Nerval's imagination are organised into a single harmonious pattern. The play expresses his transcendental longings and his sense of their danger, together with his desire for normal love and security and his sense of their limitations. In the end the hero has the best of both worlds, since he succeeds as an inventor, is reunited with the humble wife and the daughter who is another facet of her identity, whilst retaining his faith in a protective dream-figure whose menacing, diabolic aspect has been cast off.

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1. And yet we note that the triumph of reality cannot be consecrated without recourse to the supernatural, since Catherine (like Aspasia) has presumably been raised from the dead.

'Sylvie' will transpose the story of 'L'Imagier' into pseudo-autobiography, once again weaving the conflicting imaginative impulses which had remained disconnected in works like 'Petits Châteaux', into a complex and balanced pattern. As always, Nerval reverts to the crucial stage in his relationship with the actress, before he had declared his love, when she was still the focus of subjective longing which, once again, is lucidly and ironically analysed. An item seen by chance in the newspaper tells him he is rich[1], so that the glamorous figure is suddenly within his means. But a further item starts a train of memory which reveals the illusory nature of his love and in a flash coalesces the scattered pieces of his past into a new pattern of meaning, so that what happens within the story mirrors Nerval's enterprise in writing the story.

He suddenly realises that he is fascinated by the actress, Aurélie, only because she resembles Adrienne, on whose account he had broken off his childhood attachment to Sylvie, the village sweetheart. Adrienne, once glimpsed and never forgotten is, like Gabrielle in 'Le Marquis de Fayolle', the aristocratic counterpart of the village playmate. She belongs to Nerval's chosen race,

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1. As a result of a fluctuation on the stock-market. This is an abbreviated fictional device representing Nerval's desire for wealth (and disappointment over the failure of 'Le Monde dramatique'), and activating the crisis in his relations with the actress.

since "le sang des Valois coulait dans ses veines" (270)[1]. Further, like Polia in the story of Francesco Colonna, she is destined to become a nun[2], so that even in this world she is doubly inaccessible. For she belongs to the other world. She haunts his dreams, and the second occasion on which he sees her is a mystery play in which she appears as an angel rising from the underworld, celebrating a life beyond death and bringing redemption out of darkness (cf 'El Desdichado'). The atmosphere she moves in is reminiscent of the illusory, subjective region figured by the theatre. She is likened to Dante's Beatrice, and her death, announced at the end of the nouvelle, consecrates her transcendental nature[3].

Thus 'Sylvie' presents the actress as the possible incarnation of a figure who combines the multiple aspects of Nerval's

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1. This connects her with Brisacier of 'Le Roman tragique' (I, 1178), and Nerval will follow Brisacier in trying to act out his obsessions through the medium of the theatre.

2. Typically, pseudo-autobiography is shaped by a literary model. We recall that Nerval's reaction to the story had been regret that he himself had not been able, like Francesco, to sacrifice reality to the purity of other-worldly experience. The influence of the story on 'Sylvie' is generally recognised (see J. Richer, 'Expérience', 304, or F. Constans, 'Deux enfants du feu', 'Mercure de France', January - April, 1948, 630, and 'Sur la pelouse de Mortefontaine', Cahiers du Sud, No. 292, 1948, 410), and Polia is a more likely model for Adrienne, perhaps, than A. Marie's real-life candidate, Sophie Dawes. See below, p.348f.

3. This is a development of the passage about Delphine in 'Angélique' (see Chapter XI).

dream-longing. But once this is fully recognised, the dream-love is seen as fallacious and dangerous, a will-o'-the-wisp leading him into the swamps of madness. Hence he turns consciously to the possibility of marrying Sylvie as a refuge from illusion: "reprenons pied sur le réel" (271). But the quest for Sylvie which now follows is subtly invalidated at the outset, since Nerval is presenting as a conscious choice, made at a crucial moment in his life, the need for a sane normality which he feels at the time of writing.

The quest for Sylvie, the attempt to renew a childhood possibility which never reached fruition, falls into two stages. In the first, he recalls meeting Sylvie again and being reconciled with her after the fleeting infidelity with Adrienne which had estranged them. She has matured physically. Yet there is no sexual interest[1], and instead of dancing together they talk over childhood memories. As in 'Le Marquis de Fayolle', their love exists only in the context of the past, and the climax of this stage is another version of the capital scene from the novel: the young couple dress up in the wedding finery of Sylvie's uncle and aunt, and play at being bride and bridegroom. The past is re-enacted within the story just as Nerval is re-enacting

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1. It is accepted as quite natural and proper that he should go up to her room (276), and she undresses in front of him without a trace of self-consciousness (279).

an imaginary past by writing the story. The impulse towards normality, limited by Nerval's honest perception that it has remained unsatisfied, can find expression only as the nostalgic celebration of what might have been.

But the marriage-game is more than a re-enactment of childhood. It is also a return to a past age, to the period when the aunt was as young as Sylvie is now. The aunt's bedroom, where they find the clothes, is "ce sanctuaire des souvenirs fidèles" (278). There is a portrait of the aunt as a young woman, and Sylvie in the wedding-dress looks like "l'accordée de village de Greuze". He in his turn is transformed into a bridegroom of the previous century, with a rapidity which seems almost magical. The aunt is moved to tears: "C'était l'image de sa jeunesse".

One is reminded of 'Les Confidences de Nicolas', when Restif goes back to the aged Jeannette Rousseau and recognises the young face beneath the wrinkles (XI, 1088). Sylvie is like a rejuvenated version of the aunt, and the poignancy of the scene derives from the contrast between the faded lace and the firm young bosom. The nearest Gérard and Sylvie get to marriage is in this charade by which an ancestral pastoral scene is magically and precariously made present. She is being used to give life to

the faded but potent relics of the past[1].

The second phase comes three years later, when after discovering the illusory nature of his love for Aurélie-Adrienne and recalling the marriage-game[2], he goes back to seek out Sylvie and see if she is still free. But the past is dead. Everywhere there are images of stagnation. The bloom is gone from their relationship. He is no longer "l'amoureux" - his place has been filled (284). It is as though the whole innocent pleasure of the eighteenth century pastoral which provided the atmosphere of his youth, has vanished. His uncle's house is empty and shut up, the garden has run wild, covering the traces of the little plot he had tended, Emile-like, as a child. Sylvie has become hard-headed, self-conscious, sophisticated. There is a feeling of estrangement; and she is engaged to another lad.

Love exists only in a self-reflecting but never stabilised system of hypotheses. When Sylvie was a little peasant girl running free, he preferred the greater maturity and sophistication of Adrienne: but when Sylvie in her turn becomes more sophisticated, it is now precisely the sophistication which makes the

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1. Cf his uncle's souvenirs (266), the Fragment in which the wedding-game is given a different version (462) and the passage on "amours éteintes du passé" in the roman manqué on Bucquoy (II, 1467), etc.

   And the past has receding layers, since the eighteenth century, in its turn, tried to recapture the pastoral of ancient Greece (symbolised by Watteau's 'Voyage à Cythère'; see also Sylvie's "sourire athénien").

2. See L. Cellier's interesting analysis of 'Sylvie' and its receding time-perspectives (Cellier, 'Gérard de Nerval', 222f).

relationship impossible. Ultimately, it fails because of the paradoxical and uneasy status of an imagined reality. Ostensibly he is interested in Sylvie because she is a solid flesh-and-blood individual. But as I have tried to show, she stands for a set of feelings about the Valois and the way its pure, ancient traditions have been preserved[1]; and union with her, as enacted in the marriage-game, would be like a link with the pure race to which he feels he belongs. In the deepest part of Nerval's imagination, there is no distinction between Sylvie and Adrienne[2]. Thus when the hero makes Sylvie sing the very words which Adrienne had sung, and which had seemed to belong to the world of spirit, the primary aim is to exorcise the fascination of the dream-figure. Yet is it not also because he wishes to see in Sylvie a reincarnation of Adrienne?

Behind the marriage-game there is Nerval's longing for union with his mother through the person of a younger substitute. "Le réel" fails because in the end the imaginings about Sylvie are just as much a product of the dream-life as the figure of the actress. There is a profound affinity between Nerval's romanticised recollections of the Valois and his dreams about the

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1. For M. Richer, she is a personification of the Valois region ('Expérience et création', 313).

2. J. Vier points out that Sylvie, in a sense, is <u>another</u> incarnation of Adrienne ('<u>Sylvie</u> et les mythes fondamentaux de Nerval', in 'Littérature à l'emporte-pièce', Editions du Cèdre, 1958).

"ville mystérieuse" in 'Aurélia'. Although the impulse which shapes the story is the longing for sane normality, the imagination which nourishes it has the flavour of the dream. As Sylvie grows up, that is, as her status as a real person and a potential bride becomes more marked, the hero's feeling for her fades.

But although he does not marry her, the relationship is not definitively broken off. It continues in vicarious form. The boy whom Sylvie marries is yet another version of the Nervalian double: he is a negligible rival whose success owes everything to the hero's magnanimity and nothing to his own merit. At the same time he is the simple country lad Nerval might have been if he had never left Mortefontaine. Further, he is the male counterpart of Sylvie, a brother as well as a husband. Thus Sylvie's wedding is not felt as a loss. The relationship stays, as it were, within the family. Nerval reverts to his habitual posture as odd-man-out, looking on at the mirage of happiness.

The real-life alternative having failed, he reverts to the illusion, writing a play for Aurélie which is a blatant attempt to make his dream break into life: Aurélie will take the part of a heroine, based on Polia, who is identified in his mind with

Adrienne[1]. Like Brisacier, he goes on tour with the actress "en qualité de seigneur poète", taking her to the very scenes of his love for Adrienne (294). Aurélie is like a "reine d'autrefois"; we recall that Adrienne was said to be descended from the Valois kings. This is a return to the source of his emotion. But Aurélie remains obstinately herself, refuses to incarnate his fantasy. The dream-love is blocked.

Yet here again the affaire is not definitely concluded, for all the crispness of her refusal. The rivalry of the wrinkled "jeune premier", like that of the actor who plays Britannicus in 'Le Roman tragique', and like that of the foster-brother in the affaire with Sylvie, is minimised. He is a semi-comic figure towards whom Nerval feels rather patronising. We are not told that

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1. This is not explicitly stated, but it may safely be deduced from: "J'avais entrepris de fixer dans une action poétique les amours du peintre Colonna pour la belle Laura, que ses parents firent religieuse, et qu'il aima jusqu'à sa mort. Quelque chose dans ce sujet se rapportait à mes préoccupations constantes" (293). This is a reference to Nerval's current project of making the Francesco-Polia story, merged with another play, into a libretto for the music of 'The Magic Flute'. The result appears in a Scenario, 'La Fille de l'enfer', found in the papers of Nerval's collaborator, H. Lucas: the beloved "dies" and is "conjured up from the dead". Her lover will be faithful to her beyond the grave. In the end it transpires that her death was only simulated to test his love (see Letter 239 and J. Richer, 'Expérience et création', 105ff). Thus Nerval now sees the actress as a vehicle for the simulation (at two levels) of the desired union with the dead Adrienne.

The return to Aurélie takes place in Chapter xiii. Nerval may have had this in mind when he wrote 'Artémis' ("la treizième revient ... C'est encore la première").

Aurélie prefers him, simply that he has been useful to her and that he loves her for what she is, not for what she represents. But we are not told that Nerval's chances were definitely eliminated, and (as in 'Les Confidences de Nicolas') the hero's superiority as a man of imagination is precariously maintained.

In one sense, then, 'Sylvie' represents the culmination of Nerval's creation of an imaginary life. For the first time he is consciously bringing together the conflicting longings which we have traced throughout his work, and organising them into a beautifully modulated whole. But pseudo-autobiography cannot achieve the reconciliation which is reached in 'L'Imagier'. Nerval's scrupulous honesty forbids a solution. Both the dream-longing and the desire for a secure normality are left unsatisfied[1]. The creation of a second life cannot get beyond the sterile rearrangement of lost opportunities. 'Sylvie' is a self-balancing pattern designed at once to express and to leave unresolved the central recognition that Nerval at 45 is a tragically lonely person who has not lived his life as he now dreams it.

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1. See J.P. Richard: "Des deux côtés, dans le type ou dans la substance, dans Aurélia ou dans Sylvie, il ne rencontre finalement qu'échec, qu'inexistence. Telle est la moralité de Sylvie" ('Géographie magique de Nerval, 66).

A. Fairlie offers a very different interpretation: 'Sylvie' follows a course which can also be traced in 'Les Chimères': random and chaotic memories are woven into patterns which are haunting but fallacious: the "revelation" that Aurélie is

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1. Contd.

the same as Adrienne, and the alternative dream of an uncomplicated happiness with Sylvie. There follows the ironical deflation of both these illusions. But there is a final synthesis, a reconciliation with the world as it is: "out of the elusive, the fallacious, the fragmentary or the lost, has come, as in the Chimères, the persistent ritual of human traditions". ('An Approach to Nerval', 'Studies presented to Professor P. Mansell Jones', 1961). - But surely the persistent ritual is not a feature of the world as it is. It belongs irremediably to an idealised past which has vanished with Sylvie's innocence and which derives from the dream of a paradise that can never be entered. There is no final resolution of the dichotomy between what is and what might have been. The persistent ritual is defined, like Mallarmé's ideal flower, by its absence.

Compare F. Constans, who states that "l'idylle avec Sylvie est un rêve d'amour conçu comme remède à un amour de rêve". The village girl, representing his lost youth as well as the whole atmosphere of the Valois, is invoked as an antidote to the ambivalent dream-figure. The latter has a triple existence: actress, nun and amazone, with affiliation, in Nerval's mind, to the Valois queens. Since in 'Aurélia' the triple dream-figure is recognised as mediatrix and source of salvation (406), the need for an antidote is apparently limited to the time of writing 'Sylvie' ('Sur la pelouse de Mortefontaine', 'Cahiers du Sud', No. 292, 1948).

CHAPTER XV

DREAM AND REALITY: THE CIRCLE OF DESPAIR

'Aurélia' will represent a positive advance on 'Sylvie' in the sense that it abandons the attempt to adapt Nerval's dream-preoccupations to the context of his real life, and stakes all on the transcendental love, in its triple aspects of mother, lover and goddess, producing a supernatural synthesis which balances the rational synthesis of 'Les Confidences de Nicolas'. 'Sylvie' had put the clock back to a time before the actress's death; 'Aurélia' will take her death as the starting-point for a relationship that exists outside of time.

'La Pandora' and 'Octavie'[1] appear as intermediary between 'Sylvie' and 'Aurélia'.

Like 'Sylvie', they belong either in fact or in intention to 'Les Filles du Feu', and both of them tend to carry on the work of 'Sylvie' in the sense that, after recording the failure of the

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1. One cannot be certain about the date of their composition. But it would seem that Nerval considered 'La Pandora' ready for publication at the end of November 1853 (Letter 277). 'Octavie' was written before the publication of 'Les Filles du Feu' in January 1854. 'Aurélia' (in its final form) was probably begun in December 1853 (Letters 280, 281, 282) and must have been near completion by 23 September, 1854 (Letter 338). Thus we may consider the two stories as dating from just before 'Aurélia', with the proviso that it may already have been started when he wrote 'Octavie'.

affaire with a simple Valois girl, which was intended to provide an alternative and an antidote to the supernatural love, Nerval now goes on to resuscitate further alternatives. He is still looking for incidents in his half-remembered, half-invented past which, even if they were not taken to their fulfilment, could balance the love-affair with Jenny Colon and its otherworldly overtones. There is a certain desperation in the attempt, for it reveals the terrible poverty of his actual experience. Both stories deal with encounters with foreign women and continue 'Les Amours de Vienne' and 'Le Voyage en Orient' in presenting the image of Nerval as a foreign Don Juan. The origin of 'La Pandora' is his acquaintanceship with Marie Pleyel and the charades at the Embassy in Vienna, that of 'Octavie' the encounter with the "dame de Marseille". Both stories are grafted on to existing material, giving the perspective of the present, and therefore a new meaning, to the past.

Thus a variant opening of 'La Pandora' presents the heroine as a "nouvel amour" coming after the affaires with the actress and the village girl, who is now associated with Saint-Germain (Note 10, I, 1215)[1].

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1. As J. Richer points out, part at any rate of 'La Pandora' was probably written in 1841 as a sequel to 'Les Amours de Vienne' ('Expérience et Création', 267-68). Thus it contains quotation of already published material; unpublished material which had been in Nerval's possession for a dozen years; and new material. Tentatively, I would suggest that I, 352-55 is based on unpublished material dating from 1841, whilst I, 351-52 and 358-60 date from 1853 (cf F. Constans, who confirms one point

.../Contd. over.

1. Contd.

of my conjecture in 'Nerval et l'amour platonique', 'Mercure de France', May, 1955, 107-108). - In order to make sense of 'La Pandora', which Nerval never published as a finished work, the passages must be read in the following order: (1) the first six paragraphs, down to "Pourtant je n'aimais qu'elle, alors! " (I, 351-52); (2) Part II, 356-58, down to "Cet homme est profond" - this is the bit recopied from 'Les Amours de Vienne', but for some reason Nerval leaves out two essential paragraphs which explain how he came to be with her whilst she was writing a letter, and to obtain a consecutive narrative it is necessary to insert these two paragraphs here (II, 63-64, from "Je craignis d'abord..." to "c'est si ennuyeux de causer à plusieurs"); (3) the passage beginning "Il faisait très froid à Vienne..." (352) then follows on naturally up till "le souvenir chéri de l'autre me protégea encore contre les charmes de l'artificieuse Pandora" (355); (4) the description of the charades given in the manuscript variants by Notes 16 and 15 (in that order), without which the last three pages of the story, from "De colère je renversai le paravent" (358), are inexplicable.

But Nerval rejected this opening, and in the final version La Pandora is an enigmatic figure, at once alluring and dangerous, not contrasted with the dream-love, but continuing it. Like his love for the actress ('Sylvie', chapter i), the experience of this impossible love is generalised ("vous l'avez tous connue", 351). The pattern is set by the passage from 'Faust' quoted at the head of the story, contrasting a "mouvement surnaturel" in the direction of Pandora with an earth-bound love attached to the memory of the village girl. This can be related to a manuscript variant of 'Sylvie': "deux figures aimées se combattaient dans mon esprit: l'une semblait descendre des étoiles et l'autre monter de la terre" (I, 1196). In other words 'La Pandora' repeats the pattern of 'Sylvie': Pandora is the Actress, corresponding to the dream-figure, while the girl from Saint-Germain is presented as an antidote: "le souvenir chéri de l'autre/*** me protégea encore contre les charmes de l'artificieuse Pandora" (355). The "encore" is important: the protection will not long be effective, for the idea of a sweet normality is losing its power.

"L'autre ***" stands for "l'autre Sophie"[1]. The village

1. In 'Aurélia' Nerval wrote: "Je reconnus les traits divins de Sophie" (the dream figure of 'Mémorables', I, 413), then crossed out the name and substituted three asterisks.

love is more than the simple peasant girl she was in 'Sylvie': she resembles the Archduchess Sophie whose portrait he has seen on a shop-sign (352), and the chain of resemblances leads back to the dream-figure of 'Aurélia' and to Jenny Colon herself: "ne l'ai-je pas revue dans une des filles de l'archid(uc)" (II, 718)[1]. Furthermore, the whole passage in 'La Pandora' which recalls his visits to Saint-Germain is full of historical references which associate the girl with the Medici family, and thus link her with Nerval's dreams about the pre-Bourbon dynasties as the chosen race. In 'Sylvie' this dream was connected with Adrienne and continued in Aurélie as a mystical replacement; here, the process of replacement is carried through from the Saint-Germain girl, loosely associated with the pure, royal race, to the Archduchess Sophie. The pattern of 'Sylvie', though the same in the sense that the village girl is invoked as an antidote to the mystical figure of Pandora, has significantly shifted: the youthful love is no longer purely representative of attainable reality. Nerval is harking back to 'La Forêt noire' and 'Le Marquis de Fayolle'. At a deeper level, of course, this corresponds to the way the real-life figure of Sylvie was shaped by Nerval's

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1. 'Carnet de Notes du Voyage en Orient', II, 718. The fragment 'Un souvenir' transposes the marriage-game to Saint-Germain, and the heroine Sidonie (a variant of Sylvie) is also called Sophie, by a significant lapse on the part of Nerval (see Note I, 1236)

visionary preoccupations. But here the shaping of reality by dream is more pronounced. And the village girl is a distant memory, not a tangible presence.

The dominating figure is Pandora who, as an actress[1] fills the role of Aurélie. The story is based roughly on his acquaintanceship with Marie Pleyel: the amateur theatricals at the Embassy are based on fact, and the patronising attitude of Pandora corresponds to what we can deduce of Marie Pleyel's from her remarks in the letter to Jules Janin[2]. She casts him in the unwilling role of abbé, treats him unceremoniously as a second-best suitor who can be kept waiting for hours while she does her shopping. He blushes in humiliation at her irony and is mortified by his shortage of money. At the same time there is a strong element of manic playacting: wild (though vague) talk of a duel and a grotesque inflation of minor rivalries. The humble second-best suitor mingles oddly with Matamore, setting up the characteristic oscillation between extremes of humility and arrogance.

The tendency towards megalomaniac playacting in his actual dealings with her is extended into his dreams. There is a close correspondence between dream and reality. At the Embassy soirée

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1. Marie Pleyel, through her role in the Embassy charades, is thus assimilated to Jenny Colon.

2. See above, p. 84, and also pp. 187-88.

she performs a seductive dance: "Ses cheveux nattés en forme de lyre se dressaient sur sa tête ainsi que deux cornes majestueuses" (1217). In his dream these have been transformed into "deux cornes d'argent ciselé" (358). In reality she is beautiful but malicious, in the dream she is exciting but dangerous. In reality he is alternately arrogant and timid; in the dream he is Prometheus who, although he has created her, may nevertheless succumb to her poisons. In reality he had pretended to be the Baron des Adrets, a general in the wars of religion (1217); in the dream, he bestows on himself an even grander identity, that of the Prince de Ligne (another general) (358).

One has the impression that in this free arrangement of the affaire (if there was one) with Marie Pleyel, the past is being both very much inflated and yet at the same time more faithfully reported in certain details than it was in the 'Voyage en Orient'. Although fictionalised, this is a less literary version. The "beautés de bas lieu", Kathy and Vahby, put in a brief appearance, but the former shows a mercenary strain which rings true and which was not mentioned in the earlier account (354). The manuscript mentions authentic details (the fact that his friend was Alexandre Weill and was staying at the palace of the Prince Dietrichstein; the name of the Ambassador, Sainte-Aulaire), which suggests that Nerval was using factual memories. The old woman who shouts "'S... n... de D...! ' seul mot français

qu'elle eût retenu de l'invasion impériale", whenever he goes past, sounds like a genuine reminiscence (355). These details come, no doubt, from the original manuscript.

At the same time, the humiliating role he had played vis-à-vis Marie Pleyel is inflated and distorted, and the sense of rage and defeat is worked out in terms of his present dream-preoccupations. Grappling with a horned woman, for example, is a reminiscence of the merino woman he had seen the previous year, and no doubt also of subsequent dreams about her[1]. The dream-figure of Pandora is at once erotically exciting with her "blanches épaules, huilées de la sueur du monde" (358), and a semi-monster who has to be grappled with in a kind of frenzied desperation, and who engenders a stifling poison. Thinking back on his relationship with Marie Pleyel and investing it with the happenings and the atmosphere of his current dream-life, Nerval expresses both his fearful shrinking from this malicious, teasing woman and his desire to correct this impression by arrogant self-inflation.

But if the dream involves retrospective feelings of rage and shame about Marie Pleyel, and looks back to the alluring but

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1. No doubt, as M. Constans has argued, Pandora corresponds at the same time to the libidinous horned goddess Ashtoret-Karnaïm (among her many metamorphoses). But this is surely a case of the association of real-life and literary reminiscences. (See F. Constans, 'Nerval et l'amour platonique', 'Mercure de France', May, 1955, 106).

dangerous dream-figure of 'Nuits d'Octobre', it also looks forward to 'Aurélia' in which the dream-figure is a means to salvation. The title of the dream-sequence in 'La Pandora' was to have been 'Memorabilia' (Note 22), which is that given to the visions at the end of 'Aurélia' describing his redemption and his reunion with the goddess. And Pandora undergoes a transformation, which recalls a typical passage in 'Aurélia'[1]. Pandora has much in common with Aurélie-Jenny Colon: not only is she an actress, but the dream which identifies her with the "femme mérinos" links her with the reddish-blond Venetian type and Jenny. Nerval places her, as he had placed Aurélie, in the context of the 'Roman tragique' situation. He tells her, as he had told Jenny Colon in the 'Lettres' (Letter XI) that love is the same thing as religion (353); so in 'Aurélia' religion will unite with love and give it the character of eternity. Thus 'La Pandora' looks forward to the possibility which will be fully explored in 'Aurélia': of finding salvation not by rejecting the dream-love, but by staking all on it. At about the time he was finishing 'La Pandora', Nerval wrote a letter to Blanche in

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1. "Alors elle s'élança, rajeunie des oripeaux qui la couronnaient, et son vol se perdit dans le ciel pourpré du lit à colonnes. Mon esprit flottant voulut en vain la suivre: elle avait disparu pour l'éternité" ('La Pandora', I, 359). Compare a corresponding passage of 'Aurélia' in which "le ciel du lit" has become "le ciel d'Asie" (I, 368).

which he stated his confidence in eternal reunion with his beloved in the after-life[1].

'Octavie' too, at one level, continues 'Sylvie'. The heroine is a figure composed from divergent sources, about ninety per cent imaginary. She is a girl seen eating lemons on the way back from the Middle East in 1843, who obviously struck him at the time ('Voyage d'Italie', I, 428)[2]. She is also the lady he met in Marseilles in 1834 (Letter 17), who in a later anecdote he makes into an Englishwoman (II, 22). The jealous husband of that incident is assimilated to the Englishman Nerval saw being carried on a stretcher in 1843, who wanted to see Pompei before dying (Letter 107). 1834 combines with 1843. Octavie is also the English girl described in the passage from 'Les Amours de Vienne' which he copied into 'La Pandora'. It is her youth and ingenuousness, with their promise of rejuvenation, that perhaps attract him most. Like Sylvie, she is a simple little thing who provides an escape route from the fatal love (311). As in 'Sylvie', he encounters a reincarnation of the dream-love (though here the process is reversed, since the embroideress is a reincarnation of the singer). And just as in 'Sylvie' the dream-

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1. See below, p.362f.

2. J. Richer points out that Nerval could have taken this and other details from Lamartine's 'Graziella' ('Expérience et création', 342 ff).

love threatened to lure him into madness, so in 'Octavie' the phantom of possession brings on a suicidal melancholy because it emphasises the impossibility of reaching the ideal. Finally, just as in 'Sylvie' he had turned to the village girl as a refuge, so here it is the thought of his rendezvous with Octavie which saves him from suicide (314).

But the resolution: "reprenons pied sur le réel" is a weakening. In 'Octavie' he leaves Paris to seek distraction from the "amour contrarié" for the singer (309). How much less firmly stated this is than the corresponding impulse which sends him on the quest for Sylvie! The idea of distraction hardly suggests the determination to find a serious alternative. It is closer to 'Aurélia' than to 'Sylvie', since in the later work also he seeks distraction from the unhappy love (with the significant difference that in 'Aurélia' the woman will be definitively lost to him). And it will turn out in 'Aurélia' that what is illusory is not his love for the actress, but on the contrary, the hope of finding a diversion from it. 'Octavie' already prepares this vital shift of emphasis.

Octavie is no less mysterious than the embroideress. Both she and the singer are semi-magical figures with something of the syren about them[1]. The Neapolitan setting, with the unexplained significance of the white teeth biting into the lemon, and the bay inundated with the "feux de l'Orient" (310), is that of the mystical sonnets, 'El Desdichado' and 'Myrtho'. He knows

1. Octavie: "cette fille des eaux"; the singer: "une voix délicieuse, comme celle des syrènes" (309).

as though by magic that she is consumptive, saying that he has learned as much from "la sibylle de Tibur" (310). When he takes her to Pompei, he spends his time explaining the cult of Isis on the site of her temple. This, like a similar scene in 'Sylvie', is an attempt at exorcism[1]. For is not the central identity of the dream-figure, in 'Aurélia', that of the goddess Isis? But here Octavie herself voluntarily takes the role of the goddess (315)[2], which is very different from the equivalent scene in 'Sylvie', where the girl is unwilling to lend herself to the exorcism he desires, and remains her prosaic self. In so far as Octavie responds to him, it is in a way calculated to refer him back to the dream-figure, not to provide an alternative for it.

In November 1853, the month before he started work on the final version of 'Aurélia', Nerval had a vision or series of visions which convinced him that he was assured of eternal union

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1. The dénouement is also modelled on the lines of 'Sylvie': he goes back to Naples years later and finds Octavie married, just as Gérard goes back to Loisy and finds Sylvie engaged, and later married, to his foster-brother. And as in 'Sylvie', the failure is attenuated, for Octavie's husband is a cripple who can move nothing but his great black eyes. He is clearly impotent, and Nerval writes of Octavie's "candeur de vierge" (315; my italics). Although potentially menacing (the paternal version of the rival) he has not replaced Nerval as a lover. This is the old story of a defeat whose bitterness is carefully attenuated by the rival's harmlessness. He has lost her to a man who is not a man. The final regret ("je me dis que peut-être j'avais laissé là le bonheur", 316) recalls 'Sylvie': "Je me dis: 'Là était le bonheur peut-être" (297).

2. Cf the opening chapter of 'Isis' (1845), which follows 'Octavie' in 'Les Filles du feu'.

with the woman of his dreams, so that the time remaining to him on earth would be one of exile and waiting. This is recorded in a letter to Dr. Blanche which ends: "C'est dans une autre vie que (la mort) me rendra celle que j'aime. Ici je n'écoute pas la voix d'un songe, mais la promesse sacrée de Dieu" (Letter 275). The 'Mémorables' at the end of 'Aurélia' appear to record the same dream-experience. This looks like the logical solution to the problems with which Nerval's imagination had been grappling for so long: Aurélia is the dream-figure who transcends and contains all his loves. This solution is made possible by accepting what before he could not bring himself to accept: that all possibilities of a real-life relationship are irretrievably gone, and that the possibility of an eternal supernatural relationship only began with the death of the beloved.

As I have indicated, 'La Pandora' and 'Octavie' move towards this solution. The "femme d'une grande renomée" in 'Aurélia' plays substantially the same part as Pandora. Each is described as an alternative love after the affaire with Aurélia[1]. In both accounts he spends a soirée with the alternative and then writes a letter declaring his love. But whereas in 'Aurélia' his affaire with Pandora was a serious matter, and she was the centre of the story, in 'Aurélia' his love for the second lady is auto-suggested

1. Compare 'Aurélia', 364 with Note 10 to 'La Pandora'.

and illusory. She is no more than a temporary substitute for Aurélia. He recognises his mistake almost at once, and in the end she is instrumental in reconciling him with his first and only true love. This takes 'Léo Burckart' a stage further: having transferred his love to another woman, he then reverts to the first, true love. (In the original version of 'Aurélia' he says simply that he confided his love for the singer to the other lady)[1]. In the same way the tendency in 'Octavie' was for the woman who was pursued as an alternative to lead his imagination back to the "amour contrarié" left in Paris, from which (as in 'Aurélia') he had been seeking a distraction.

All this reverses the direction of 'Sylvie'. Once it is accepted that the essential part of the relationship only began with the actress's death, the situation leading up to it can be passed over rapidly. The circumstances of the relationship are unimportant (363). He is impatient to brush aside what she really was in order to tell us what, after her death, she became. This is reiterated: he is concerned with what took place in "les mystères de mon esprit" (363); "elle m'appartenait bien plus

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1. See the 'Ur-Aurélia' (described in Appendix "A" to Chapter VII) in which madness appears as an interruption rather than a continuation of the relationship with the singer, which he evidently planned to renew (see below, pp.425 -426). In 'Sylvie' it was the actress who realised that his love was false because it was not directed at her as she really was. In 'Aurélia', this discovery is made by the other woman. And in 'Corilla' it is in approaching the singer that the hero is afraid of not being able to live up to his exalted epistolary style, whereas in 'Aurélia', again, it is the second lady who occasions this fear.

dans sa mort que dans sa vie" (378); "cette passion est l'histoire de toutes: je ne veux qu'indiquer l'influence qu'elle a pu avoir sur les rêves de mon esprit" (422).

The uncertain status of works like 'Sylvie' arose because they were the product of imaginative longings working on and reinventing the real circumstances of his past life. But now the elaborate mechanisms of refracted identity by which he sought to build his longings into the context of actual life can be done away with. Nerval is no longer trying to reshape his past, but to make sense of the recurrent and timeless experiences of his madness, and to fashion them into a single destiny. Instead of reshaping lived experience, he is reshaping dreamed experience.

This in a way is more difficult than the earlier enterprise, for these experiences, being partly involuntary, are apt to prove intractable. The effort needed to submit the dream to rational control is one which, as he insists throughout 'Aurélia', requires him to be "armé de toute ma volonté" (416). But if one regards Nerval as a person who found himself in madness, 'Aurélia' appears to be a beautifully simple solution to the problems of reconciling dream and reality: dream is recognised as the only reality. 'Aurélia' seems like the last haven of a restless mind[1].

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1. Critics, giving credence to Nerval's presentation of his life as a finished destiny, have stressed that the work ends with the poet's salvation. For G. Poulet this is enacted when Nerval breaks out of the "cercle ouvrique" by communication with another human being ('Les Métamorphoses du cercle', Plon, 1961, 264).

We have a love which was interrupted at a crucial point. She had condemned him for a fault, and he had given up all hope of pardon[1]. But, after the intervention of the other woman, in a scene where dream is already taking over from reality in the sense that he interprets the significance of her actions rather than holding a rational conversation, the unhoped-for pardon is vouchsafed (365), and his love takes on a religious character which will guarantee its eternal existence. It is at this point that she dies, and becomes a radiant yet misty figure at the centre of his dream-life. For the first time, the dream is being expressed as a dream. The longings which in 'Sylvie' had to be worked in to the rationally acceptable situation of nostalgia for his Valois childhood, here find their most beautiful expression in the visions of a pure race dwelling in an airy paradise.

Aurélia is the all-in-one. What the actress, a single person with multiple roles, could only represent, or what could only be represented by a system of interchangeable identities such as

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1. He never says what this fault was. It could not surely have been that he had an old family ring made smaller to fit her hand (378f and 421f), since this is a fault only within his imagination - occasioned perhaps by the feeling that this act was a profanation of a family marriage, as in 'Souvenir'. It may refer to some such scene as the one reported in 'Sylvie', chapter xiii, where she reproaches him for using her to represent his private fantasies.

we get in 'Les Confidences de Nicolas', is here realised. She is all the women he has ever loved: "je suis ... la même aussi que sous toutes les formes tu as toujours aimée" (403). The sentence: "j'ai revu celle que j'avais aimée transfigurée et radieuse" has a significant variant: "j'ai revu toutes celles que j'aimais" (414 and Note 57). The one is the many. At worst, he may have outraged her memory with "faciles amours" (384), but this is reparable. As for the Sylvie-figure, she no longer has sufficient presence to set against Aurélia: "Mais opposer ce vague amour d'enfance à celui qui a dévoré ma jeunesse, y avais-je songé seulement?" (394). The longings which in 'Sylvie' were centred in the figure of the little village girl, and which because of their dream-origin helped to invalidate the reality of that relationship, are woven into the dream-life, and there is no further need for a balancing reality. The fantasy about discovering that he is of noble blood and can be reunited with an aristocratic family is also accommodated in these dreams. Everything relates to the single, dominating figure of Aurélia.

Thus the whole saga of his dream-destiny can be worked out with reference to this single interceding figure. Union with her is both the cause and the consequence of universal harmony, which is disrupted by her impending marriage with his other self. The

work is admirable chiefly, as Béguin points out[1], as an heroic attempt to impose order on the overwhelming flux of intense experience which threatens at any moment to become chaos. In the opening sequences the double is present, but the threat is held off (368f, 374); and Nerval is greeted and recognised in paradise, where he has a glimpse of union with his mystical family and, by extension, with the whole human race. In the later series, there is a period when he fears that he has lost Aurélia in death as well as in life. He is not recognised by the guests at the ceremony where she is apparently preparing to marry the double, and his attempt at breaking the power of the usurper only seals his position as Outsider. For a long time he is tormented by a sense of exile and desolation, but redemption finally comes with the ecstatic dreams of 'Mémorables', which restore him, through the intercession of the transfigured Aurélia, to the certainty of immortal life he had acquired in the earlier sequences. Thus the threat of madness turns into a promise of eternal happiness.

Yet the certainty is temporary and precarious. The emotion generated by the final dreams of salvation may be so intense that it spills over into his waking life, so that he feels he must fix it by some external mark ("Tu m'as visité cette nuit", 431).

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1. A. Béguin, 'Gérard de Nerval', Corti, 1945: the analysis of 'Aurélia' is profound and sympathetic.

But the figure of the deified Aurélia is hardly such as to inspire confidence in the permanent effect of salvation. Throughout, it is melting, shifting, formless; radiant but infinitely receding. It is perhaps the very fact that the goddess is endlessly moving out of reach that gives these images their beauty[1]. The world of Nerval's visions is not static and clearly defined but highly coloured, dynamic and unresolved. 'Les Chimères' also give this effect, with their variants and interchangeable tercets.

Thus, although 'Aurélia' looks like a beautifully logical and simple solution to the problems with which Nerval's imagination has been struggling for all these years, it is only an apparent solution. In spite of the admirable, the valiant determination to impose a coherent pattern on his dream-experience, Nerval is

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1. "La dame que je suivais, développant sa taille élancée dans un mouvement qui faisait miroiter les plis de sa robe en taffetas changeant, entoura gracieusement de son bras nu une longue tige de rose trémière, puis elle se mit à grandir sous un clair rayon de lumière, de telle sorte que peu à peu le jardin prenait sa forme, et les parterres et les arbres devenaient les rosaces et les festons de ses vêtements; tandis que sa figure et ses bras imprimaient leurs contours aux nuages pourprés du ciel. Je la perdais de vue à mesure qu'elle se transfigurait, car elle semblait s'évanouir dans sa propre grandeur" (378). This seems to be based on 'Isis': "l'invincible déesse disparaît et se recueille <u>dans sa propre immensité</u>" (I, 325; my italics), which is adapted from 'The Golden Ass'. Robert Graves' translation gives "faded and dissolved" (273).

constantly being forced to report that his dreams were frightening and confused[1]. The terrible thing about his madness was that it gave him a sense of underlying significance, a sense of imminent revelation, but failed to provide any steady validity of experience to satisfy it.

Besides, we should notice that this solution depends on giving an account of the dream-experience from a rational standpoint. 'Aurélia' is about Nerval's madness, and interprets it against a reassuring framework of sanity. The suggestion is that visionary experience can have a logical outcome whose effects will remain permanently valid even after the visionary has been "cured" (I, 417-418). But if one turns to sonnets like 'El Desdichado' and 'Artémis', which were conceived within the visionary experience (and which remain mysterious precisely because the link with rationality is not made), the picture is less reassuring.

'El Desdichado'[2] is built up on the opposition between the

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1. "Je perdis le sens et la liaison des images qui s'offrirent à moi" - and this lasted for several days (369). "Je n'eus d'abord que des rêves confus, mêlés de scènes sanglantes" (384). "Le rêve se jouait parfois de mes efforts et n'amenait que des figures grimaçantes et fugitives" (386). "Le sommeil m'apporta des rêves terribles. Je n'en ai conservé qu'un souvenir confus" (394). "Le rêve devint confus" (396).

2. Most interpretations of the sonnets fall short because they treat them as disguised or encoded accounts of rationally apprehended experience. It is unlikely that a definitive exegesis can ever be made, but an article by Albert Gérard attempts admirably to explain the poem from the inside, in terms of a reconciliation of two atmospheres: Classical-Mediterranean, associated with happiness (second quatrain); and Mediaeval-Nordic, associated with suffering (first quatrain). The second tercet celebrates serenity regained for a second time - not through the intervention of the beloved, as before, but through the sublimation of art (the sonnet itself).

state of the lover abandoned to his desolation (first quatrain), and the luminous happiness which it is in the power of the beloved to restore to him (second quatrain). In the tercets, he asks which of the pairs of types representing this dual destiny corresponds to his true self: whatever the exact identities of Amour and Biron, we may see them as types of the happy lover, whilst Lusignan (abandoned by the fairy Mélusine) and Phébus (Gaston Phoebus d'Aquitaine - Letter 269 -, referring back to the first quatrain) stand for the hero whose love is fatal and leads to despair. (These pairs may, of course, be arranged differently)[1]. The opposition continues between "Reine" and "Syrène", "Sainte" and "Fée". The point of the sonnet is that he does not know which of the two destinies is the true one ("Suis-je ..."), but alternates between them ("tour à tour"). At the same time the experience is that of a single, unified self.

Similarly in 'Artémis' the quatrains insist on the oneness of the multiple love[2], whilst the tercets contrast the "Sainte

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1. N. Rinsler is surely right in suggesting that the figures have a multiple identity ('Nerval et Biron', 'Revue d'histoire littéraire', July-September, 1961); they should not be "identified" as (for example) Shakespearean heroes in disguise (cf L. Cellier, 'Sur un vers des Chimères', 'Cahiers du Sud', No. 311, 1952).

2. The important associations here are: Diana (Artemis) connected with a stopped clock ('Sylvie', I, 272); and the original title 'Ballet des heures', a reminiscence of 'L'Imagier de Harlem' (see J. Onimus, 'Artémis ...'). The thirteenth hour is a recurrence of the first. The lovers' union is eternally the same throughout their successive avatars (see above, Chapter VII).

napolitaine" with "La sainte de l'abîme". Here the equilibrium of 'El Desdichado' gives way to what appears to be a choice: "plus sainte à mes yeux".

Thus the dualism in 'Sylvie' between a figure representing sanity and a figure representing the dream-world, is continued in the dream-world itself. Transcendental love can lead to a luminous paradise or to hell and darkness. The dream-experience does not unfold on the temporal plane, and the attempt to mould it into a continuous process leading to a permanently valid salvation is a construction of Nerval's sanity[1]. One feels that 'El Desdichado', with its unresolved dichotomy, is a truer reflection of his madness. The pattern of Nerval's imaginary love-life could end in 'Aurélia', with all the strands coming together in a single thread. Critics have tended to write as if it did, reassuring us that his life was an exemplary destiny[2]. But it was not so. In 'Promenades

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1. Cf J. Richer's insistence that 'Aurélia' is above all a work of art: "tout y est repensé en fonction d'un ensemble ordonné" ('Notes sur Aurélia', 'Cahiers du Sud', No. 292, 1948). See Appendix to Chapter VII for some indications as to how Nerval was re-fashioning much earlier material so that it fits into a sequence whose logic derives from later events.

2. See for example the final chapter of J. Richer's 'Expérience et création'. M. Richer argues that Nerval, having received the sign of his redemption ('Aurélia', 414) on Christmas Day, 1853, deliberately committed suicide thirteen months later when the sign was not renewed. But M. Richer fails to take account of 'Promenades et souvenirs' and the renewal of interest in the village love. Cf J. - P. Richard, 'Géographie magique', 84. F. Constans, on the other hand, writes of "la violence croissante au cours des dernières années de Nerval de l'épanchement du songe", of the "tournoiement toujours plus effréné" of his dreams ('Ascendance mystique', 449).

et souvenirs', his last work, he turns again to the last chances of a youthful love, and tries with something approaching desperation to extract further riches from the exhausted vein of 'Sylvie'. 'Aurélia' was no more than the point of immobility of a pendulum which is still swinging, and which now moves back to the opposite extreme.

After the supposed cure recorded in 'Aurélia', Nerval obtained his release from the clinic at Passy, determined to take his place again in the world. But, in the words of Blanche, "il n'était plus jamais sain d'esprit" (Letter LXX), and he wandered deeper and deeper into the maze of madness and despair, ending in the obscure and grotesque tragedy of the Rue de la Vieille-Lanterne. 'Promenades et souvenirs' is the record of his last attempt to regain a hold on reality. But it reveals how that hold was slipping.

Like 'Angélique', it is about an ostensible quest which conceals a deeper one. His hunt for lodgings turns into another excursion into the past, which is also a quest for the lost home. After recalling that he once dreamed of setting up a quiet country retreat in Montmartre (146-48), he decides to look in Saint-Germain. This is obviously authentic reporting, for there is ample evidence in the Correspondance of his intention to settle

down in Saint-Germain and even to start a review there[1]. But at the same time, he is moving more deeply into the past: Montmartre is the scene of happiness that might have been his ten years ago; Saint-Germain is the setting of adolescence. Pontoise takes him back ten years earlier still, and finally he reaches Chantilly, near the place where he spent his childhood. 'Promenades et souvenirs' is an attempt to re-create and re-enter the past. On one level, Nerval is renewing the quest for the lost childhood sweetheart. But the figure of Sylvie has splintered into a bewildering multiplicity of half-remembered, half-invented faces: the two cousins who appeared in 'La Pandora'[2], the creole girl, Héloïse, Célénie: "une petite paysanne qui m'a aimé et qui m'appelait son petit mari" (161), the daughter of an inn-keeper at Chantilly. These are creatures of no substance[3]. Nerval moves as though in a dream, re-discovering his familiar phantoms. The image of his past has lost what objective status it still possessed in 'Sylvie'.

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1. "Je vais à Saint-Germain pour affaire" (Letter 348); "je réside quelquefois à Saint-Germain" (Letter 349); "je pars pour Saint-Germain ... Si je ne trouve pas cent francs qu'il me faut pour commencer un journal-revue à moi, à Saint-Germain, je reviendrai tantôt" (Letter 350). All these letters are dated November, 1854. The "affaire", according to the Pléiade editors, was the project of having 'Promenades et souvenirs' printed at Saint-Germain.

2. Cf I, 161 with 'La Pandora', I, 352.

3. Célénie is at once a water-sprite and a miniature patron goddess of the original inhabitants of the region (166-67). Héloïse owes more to J. - J. Rousseau than to reality.

Reality is no longer a refuge from the incursions of the dream, as it was in 'Les Nuits d'Octobre' and 'Sylvie'. Indeed, the distinction is no longer made. Reality is open to the dream.

For the first time Nerval writes directly about the memories of his mother, his aunt, his grand-father, his father and his cousins which have been shaping his works ever since the dreams of 1841. During this pilgrimage into the past, he everywhere sees faces which remind him of the beloved dead. He is seeking the family paradise <u>in this world</u>.

Thus everything in Nerval's last work refers us to his most cherished dream, whether it be in its historical form, through his fancied affiliation to the chosen race of the Valois[1], or through the recurrent allusions to the mysteriously serene features of those who, wherever he goes, seem to dwell apart, and are always associated with his own kith and kin.

But in the nature of things he cannot proceed beyond allusion, and illusion. In this world where "l'action n'est pas la sœur du rêve", the quest for a home never reaches its goal. He never, in fact, arrives at his birthplace. The past cannot be reassembled and, more profoundly, the dream cannot find a locality in three dimensions. There is no earthly paradise, only the elusive magic

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1. See the pages on Saint-Germain, especially 150 (cf the "roman manqué" of Bucquoy, II, 1467).

in the smile of a passing stranger, or the indefinable timbre of a song which soon will end. The very rapidity with which he passes his "childhood sweethearts" in review reveals that there is nothing in reality, nothing in his actual memories, which corresponds to his longing.

Thus he has recourse to the old dream of acting the dream of family reunion by joining a strolling troupe. But this wandering substitute for a home cannot claim him long. Nerval at 45, lonely and longing for love, feels more and more strongly that only in that "château de Bohême" where a beautiful lady steps out through the portrait-frame, could his longing be satisfied. And never, never will he find it. He walks in a circle from dream to a reality which, however frequently rearranged, can never be made to correspond to it. Nerval's circle is the circle of despair, which can only be broken by death.

CONCLUSION

We all exist between two lives, between life as we hope to live it and life as we have to live it, between dream and reality. For Albert Béguin: "toute époque de la pensée humaine pourrait se définir, de façon suffisamment profonde, par les relations qu'elle établit entre le rêve et la vie éveillée".[1] The Romantic generation takes the impossibility of living within the limits of one's life as a major theme. For Baudelaire, dissatisfaction leads to the postulation of two unattainable absolutes: pure unconsciousness or animality, and a total beatitude towards which our imperfect faculties irresistibly and maddeningly draw us. Nerval too - though more humorously, more discreetly and at times, we feel, more anxiously than Baudelaire - finds that what concerns him is always the luminous or shadowy promise lying behind what is available. Happiness is always elsewhere, in a paradise which is lost but which might be found round the next corner. Hence the theme of the journey to the transplanted homeland, the journey which is a return to the origins of a simple felicity.

Critics, taking 'Aurélia' as the definitive formulation of Nerval's destiny, have presented him as a mystic for whom things as they are act as a barrier to things as they might be in another world glimpsed in dreams and entered through death. Two stages in the career of the hero of 'Les Confidences de Nicolas' could be taken as the paradigm of Nerval's escape from mere living to the more authentic reality of the dream. Nerval

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1. A. Béguin, 'L'Ame romantique et le rêve', vii.

brusquely interrupts the sexual consummation which, in Restif's cruder version, the hero enjoys with Marguerite. When the act does take place (with Mme Parangon) the experience is strange and fleeting like a dream (II, 1041).

Thus the surface meaning of Nerval's works, the brisk and sophisticated entertainment which they offered to the readers of the 'Revue de Paris' or the 'Revue des deux mondes', has been treated as a mere envelope wrapped lovingly around the mythical patterns which are their true content. Critics like François Constans, however, have not put forward the reductive argument that the works are determined by the myths or legends which they allude to. On the contrary, Constans' interpretation of 'La Pandora' shows that the allusions are all used to illustrate what he takes to be the central theme of a platonic love (fidelity to the dead Jenny Colon) overcoming the temptation of a love which is purely physical and mechanical.[1] The secret mythical pattern of the story is adapted to Nerval's preoccupation with a pure love leading to a mystic union beyond death.

Constans' theory that for Nerval "la mort est fonction de l'amour charnel" points to an obsessive pattern which associates love and death[2] and

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1. The reference to the temple of Thoas (I, 358) shows that Nerval is a devotee of Diana (see also Richer, 'Expérience', 571). Certain unobtrusive but carefully placed details warn us that Pandora is an incarnation of the hybrid Oriental goddesses like Derceto who represent erotic passion. Her reference to the "joujoux de Nuremberg" (I, 360) invites the hero to enjoy the mechanical frenzy of sexual pleasure - cf 'La Poupée de Nuremberg' (see 'Expérience', 268f) and the colloquial expression "faire joujou".

2. Popa sees the obsession with death as a key to Nerval's thought, quoting a remark by Paul de Saint-Victor: "il est mort ... de la nostalgie du monde invisible" ('Le Thème et le sentiment de la mort chez Nerval'). See Constans, 'Nerval et l'amour platonique'.

which is first adumbrated in the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon': sexual pleasure, a profanation of the ideal, induces a sense of guilt and a longing for death as purification and atonement. So too in 'Aurélia' (1841) an encounter with a prostitute who resembles at once death and his dead mother leaves him with the conviction that he is about to die and pass onto a higher spiritual plane. In the dreams which follow this appears to have been realised, and he is briefly reunited with his mother in rejuvenated form. When this is transposed in 'La Forêt noire', there is no guilty sexual encounter, but the rest follows step-by-step as before: the apparent death, the meeting in paradise with the mother and a rejuvenated version of her. Similarly, Polyphile, by renouncing physical possession, enjoys dreams which give him a foretaste of the pure spiritual union. (Here the consummation is achieved without the hero's undergoing the ordeal of death.) The postulant to the priesthood of Isis also renounces his earthly love, and is united with her deified counterpart after passing through an ordeal which consists in facing death but not actually being killed. The hero of 'La Forêt noire' is subjected to a simulated execution as proof of his fidelity to those he belongs to both in this world and the next, and Yousouf submits willingly to the mock-execution which Sétalmulc has staged to try his love. In the scenario of 'Francesco Colonna', connected in Nerval's mind, through the music of 'The Magic Flute', with the ordeals of the priest of Isis, as well as with the story of Polyphile, death again proves to have been only apparent once the lover's readiness to die has established his undying fidelity. Finally, in both 'Octavie' and 'La Pandora' sexual pleasure (or a dream symbolising it) is followed by a choking sensation which figures guilt, which in its turn gives

way to ascension, purification and a form of spiritual union.[1]

It is clearly tempting to agree with critics like Popa, Constans and Richer who state that for Nerval sexual love (often with an "easy woman" who resembles the ideal figure) is a guilty profanation, and that death is not only an expiation but also the final consummation. But only in one work, 'Aurélia', does Nerval commit himself to the love which begins with death. Even here the descent into the other world is followed by a return to life and normality, as though the mystic's conviction must be ratified by the rational self who has to live his life in this world. Like Keats, Nerval is only half in love with death. "Il ne m'a pas suffi de mettre au tombeau mes amours de chair et de cendre, pour bien m'assurer que c'est nous, vivants, qui marchons dans un monde de fantômes" (II, 71). Only in makebelieve can the Nervalian hero undergo the experience of death. In no case do we find that he is in love with death in the literal sense, as in Gautier's story of necrophilia, 'La Mort amoureuse'. When Nerval dreams about his mother's ghost, she appears first in the guise of death itself (see above, p.179), and in 'Les Confidences de Nicolas' the avowed maternal figure has the chill of the tomb upon her. Death here is something to be shunned. Even in the happiest of Nerval's dreams the mother-goddess is a nebulous figure dissolving in a cloud of perfume, and if for a moment she is close and reassuring, the moment is soon past. It is only when her image is invested in the person of a humble substitute that an approach can be made. The dream finds expression by being transposed into real-life terms. In the last act of 'La Forêt noire' the happiness which had been enacted in the other world is transferred into this one.

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1. For the detail of these passages, see above, pp 10f, 120f, 179ff, 349.

If we, in the mid-twentieth century, find so much to engage us in Baudelaire and Nerval, it is not because they promise an easy evasion of reality, a smooth ascension into the Beyond, but because their work sets up a living tension between what might be and what is. The vivid sketches of 'Les Nuits d'Octobre' stay in the mind as much because of their deft precision as because of their otherworldly atmosphere. When Nerval says of Sylvie: "elle existe, elle" (I, 271), he means that dreams are insubstantial figments of the mind and that happiness must be nourished by a living presence. And his warm sympathy for others goes into the creation of a convincingly individualised portrait.

Both the yearning for a more perfect existence and the sense that he is circumscribed by a reality with which it is essential to come to terms, point towards Nerval's central enterprise as a writer, the creation of a second life which at once extends, and yet remains in close relation to, his own. Until 1841 the parallel is governed by the rules of a strict probability. The glamorous and much-courted Jenny Colon could, like Sylvia in 'Piquillo', have concealed a tender heart beneath the façade of hard venality. Even the fancy that he might have been more successful if Jenny had really been one of the <u>ingénues</u> whom she impersonated on stage, is based closely on the circumstances binding together an acress and her admirer. The image of the <u>ingénue</u> in any case derives from the early longing for a simple and attainable happiness.

At the beginning the Marguerite-figure stands for a tranquil bourgeois normality, an alternative to success and the semi-public conquest of the famous courtesan which is the seal of success. But after 1841 the lure of the dream-world becomes a potent force, and the Marguerite-

figures subsequently created by Nerval (Zeynab, Sylvie) are actual real-life alternatives to the otherworldly figure into which the actress-courtesan has been transformed. Yet Nerval's second life satisfies us not by the epic, black-and-white contrasts which we find in Hugo, but by its completeness and complexity. The image of a possible happiness which he creates and recreates in the later works, draws sustenance from both dream and reality. As Nerval grows older, the conflict is more and more consciously formulated, for as his madness gains ground and he feels that his hold on reality is slipping, so the desire for peace and sanity, centred around the figure of the village girl, strengthens and clarifies. But the literary enterprise of inventing a second life leads to a profound ambiguity, the paradox of a makebelieve reality. By rearranging the past in accordance with the impulses of the present, Nerval sets up the spurious mode of the might-have-been. Further, the threat of mental disintegration which makes him long for a stable normality is the product of visionary experiences whose ineffable beauty undermines that longing, so that the image of reality is secretly shaped by the structure of the dream. The hidden unity of 'Sylvie', which can never be realised in terms of the story precisely because it is the story (or rather a story) of Nerval's actual life, is that Sylvie as well as the actress is an image of the lost Adrienne, and the hero's mock-marriage parallels the central dream-sequences of 'Aurélia' (1841). Reality is a pseudo-alternative to the dream - you cannot escape into a mirror.

Hence the technique of creating a semblance of multiplicity. Since the real-life image is a projection of longing it can never satisfy longing. Its subjective origin ensures that even though the beloved

change her name she will not change her nature, so that differences of identity are only apparent. Sylvie, for all her lively individuality, is seen to belong to the same stereotype as Zeynab (the charming scatter-brain). Love is a feeling which can be transferred but not developed, and which alters everything to its own likeness. In the two versions of 'Léo Burckart' or in chapter i of 'Aurélia' we see that the transfer can be effected with the bewildering rapidity of sleight of hand. Nerval himself, of course, is aware that he is practising illusionism, as we see from 'Sylvie', chapter i, or in 'Léo Burckart'. But Frantz's lucidity comes to an end with the revelation that his love for Diane de Waldeck was unreal because totally subjective. The subjectivist's self-deception reappears in his fancy that a simple girl might have been more responsive than the grande dame, so that this second feeling would be authenticated from the outside. And Frantz, by behaving as though this were so, hopes that it will become so. But the second feeling is no less exclusively interior, and therefore has a no more certain status, than the first.

This limited lucidity is typical of Nerval's creation of a second life. Not that the operations I have tried to describe are peculiar to the act of literary creation or even to Nerval's imaginative constitution. On the contrary, if I have achieved relevance, it will be in the degree of assent and self-recognition I have won from the reader, for we are all engaged on the same enterprise. We all create an image of ourselves, with what we would like to be true, and what we would like others to recognise as true, about ourselves. The process of creating our own image is one that can never be finished, but whose continual adjustments and variations are given continuity by what Valéry calls

"les thèmes les plus simples et les plus constants de (notre) vie affective et intellectuelle"[1], and which will satisfy our need for self-esteem as well as our legitimate self-reproach. I have tried to show the admixture of self-awareness and self-deception which this involves, for Nerval (again, like all of us) could never be completely honest with himself, nor yet completely dishonest. Hence the subterfuges of a mind simultaneously frightened and fascinated, or which, desiring something it knows to be impossible, invents a situation which, if only partially, gratifies the desire in a disguised form. In 'Le Marquis de Fayolle', for example, Georges' longing for the mother who abandoned him when he was born finds a subtly unfocussed satisfaction in the prospect of marrying Gabrielle.

Nerval's most satisfying achievement, from our point of view, is 'Sylvie', which brings a high degree of lucid consciousness and a corresponding artistic maturity to bear on the unified presentation of the conflicting claims of the real and the ideal, as well as their subtle interpenetration and secret identity. And here creative maturity seems to be linked with self-honesty, for the much less interesting 'Imagier de Harlem' operates the impossible reconciliation of the conflicting claims, whereas 'Sylvie' leaves them in precarious, if harmonious, balance. This image of the second life achieves the difficult union of artistic shape and a complexity giving due proportion to a number of conflicting impulses each of which is struggling to find expression. 'Aurélia', by contrast, beautiful and moving though it is, presents an incomplete image of Nerval's

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1. 'Oeuvres', vol. I, 1503.

life[1].

Once again, of course, Nerval has eluded us. The imaginative structures which I have sought are doubly evanescent. In the first place, though I have tried to be faithful to the spirit and the letter of what Nerval actually wrote, my sympathy for his struggle to match self-deception and self-awareness in his projection of the self, has no doubt introduced a distortion arising from my knowledge of these processes in myself. Secondly, the structures belong to literature at the stage of motivation rather than of expression, so that they exist temporarily and even furtively in an area which is notoriously uncertain. My work will have been worthwhile if it has given a provisional consistency and coherence to these phantoms. If not, we must concede with Jean-Pierre Richard: "aucun grand écrivain ne peut être emprisonné, fût-ce au filet de ses propres songes".

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1. It should be emphasised that this is not a literary judgement.

A P P E N D I C E S

CHAPTER IV: APPENDIX "A"

THE RECORD OF A REAL CORRESPONDANCE

The central problem raised by these manuscripts is whether they are copies or drafts of real letters, written for, if not actually sent to, Jenny Colon, or whether they are "literature". Before coming to a firm conclusion on this point, both sides of the question must be put.

Sardou, in his publication of 1902, implied that they were "real" letters by giving them the title of 'Lettres à Jenny Colon'. But not all critics have agreed with him. Marsan in 1911, N. Popa in 1931 and N. Rinsler in 1961, all make out a case for believing that the letters are not an attempt to communicate with Jenny Colon, but the narcissistic record of a semi-imaginary experience.

Marsan writes: "bien des détails s'appliqueraient assez mal à la comédienne; et d'ailleurs il suffit de regarder le manuscrit, écrit régulièrement sur de grandes feuilles, pour reconnaître, non pas une série de lettres distinctes, mais - sous la forme épistolaire - une sorte de petit roman ou, si l'on veut, de journal intime"[1]. This judgment applies only to the Sardou manuscripts.

N. Popa[2] agrees: "Plus maître de sa plume que de sa parole, il

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1. 'Correspondance', ed. Marsan, 1911. My italics.
2. N. Popa: 'Etude critique sur les Filles du Feu', in 'Les Filles du Feu', vol. II.

a ébauché à l'intention de son idole de nombreuses lettres ... Ces feuillets ... font croire à un journal intime de forme épistolaire, sorte de soliloque tendre, nullement destiné à parvenir à celle qui en fait l'objet" (36). Popa is referring to the Chantilly mss.

Norma Rinsler believes that the letters should be called 'Lettres à Aurélia' (following Gautier and Houssaye). She does not think that they were addressed to Jenny Colon but that Nerval's publication of them in 1842 "reveals the truth of the matter: the artist extracted every last drop of human possibility from the situation, but the man of sense was careful not to become involved in it in reality". Mrs. Rinsler concedes that the letters are "a most searching analysis of an unsuccessful relationship, dissected till every nerve and every fibre lies bared". But they constitute an "imaginative act" rather than an autobiographical record (N. Rinsler, 230-35).

But the opposite view has been defended with equal cogency, notably by A. Marie in 1914, P. Audiat in 1926, J. Richer in 1952 (and 1960), and J. Poirier in 1955.

A. Marie concludes that in spite of their "destination littéraire", the letters "ont un tel accent de vérité, laissent une telle impression de <u>senti</u> et de <u>vécu</u>, qu'il est impossible de n'y pas reconnaître l'écho de sentiments et de faits réels" (112-113).

And he uses the letters to reconstruct the course of the affaire.

He is followed in 1926 by P. Audiat: "l'existence assez fréquente d'un premier brouillon et d'une copie au net sur papier à lettre, incline à penser que Gérard ne destinait point ses lettres à son tiroir. Il se peut aussi que certaines lettres aient été envoyées, que d'autres aient été retenues et ... conservées par Gérard" (P. Audiat, 36). And Audiat, like A. Marie, proceeds to reconstruct on the basis of the letters, the course of Nerval's affaire with Jenny.

M. Richer refines Audiat's view: "Ces variantes nombreuses, le ton intime, personnel de lettres qui décrivent une situation précise et très particulière montrent, selon nous, qu'elles furent bien d'abord conçues pour être envoyées, le travail de l'écrivain portant plus sur les nuances du sentiment que sur l'expression proprement dite" (I, third edition, 1312 - Richer's italics). This is an admirable summary of the present state of the question.

Finally, Jeanne Poirier comes down on the side of those critics who believe that this is a "real" correspondance. She stresses that the letters are the product of a real experience which made Nerval extremely unhappy (a point that too many critics have overlooked). She refuses to believe that the love was all imagination; it was, as Gautier said, "une passion très réelle". But why (it might be objected) did he then correct them, rewrite them, copy them out? "Est-ce ainsi que crie la passion?" Her answer to this question is

"yes": a passionate lover does just what the Chantilly manuscripts show Nerval to have done. She quotes Balzac in support: "Jamais première lettre d'amour n'a été, comme on pourrait le croire, un jet brûlant de l'âme ... une pareille lettre est accompagnée de bouillonnements trop abondants, trop multipliés, pour ne pas être l'elixir de plusieurs lettres essayées, rejetées, recomposées" (J. Poirier, "Un Etrange Amoureux", 99-100).

My view is that the second school of thought, which holds that the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon' are traces of a real correspondance, is right.

A. Marie is surely correct in stressing that these letters are "senti, vécu". Whatever the literary tone of certain passages, there is a real anguish at the impossibility of being accepted by her, and the impossibility of her being acceptable. This is not "un soliloque tendre". It is the record of a tormenting experience.

An examination of the manuscripts at Chantilly has led me to endorse fully the judicious conclusions of M. Jean Richer. Certain particularities make it virtually certain that they were designed to be sent. The manuscript of Letter X (f°. 19 at Chantilly) is embossed with the "en-tête" bearing the initials G.L.N., which M. Richer gives in facsimile in his 'Gérard de Nerval' (Seghers). This is a fair copy of f°. 18, carefully written out, set neatly in the middle of the page, and signed with a flourish: G. de N. It is

folded in exactly the same way that he folded the letters he did send. And yet, clearly, it was not sent: there is no address and no trace of a seal, as there is in the case of letters which were sent. F°. 8 also has the "en-tête": it begins neatly, as a fair copy, and then, as though he had suddenly realised it would not do, turns into a "brouillon". Nearly all the manuscripts are either rough drafts, or else fair copies which turn into rough drafts, which explains why he kept them.

Furthermore, Nerval himself explains why he kept so many unsent letters and fragments of letters: "Je voudrais pouvoir anéantir toutes les lettres que je vous ai adressées; votre indifférence m'aura peut-être rendu ce service; mais le souvenir reste encore, et c'est trop. Combien n'en ai-je pas déchiré pourtant! J'en écris une vraie et sentie, mais dont la violence risquerait de vous effrayer; puis une autre réfléchie et calculée, où je m'applique à vous paraître patient et raisonnable; et ce n'est aucun des deux que je vous envoie, mais une troisième écrite à la hâte et parce qu'il faut en finir, faite avec les lambeaux des autres, où les phrases ne se suivent pas, où les idées se confondent, une lettre folle et blessante et qui défait tout mon ouvrage" (XIX). It is clear that he either destroyed or kept more letters and drafts than he sent. Is he not here describing in precise terms the state of the Chantilly manuscripts, with their confusions, repetitions and changes of tone? There are indeed some letters which are violent, others where he is making an

effort to be patient and reasonable, others that are "folles et blessantes". Above all, it should be noted that he found it difficult, not only to produce a letter that was "right", but also to send them once they were written.

One need look no farther than Nerval's own testimony to understand what kind of documents the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon' are. They are the detritus of a real correspondance that Nerval found impossibly difficult to keep up. They are the product, for all their attempt at style, of a mind driven nearly mad by the desperation of not being loved, and perhaps even more, of not himself being able to love in a normal way; a mind which the emotional stimulus of an affaire, the kind his friends would no doubt take so lightly, throws into a riot of contradictory and violent feelings, which he knows will do his cause no service, but which he cannot control. We may adopt Nerval's own description of the manuscripts when he published them as 'Un Roman à faire': "(des citations) où apparaît l'éclair d'une âme qui a réellement pensé et souffert" (I, 1250).

The letters belong in the first place, then, to Nerval's biography, and they contain references to an actual situation and to identifiable occasions. Letter XV has: "Oh! si tu m'aimes, nous sommes encore bien malheureux: toi tes leçons, ton théâtre, tes occupations; moi mes journaux, mes théâtres et une foule encore de tracas et d'ennuis". He goes on to say that on the previous day he had intended to see a play he was to review: 'Le Camp de la Mort',

by Adolphe Dumas. This is identified in the Pléiade Notes as 'Le Camp des Croisés', first played at the Odéon on the 3rd February, 1838. Letter XVII mentions that the season is winter, so (since internal evidence abundantly suggests that all the letters were written at the same time) we can date the letters 1837-38. This fits what we can guess Jenny's activities to have been at this time, and what we know of Nerval's. The pair are kept apart by their several occupations: her singing lessons and rehearsals, his commitments as a journalist. Letter V confirms this dating, for it refers to the visit to Naples of 1834 as being three years before.

The repeated references to services he has done her, or is about to do her, can be identified as reviews of plays in which she appeared[1]. And on the back of the rough draft of Letter X, in which he declares his complete devotion to her career, there is the draft of a note to Duchâtre which solicits a piece of publicity in her favour[2].

This does not mean, unfortunately, that the letters can be used to reconstruct the course of the affaire. As I will show in

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1. Nerval was helping Gautier with the "feuilleton" of 'La Presse' from July to December 1837, and in the early months of 1838 signed some with the initials G-D, indicating that he had produced them on his own. He also wrote several articles for 'La Charte de 1830' in the Autumn and Winter of 1837, including reports on plays in which Jenny had acted: 'Les Etats de Blois' (September) and 'Piquillo' (November). From the Spring of 1838 onwards he contributed to 'Le Messager'. - There is no article on 'Le Camp des Croisés', but in the letter Nerval only says that he wanted to do a review, but missed the first night.

2. 743-44. Incidentally, this is the only time we know of that Nerval actually wrote her name.

Appendix "B", the best we can do is to postulate the order in which Nerval arranged them for publication in 'Aurélia'.

If we want to arrive at a working hypothesis about what actually happened between Nerval and Jenny Colon, it is necessary to combine the brief indications of the letters themselves with the external evidence of contemporary memoirs.

According to two of the more complete contemporary accounts, those of Maxime du Camp and Théophile Gautier[1], Nerval met Jenny Colon in 1834 (after his inheritance, says Maxime du Camp); he fell in love with her because (says Gautier) she realised his ideal. He adored her from a distance, attending the theatre every night and sending her bouquets, which she took little notice of. Gautier adds that he founded 'Le Monde théâtral' (i.e. 'Le Monde dramatique') in order to help her career, and wrote plays "pour se rapprocher de son idole". One of these plays was the 'La Reine de Saba', on which Nerval expended a vast amount of time and trouble. Other attempts to get closer to her were by commissioning from Gautier sonnets in her praise and a pen-portrait in 'Les Belles Femmes de Paris'. He bought a Renaissance bed for her, before he had even met her, because his imagination was soaring ahead of reality, not because he was confident of success; and in fact, the lady never slept in it (Gautier); Nerval was very shy about the

1. M. du Camp, 'Souvenirs littéraires'; T. Gautier, 'Portraits et souvenirs littéraires'.

subject of love, and never discussed the affaire with his friends. Du Camp states that he never declared his love, and this is confirmed if not explicitly, at least by the tenor of Gautier's article. (In fact he says: "Nous l'ignorons"). Gautier adds that the love-letters he wrote were never sent (although the reason he gives is no more than that Jenny Colon would have been touched by them if she had received them). This is confirmed by her alleged statement to Gautier (reported by Du Camp) that she never heard anything from Nerval, that she only knew about his love through indirect rumours, and that the only time she spoke to him was when he came to her with the offer to write 'La Reine de Saba'. Both Gautier and Du Camp agree that he made a cult of her after the relationship, such as it was, had ceased; Gautier thinks that this cult turned into an obsession which caused his friend's madness and suicide; Du Camp considers this is no more than a legend.

We can accept the points of this testimony which are corroborated by the letters - for example, that there was a period of silent adoration is born out by Letter V, lines 75-77. What makes it suspect is that much of it is manifestly copied from Nerval's own "memoirs", in particular 'Les Petits Châteaux de Bohême', which itself cannot be relied on as a biographical document. If one were to attempt the tricky task of sorting fact from fantasy, one might conjecture as follows:

Gautier's assertion that Nerval founded 'Le Monde dramatique' to further Jenny's career probably goes one better than the strict truth. There are indeed no fewer than nine mentions of her name in the first two volumes (1835-36), when Nerval was director[1]. But as Cellier says, "il serait absurde d'assimiler la revue à une publication publicitaire à la louange de J. Colon" (48). The Pléiade editors' judicious modification of Gautier's assertion is probably pretty near the mark: "c'est en partie pour pouvoir la vanter à son gré que Nerval fonda Le Monde dramatique" (I, 1248-49). On the other hand, it is impossible to accept the statement that he never declared his love. The letters refer frequently to meetings, and even love-scenes, between them. Letter XV implies that they were seeing one another regularly. There is reference, as I have shown, to identifiable circumstances. Gautier and Du Camp have been misled by subsequent indications in Nerval's writings that he wished he had never approached the idol and spoiled the dreams of the initial period[2].

Nevertheless, as I show in Chapter IV, it is undeniable that in the real relationship which Nerval tried to establish with Jenny, circumstances are distorted by wishful thinking. This comes out in Letter VII, precisely in the passage where he recalls the point at which fantasy merged with reality: their first meeting

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1. See Senelier, N°s. 336-61 and A. Marie, 104-107.

2. This idea appears in the Letters themselves (VII, 31-34), only to be suppressed. But it occurs again in (for example) 'Corilla' and 'Les Confidences de Nicolas'.

when, after years of distant adoration of the artist, he was confronted with the woman. He rejoices at having taken indirect possession of a portion of her time and of her thoughts, by writing a play in which she consented to take a part. He spent a whole year, he says, preparing this triumph for her. "Dans cette soirée où je compris toutes les chances de vous plaire et de vous obtenir, où ma seule fantaisie avait mis en jeu votre valeur et la livrait à des hasards, je tremblais plus que vous-même. Eh bien! alors même, tout le prix de mes efforts était dans votre sourire".

This is an embellished account of 'Piquillo', in which Jenny took the leading role[1]. It was not the product of "ma seule fantaisie", since it was written in collaboration with, and signed by, Alexandre Dumas. Nor does the play appear to have been written for Jenny, since at the rehearsal stage the role of Sylvia was assigned to Mme. Damoreau[2]. And Nerval was just as concerned with advancing his own career with 'Piquillo' as he was with Jenny's: in Letter 22 he talks of it as "la grande affaire qui décide tout à fait mon avenir", and in the note to Duchatre he declares that his position in the theatre is "fort bonne" as a result of the moderate success of 'Piquillo'. There is another discrepancy: he admits to Duchatre that 'Piquillo' has been only very moderately successful (I, 744),

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1. The statement in his friends' memoirs that he wrote 'La Reine de Saba' for Jenny is taken from 'Petits Châteaux de Bohême', and is a retrospective invention of Nerval's (see Chapter XIV).
2. Letter 22. In the note to Duchatre, Nerval implies that Jenny is not as good as Mme. Damoreau (I, 744).

whereas in the letter to Jenny it is a triumph. However, there is no very serious distortion. As far as Jenny was concerned, it was more or less true that 'Piquillo' was the product of Nerval's imagination, since the verses which she sang were evidently composed by him[1]. After the event, it was quite easy to forget that the part Jenny took had not been intended for her all along. And Nerval is not the only lover to exaggerate the degree to which he has devoted himself to the beloved's service. There is every reason to suppose, not only that Jenny would have accepted this version of the writing and casting of 'Piquillo', as being flattering to her, but also that Nerval himself more than half believed it. The same remark applies to the exaggerated claim that he has given up years of his life to her, and has sacrificed his position as "l'une de nos célébrités parisiennes" (Letter X).

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1. "J'ai fait les vers d'opéra facilement dans mon lit" (Letter 22).

CHAPTER IV: APPENDIX "B"

PROBLEM OF THE ORDER OF THE MANUSCRIPTS

The 'Lettres à Jenny Colon' raise some extremely difficult bibliographical problems.

There are two sets of manuscripts. The Chantilly collection has sixteen letters, which are well described by J. Poirier as "les autographes de Chantilly ... morcelés, papier effiloché ou froissé, mélange de brouillon et de mise au net"[1]. The Pléiade edition follows the Chantilly order.

The other set belonged at one time to Victorien Sardou, who published them in the 'Nouvelle Revue' in 1902. They were then bought by Jules Marsan, who republished them in his edition of Nerval's Correspondence in 1911. The original Sardou manuscripts seem to be irretrievably lost. M. Richer has made repeated efforts to track them down, without success, and he tells me that "j'ai cru comprendre ... que ces manuscrits ont été perdus, volés (ou vendus?) durant la dernière guerre" (Letter dated 26 November 1960). The only document still available is the facsimile of Letter VII published by Sardou ('La Nouvelle Revue', 447). However, the text published by Marsan is presumably accurate, since he states: "j'ai collationné le texte sur le manuscrit original et corrigé quelques

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1. "Un Etrange Amoureux", 99.

erreurs" (of the Sardou publication). The Sardou letters are all versions of Chantilly texts, except numbers IX, XII and XVIII (Sardou numbering), which have no equivalent at Chantilly. But the order of the Sardou publication is totally different from that of Chantilly.

Some of the letters had been published before 1902. Nerval himself included six of them in 'Un Roman à faire' in 1842: one of these is found only in the Sardou collection, one only at Chantilly, whilst the other four are common to both collections. Ten more letters, found among Nerval's papers, were included by Gautier and Houssaye in 'Aurélia'[1]. Here, too, most of this material exists in duplicate in both the Sardou and the Chantilly manuscripts, but some of it is only in the Sardou texts, and some only at Chantilly. We may conjecture that originally the manuscripts were all together - though Gautier and Houssaye do not appear to have had all the Sardou manuscripts, since they do not include Sardou XVII or XVIII. The order of the ten letters published by Gautier and Houssaye is the same as the Chantilly order (with one variation), but they do not represent a consecutive series from the Chantilly manuscripts - a vital point to which I shall return later.

The main picture then is of two sets of manuscripts, Sardou and

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1. In 'Le Rêve et la vie'.

Chantilly, in two quite different orders.

If the manuscripts reflect a real experience, (see Appendix "A"), can the sequence of events of the affaire with Jenny Colon be reconstructed? In what order should the letters be read? Let us examine the alternative orders available.

Apart from the Sardou and the Chantilly orders, there is that of the ten letters published by Gautier and Houssaye, under the title of 'Desiderata', which is the order they found the mss in - taken by them to be the disorder in which Nerval had left them[1]. Now, at first sight this would appear to be the same as the Chantilly order. But a little arithmetical reasoning shows that the order in which the two friends found Nerval's manuscripts was not the same as the present Chantilly order.

It is noticeable that the numbering of the 'Desiderata' letters is not consecutive: 3,4,5; 7,8; 10,11,12,13; 15. What has happened to 1, 2, 6, 9, 14? Are not these numbers omitted to show that Gautier and Houssaye are leaving out the letters already published in 'Un Roman à faire'? That is, we can postulate that the two men found themselves confronted with a series of manuscripts. Six of them, they noticed, had already been published by Nerval, so they decided to set them aside - after all, they could not be both the posthumous letters of "le chevalier Dubourjet" and the letters

1. 'Revue de Paris', 15 March, 1855.

written to Aurélia. They left gaps in the numbering to indicate the lacunae. In that case, why five gaps and not six? Because their number three coincides with number three of 'Un Roman à faire' - it is in fact a fragment of the third letter of 'Un Roman à faire' that had not been published in 1842. Thus, their omission of numbers one and two corresponds to the first two letters of 'Un Roman à faire'; their number three corresponds to the third letter of 'Un Roman à faire'; and their omission of numbers 6, 9 and 14 corresponds to the remaining three letters of 1842. This is all the more likely since Gautier and Houssaye state that they published the manuscripts just as they found them. This means that one can reconstruct the order of the manuscripts as left by Nerval as follows: (RF = 'Un Roman à faire', GH = 'Desiderata'): RF 1, RF 2, RF 3 = GH 3, GH 4, GH 5, RF 4, GH 7, GH 8, RF 5, GH 10, GH 11, GH 12, GH 13, RF 6, GH 15. But this is quite different from the Chantilly order. Using the Chantilly numbers, it gives: I, II, V, VI, VII, XI, IX, X, XII, II bis, XIV, XV, XVI, XIII, XVIII[1]. If my reasoning is correct, this is the order in which the manuscripts were left by Nerval, and the Chantilly order is

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1. Gautier and Houssaye did not publish Chantilly numbers III, IV, VIII, XVII, XIX, XX. This can be explained. They left out VIII and XIX because they are variants of I and II respectively. They left out III and IV because they are extremely incoherent and difficult to decipher. They left out XVII, perhaps, because it was torn (?) As for XX, they presumably had not got it - it is not at Chantilly, and we have already seen that Gautier and Houssaye did not have access to all the Sardou manuscripts. - The fact that this is pure speculation does not invalidate the main argument.

arbitrary.

We thus have three alternative orders: that of Chantilly (probably arbitrary); the order of the papers as left by Nerval; the Sardou order. If we were to attempt to reconstruct the narrative of the affaire, which of these would we follow? So far, three such attempts have been made, each bringing a rather different solution.

A. Marie follows the 'Desiderata' order[1]: "le classement opéré par les amis de Gérard nous semble assez logique; ce qu'ils nous ont livré s'enchaîne assez bien" (114). But Gautier and Houssaye say categorically that they did not classify the manuscripts: the "enchaînement", such as it is, would appear to be entirely fortuitous. In any case, A. Marie's "idylle" is incomplete since he omits, without good reason, the letters of 'Un roman à faire'. A. Marie is, on his own showing, giving an arbitrary selection of the letters in an arbitrary order.

P. Audiat attempts a reconstruction in his turn, dismissing the problem of order like this: "Bien que Gérard n'ait pas indiqué l'ordre dans lequel (les lettres) doivent être lues et que la présentation qui en est faite et dans Aurélia (by Gautier and Houssaye) et dans la publication Sardou, soient discutables, les lettres à Aurélia permettent de reconstituer approximativement le

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[1] That is, a selection from the Chantilly order.

roman de Gérard et de Jenny" (P. Audiat, 35-57). It is difficult to see how one can do a chronological reconstruction without having decided in which order the manuscripts should be read. P. Audiat, as far as one can tell, follows the Chantilly order, but he also uses the account of the end of the affaire given in 'Sylvie', chapter xiii, although without acknowledging that he is using another source than the letters themselves[1]. Audiat concludes: "Tel quel le roman est complet; l'incertitude de la fin, le mystère qui enveloppe certains épisodes ajoutent même à son charme". Audiat makes a charming story out of the letters (and out of his head), which is not difficult to do. But the real problem, whether this story corresponds to the sequence of the facts of Nerval's life, is sidestepped.

The problem is also avoided by J. Poirier, who does not even discuss it; but if one follows her reconstruction of the affaire, it is quite clear that she is, like Audiat, following the Chantilly order.

Thus if one wants coherent account of the affaire based on the Chantilly order, one can consult either Audiat or J. Poirier - the latter being more understanding, the former too close to anecdote.

But it has already been shown that the Chantilly order is, in all probability, an arbitrary one. In any case, it presents

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1. "On lui montre l'impossibilité de rompre les liaisons de vieille date", says Audiat; surely this comes from 'Sylvie': "elle ... m'avoua qu'il lui était difficile de rompre un attachement plus ancien" (I, 294).

several inconsistencies. For example, Letter IV seems to indicate that she has become his mistress ("une nuit, toute une nuit"), but the succeeding letters make it clear that the event has not yet taken place. Of those who attempt a reconstruction of the affaire, P. Audiat dodges this and other difficulties by implying that the problem of order is of secondary importance, and J. Poirier, following the Chantilly order, explains the difficulty away by saying that the letter refers, not to "dernières faveurs", but to "légères faveurs". But it is hard to imagine "légères faveurs" going on all night ... Later on in the Chantilly order, Letter XIV does not seem to follow on at all from Letter XIII, whereas the order in which (if my theory is right) Nerval left them places XVIII after XIII, which is much more likely.

The question arises as to whether the order in which Nerval left the manuscripts is as haphazard as Gautier and Houssaye imply when they talk of "la suite et l'enchaînement dont le pauvre rêveur a emporté le secret avec lui"? Let us re-read carefully the passage in 'Aurélia' where Nerval introduces the mss he intended to insert, which, according to Gautier and Houssaye, were the 'Lettres à Aurélia':

"Avec quelles délices j'ai pu classer dans mes tiroirs l'amas de mes notes et de mes correspondances * intimes ou publiques, obscures ou illustres, comme les a faites le hasard des rencontres

ou des pays lointains que j'ai parcourus".* (Ms variant of the passage between asterisks: "Il y a de quoi compromettre la moitié des célébrités de la France et de l'Allemagne, poètes et princes. 'J'y con(descends?) comme dirait Voltaire. Mais pourquoi se vanter; c'est le bagage de tout voyageur lettré". This variant is crossed out. The passage continues:) "Dans des rouleaux mieux enveloppés que les autres, je retrouve des lettres arabes, des reliques du Caire et de Stamboul. O bonheur! ô tristesse mortelle! ces caractères jaunis, ces brouillons effacés, c'est le trésor de mon seul amour ... Relisons ... Bien des lettres manquent, bien d'autres sont déchirées ou raturées; voici ce que je retrouve" ... In a ms variant there is the following note after "raturées": "Ici les lettres jusqu'aux dernières que j'envoie"[1].

M. Richer decided <u>not</u> to insert any of the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon' here, as Gautier and Houssaye had done, for two reasons. First, because "on ne sait ... s'il les eût produites dans l'une des versions que nous en connaissons". Here, one is bound to agree: it is impossible to tell which letters Nerval would have put in here, or in what order, or after what degree of revision. (Gautier and Houssaye, of course, admitted as much). M. Richer's second reason is that "on ne sait ... si Nerval devait donner là des lettres à Aurélia (le contexte ferait penser plutôt à des lettres

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1. 'Aurélia', I, 410, and notes 44 and 45.

reçues par l'auteur)". But it appears to me that the context, which I have quoted in full, does indicate that Nerval was thinking of letters written by himself. What else can be the meaning of his note - which, as M. Richer himself suggests, is probably a "note de travail": "Ici les lettres jusqu'aux dernières que j'envoie"? He can hardly have intended to insert letters from Aurélia, since he has already said he has only kept one of them (her last) (393), and even that he has burned (395). The bit about the "célébrités" (crossed out no doubt because it betrays all too obvious delusions of grandeur, and Nerval in 'Aurélia' treats his madness as though it were a thing of the past), and the bit about "lettres arabes...", are obviously pure fantasy. Like the fiction of the "chevalier Dubourjet", they are designed to disguise the extremely personal nature of his own love-letters; they are a Romantic smokescreen, a literary pretence of self-revelation to hide a real self-revelation.

But what convinces me above all that Nerval did mean to bring in some of his 'Lettres à Jenny Colon' here, is this: the phrase "le trésor de mon seul amour" is a direct echo of Letter II: "le seul trésor de mon amour". I do not think this can be a coincidence. Nor do I think that the point is invalidated by the fact that, in the context of letter II, the phrase refers to a letter from her, not one written by him. The point is that Nerval has been going through his old papers and has come across these

letters; a poignant phrase - it is so long ago now! - catches his eye, and he applies it to the letters as a whole: "le trésor de mon seul amour".

There is a further point. Does not Nerval's description of the letters he is going to insert exactly fit the Chantilly mss? "Ces caractères jaunis, ces brouillons effacés, ces lettres à demi froissées... Bien des lettres manquent, bien d'autres sont déchirées ou raturées".

It seems to me, then, probable that Nerval was going to put some at least of the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon' into 'Aurélia'. If this is so, we have established the probable order he left them in. Is this as haphazard as Gautier and Houssaye suggest? What of this remark from the passage of 'Aurélia' just quoted: Avec quelles délices j'ai pu classer dans mes tiroirs l'amas de mes notes et de mes correspondances intimes ou publiques"? This passage is surely autobiographical, since it occurs when he is describing how he arranged his furniture and belongings in his room at the "maison de santé" ("Je me suis plu ... à ranger tout cela", I, 409), which clearly refers to the installation of his things at Passy in October 1853 (see Letters 253, 255 and LIV). So we can be tolerably certain that he really did "classer dans mes tiroirs l'amas de mes notes et de mes correspondances" while, or just before, working on 'Aurélia'. Of course this may only

mean that he sorted the letters out from other mss and put them away in a drawer. But since he seems to be planning to use them, may it not mean that he actually classified the letters - put them into the order he had decided to publish them in? If this is the case, we have established what that order was: I, II, V, VI, VII, XI, IX, X, XII, II bis, XIV, XV, XVI, XIII, XVIII.

If one reads the manuscripts in this order, their sequence is, in fact, far more logical than that of the Chantilly order followed by P. Audiat and J. Poirier. By following it, one can trace the successive phases of an unhappy love-affair.

From I it appears that she had been kind to him (31-33)[1] but he has incurred her anger by making exaggerated claims on the strength of "mon anour si long et si éprouvé" (17-18); she has punished him by ordering him not to see her alone, and he is contrite, resolves to be humble. In II things have improved: he has had a letter, a cold, reasonable letter, but which gives him a faint hope; he promises to be good if she will only let him see her again. She evidently does, because in V he describes her as "non pas tout à fait indifférente peut-être, j'ai lieu de le croire aujourd'hui", and talks of "(le) bonheur que vous me promettez" - but he is still remote from her: "de vous si occupée de tant d'autres, si distraite, si affairée". However, gradually

1. My figures refer to the lines, which are numbered in the Pléiade edition.

he returns to favour - or at any rate, it would seem from VI that she has forgiven him sufficiently to write him a tormentingly coquettish letter: "J'ai lu votre lettre, cruelle que vous êtes! Elle est si douce et si (indulgente) que je ne puis que plaindre mon sort" - her letter is both cruel and sweet, then; one can deduce it from his:- she has suggested that if she gives herself to him he will later be jealous of her other lovers, and that it would therefore be better if they broke altogether - better for him. This can be deduced from: "Songez que vous m'avez mis dans une position telle, vis-à-vis de vous, que l'abandon me serait beaucoup plus affreux que ne le serait une infidelité quand je vous aurais obtenue. En effet, dans ce dernier cas, qu'aurais-je à dire? ... j'aurais cessé de plaire, voilà tout ... Mais songez au désespoir où me livrerait votre changement dans nos relations actuelles! Oh! mon Dieu! vous vous créez des craintes là où elles ne peuvent exister! Pour ce qui est de la jalousie, c'est un côté bien mort chez moi..." And further on: "Ne craignez donc pas de me voir". He wants the <u>status quo</u> to continue at all costs; anything is better than a complete break; she has driven him into a position where he is ready to accept any humiliation.

In the next two letters, VII and XI, her almost sadistic coquetry continues. In VII, he replies to a letter from her in which she has accused him of neglecting her, evidently affecting

not to believe he really loves her as much as he says, which stings him into a bitter retort. In letter XI he cries out: "Oh! comme vous connaissez bien votre pouvoir sur moi! Comme vous en usez et abusez sans pitié! ... Vous me parlez de fidélité sans récompense comme à un chevalier du moyen âge". What could be more blatant than this? When she feels the string going slack, she tugs (VII); when he is securely tethered, she expects everything in return for nothing.

However in IX, the next letter, things have advanced. For the first time the tone is slightly intimate: "ma pauvre amie". And she seems to have promised to be his at some unspecified date in the future. He has apparently angered her by making clumsy advances, having been unable to control his desire, which he now confesses for the first time. The letter is long, and turns entirely around this new situation; when, how, will she go to bed with him? he is willing to postpone the moment indefinitely and, although he is aware that "les femmes aiment qu'on les force un peu", gives elaborate reasons for not doing so (their love is <u>different</u> etc); she shall choose the right moment - his role will be quite passive.

In X, the more intimate footing continues; he addresses her as "oublieuse personne"; she has complained that he takes up too much of her time and, perhaps to underline this point, has missed a <u>rendezvous</u>.

In XII, the situation of IX is repeated. It would appear that she has again shrunk away from his embraces. He tries to shrug the humiliation aside: "Oh! nous sommes fiancés dans la vie et dans la mort! qu'importent les hommes et les indignes obligations de l'existence? ... Dans les concessions où votre amour m'entraîne, j'abdique volontiers ma fiérté d'homme et mes prétentions d'amant". The attempt at physical contact has again failed as a result of his awkwardness; again he falls back on the promise that she will be his one day, thus shelving the problem until some unspecified future date, hoping no doubt that time will miraculously make him a more expert lover, and yet dreading the moment when he will actually be put to the test. In the meanwhile he has been told he may regard himself "comme ayant tout obtenu de vous": he is her accepted lover if not her actual lover.

The next letter in this order is II bis. The first part of it (lines 1-33) is a variant of I and II, which have already occurred in our sequence; the sensible thing seems to be to do what Gautier and Houssaye did: leave out the first half and consider here only the second half. This is frankly arrogant. He is trying to convince her with an almost paranoiac earnestness of his own great merit and above all of his value as lover and

protector: "Je suis un homme honorable et digne en tout de votre préférence; je suis capable de vous faire respecter aux yeux de tous; je suis digne de votre confiance, et, désormais, tout mon sang est à vous, toute mon intelligence s'emploiera pour vous servir".

This appears to have angered her, for in the next letter of this sequence (XIV) he is abjectly apologetic about the extravagance of his boasting: "Oui, j'ai mérité d'être humilié par vous! oui, je dois payer encore de beaucoup de souffrances l'instant d'orgueil auquel j'ai cédé! ... Ah! c'était une risible ambition que celle-là! Me croire quelque chose près d'une femme de votre talent et de votre beauté! prétendre vous prêter l'appui de je ne sais quelle puissance dans le monde et vous parler comme un roi couronné... au nom de cette misérable autorité! Eussiez-vous réduit trop bas l'insignifiance de la proposition d'un protecteur, j'accepte vos dédains pour ma justice". Beneath the abject apology a residue of pride is still working ("Eussiez-vous..."). From the point of view of a logical <u>enchaînement</u>, this letter could hardly be better placed. - The start of the letter indicates that she has partly forgiven him: "quoi! vous n'êtes donc pas si irritée que je le craignais..."

Letter XV, the next in our series, is the most natural of all the 'Lettres à Jenny Colon", the nearest in tone to the spontaneity

of his other correspondance. Things are back to normal; they are too busy to see much of each other, and have not met for two days. This means presumably that their relationship normally involved daily meetings.

Letter XVI refers to another of her caprices, which he justifies by a somewhat tortuous dialectic.

But in XIII there has definitely been a rapprochement. "Je ne puis me remettre encore de l'étrange soirée que nous avons passée hier: que de bonheur et d'amertume ensemble dans ce souvenir! Je voudrais pouvoir m'écrier, comme Saint-Preux: 'Mon Dieu! vous m'avez donné une âme pour la souffrance; donnez-m'en une pour la joie!' Mais je suis aussi mécontent de moi-même que reconnaissant envers vous. Que vous écrirai-je à présent? Mon âme est bouleversée... Il y a comme un cercle de fer autour de mon front, je suis sans force et sans courage à la pensée même de ces heures; je vous demande un jour pour me reconnaître; car il me faut un jour au moins pour me reposer de ma nuit et que vous écrirai-je, d'ailleurs... Elle ressemble à la plupart des autres: j'ai marché longtemps pour apaiser mon ardeur que je ne puis apaiser que par la fatigue, mon inquiétude dont je ne puis sortir que par l'abrutissement. J'ai marché longtemps"[1]. He has not spent the night

1. The Sardou ms has: "que vous écrirai-je, d'ailleurs, de ma journée"; but the Chantilly version seems to refer to nocturnal walks.

with her (as a first reading might lead one to suppose), but only the evening; this is borne out by the other two versions, the sixth letter of 'Un Roman à faire' and the fifth of the Sardou publication. This looks to me remarkably like an account of the turbulent feelings of a man who has experienced some kind of fiasco (in the Stendhalian sense).

The reference to 'La Nouvelle Héloïse' is to the beginning of Letter V, Part I: "Puissances du ciel! j'avais une âme pour la douleur, donnez-m'en une pour la félicité".

This is Saint-Preux's reaction to learning that Julie loves him in return: clearly there has been a similar development in Nerval's relationship - not that she has said for the first time that she loves him, since he is already convinced of that (see letters XII - "Que vous m'aimiez plus qu'un autre, je ne puis en vouloir plus" - and IX - "Quelque espoir que vous ayez bien voulu me donner" etc); it is more likely that the comparison with Saint-Preux is inspired by a more definite offer on her part, by her being ready to abandon herself "en disant: C'est l'heure!" as he anticipated in IX. But his joy is not as straightforward as that of Saint-Preux: "Je voudrais pouvoir m'écrier, comme Saint-Preux..."; but he cannot. He is as grateful to her (for having offered herself), as he is annoyed with himself (for having failed to take advantage of the offer). He is totally discomfited, anguished, unable to think coherently; the memory of what happened torments him. He needs

time to let the turmoil in his mind settle. When he left her he walked in the night until he was exhausted, to relax the intolerable tension which his evening with her had aroused and failed to relieve.

Nevertheless, he is not totally humiliated. Perhaps there was no physical fiasco - perhaps he only failed to take advantage of a favourable moment. In the next letter (XVIII), the last of this series, the new phase in their relationship marked already by his reference to Saint-Preux, is strongly endorsed: "(mes) mauvais jours sont passés". This time she does at last seem to have become his mistress. Once again, though, his feelings are mixed. He is divided between exultation ("Je me réveille en sautant et en poussant des cris de joie!") and a sense of anti-climax.

And here the sequence of manuscripts in the order Nerval left them, comes to an end. We can say with P. Audiat: "tel quel, le roman est complet".

But is it a "roman vécu", or only a fragment of a "vie romancée"?

Unfortunately, we cannot be certain that this order reflects the actual course of the affaire. It may do: Nerval may have kept the manuscripts in the order in which the letters were written. If this is so, we can trace an increasing intimacy of tone leading - though not without setbacks - to some kind of sexual encounter to which he reacts with a mixture of violent excitement and intense anxiety which hardly look promising for the future of the relationship. But there is not sufficient evidence in support of the order I have

postulated for it to serve as a biographical document. The letters can be used to infer the nature of the relationship (and this I do in Chapter IV), but not as the basis of a chronological reconstruction.

It is more probable that this order represents, not the sequence of events of the affaire itself, but a rearrangement intended for subsequent literary use. According to M. Richer, Nerval was obsessed from about 1833-34 with the idea of an epistolary novel "dérivant, en somme, de La Nouvelle Héloïse" (Letter dated 26 November, 1960). The rearrangement may well have been made with this in mind[1]. Or again, it may have been made for the epistolary novel of which 'Le Roman tragique' is the only known fragment, and which presumably turned into the novel he was working on right at the end of his life, 'L'Illustre Brisacier'. It is probable that the Sardou manuscripts also represent a recopying of the originals with a view to publication. But if so, the project never got very far, and the Sardou order is no improvement on that of Chantilly[2].

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1. See 'Dolbreuse', which M. Richer says was conceived first as a play, then as a novel. "Le personnage le mieux dessiné dans ces notes était explicitement identifié à 'Rousseau l'auteur' et l'influence de La Nouvelle Héloïse y est très visible" ('Nerval et Sylvie').

2. See Appendix "C".

CHAPTER IV: APPENDIX "C"

THE SARDOU MANUSCRIPTS

J. Marsan does not believe that the Sardou mss represent real-life letters: for him, they are at least half-way to being "literature". According to the catalogue of the sale at which Marsan acquired the Sardou manuscripts in 1909, the eighteen letters are written on "15 feuillets in-8°; plusieurs minutes de lettres se trouvent sur un même feuillet."[1] In other words, the Sardou mss consisted of both drafts and fair copies, and this fact is borne out by the facsimile of letter VII. Because of this, M. Richer believes that the Sardou mss represent "un désordre comparable à celui des ms de Lovenjoul."[2] Nevertheless, it is difficult to get round the fact that Marsan, the last person who is known to have studied the Sardou mss, talks of them not in the plural but in the singular ("le manuscrit"), and suggests that they are not separate letters, but a sequence. Unless the mss reappear, the point can never finally be cleared up; but the evidence is that the Sardou mss probably represent a recopying of the originals, if not a rearrangement. This is the opinion of J. Poirier: "On peut supposer que le manuscrit Sardou est une copie et, partiellement, une refonte des autographes

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1. I, 1252; for Marsan's theory, see above, p. 386.
2. Letter dated 26 November, 1960.

de Chantilly, en un temps où Gérard, son aventure finie, songeait à utiliser sa correspondance ou, comme beaucoup d'écrivains à en conserver un double" (my italics; J. Poirier: "Un Etrange Amoureux", 100).

A study of the variants as between the Sardou and the Chantilly mss bears this out.

S II is almost exactly the same as Ch. VI[1]; S IV is almost exactly the same as Ch. XIV; where there are variants, it is impossible to decide which version came first, or which is better. Ch. I looks as though it might be a write-up of S XVII; but it is just possible that S XVII is a hasty transcription, a kind of shorthand version, of Ch. I ... Comparisons of other letters reveal a similar uncertainty: in S XIII "le mauvais temps pour aimer" is far less telling than "la mauvaise saison pour aimer" in Ch. XVII; the latter, on the other hand, has a slightly worse reading in line 9: "mon beau drame, si chaleureux et si bien", than S XIII, which has "si chaleureux et si bien conduit"; what is lost on the swings is gained on the roundabouts. There is the same kind of hesitation over S I as compared with Ch. II: S I has: "je suis bien forcé de me faire une bien grande illusion" which is inelegant compared with Ch. II: "ne m'ôtez pas l'illusion..."; but on the other hand S I's "des choses... qui me tenaient tellement au coeur qu'il

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1. S = Sardou, Ch. = Chantilly.

me semblait que j'en arrachais des fibres", is better than: "des choses qui me tenaient au coeur, qu'il me semblaient que j'en arrachais des fibres" in Ch. II. In the case of S X and Ch. IX, the S version seems slightly better on balance, but the Ch. version is preferable in one or two places.

All this is perfectly inconclusive. Nevertheless, there are some slight indications which suggest that the Sardou mss were copied from the Chantilly mss in certain cases at any rate.

S VI is a coherent version of the scrappy Ch. IV. S XVI omits the repetition in line 7 of Ch. VIII ("j'ai respecté vos ordres"), making a slightly better version. "Dompter" in line 15 of S V avoids the inelegant repetition of "apaiser" in Ch. XIII. S VIII is definitely more coherent than Ch. XV. The extra words in S XV (lines 19 and 22) clarify Ch. XVIII slightly.

Then there are signs that the Sardou version deliberately omits specific references which would make it possible to identify Nerval: thus the date of his medallion, given in Ch. X, is omitted in S. XIV. Then in Ch. XV there is "toi tes leçons, ton théâtre, tes occupations; moi mes journaux, mes théâtres et une foule encore de traces et d'ennuis"; this does not appear in S VIII; and Adolphe Dumas, named in Ch., becomes "***" in the Sardou version.

Then, in the Sardou version, a certain amount of bowdlerising seems to have taken place. S VII omits the "baisers doux et

brûlants" of Ch. XII; S V has "il me faut un jour au moins pour me reposer de mes émotions" instead of Ch. XIII's "de ma nuit"; the "une nuit, toute une nuit" of Ch. IV is omitted from S VI; the exultation of Ch. XVIII is slightly toned down by the omission of "sautant" in S XV.

Again, one can glimpse some faint attempts in the Sardou versions to attribute to the author of the letters a slightly less inglorious role than he appears from the Chantilly mss to have played. Ch. XII has: "Dans les concessions où votre amour m'entraîne, j'abdique volontiers ma fierté d'homme et mes prétentions d'amant"; this has disappeared from S VII; Ch. XVIII, has: "j'ai manqué de confiance en vous et en moi-même", which becomes in S XV: "j'ai manqué de confiance en vous" (nothing about himself).

Finally, S XI seems to have been developed from Ch. VII. Ch. VII is a pencil draft, very hard to read, obviously "du premier jet". We are lucky to have the facsimile of the Sardou version of this, which shows what looks like an expansion of Ch. VII, first in draft with many crossings-out, then in a fair hand. Now, since the rapid Ch. pencil version can hardly have come after the Sardou version, which is the finished letter, it follows that the Sardou manuscript must have come after the Chantilly manuscript.

But does recopying mean rearrangement? In other words is the Sardou order significant, or haphazard? The attempts to eliminate

identifiable details, the slight bowdlerisation, the attribution to the author of a rather less inglorious role in the Sardou mss than in the Chantilly mss - all this seems to indicate that Nerval was thinking of an eventual publication when he did the recopying. Yet one is bound to concede that he did not get very far in turning the mss into a publishable and coherent whole. Sardou XVII represents not an improvement, not a writing-up, of Chantilly I, but a hasty transcription in which he has not even bothered to be coherent, but just jotted down scraps which convey the essential ideas (towards the end). Sardou XI for some reason incorporates Sardou III. On the other hand, Sardou VI is definitely a tidied-up version of Chantilly IV. Surely, the conclusion is that we must accept the judicious remark of J. Poirier "le ms Sardou est une copie et, partiellement, une refonte des autographes de Chantilly".

The Sardou mss in other words certainly do not represent a thorough re-working of the Chantilly mss; they are a transcription, sometimes hasty to the point of producing an inferior version, in one or two cases only an improvement. This means, I think, that we should not waste time considering the Sardou order in detail. Not that it will not "work" - a coherent story can be made out of it, with a little readjustment: but the Sardou version seems to hover inconclusively between the original, real-life experience, and a literary exploitation of it.

CHAPTER VII: APPENDIX "A"

'AURELIA' (1841) AND THE 1840 PREFACE TO 'FAUST'

THE COMPOSITION OF 'AURELIA'

Nerval himself indicates that the first eight chapters of 'Aurélia' are based on notes taken at the time of his first attack (I, 363). J. Richer has most usefully collated the mss which clearly correspond to these notes ('Expérience et création, chapter xiii), giving a kind of 'Ur-Aurélia' free from the considerable literary distortion of the final version. The notes present a succession of partly disconnected happenings and lack the factitious unity of the final version, which imposes the meaningful pattern of an accomplished destiny. Since they correspond closely to the events of Nerval's life as they can be traced in his correspondence, and since there is a certain amount of circumstantial detail (names, places) which was expunged from the final version, we may take them to be substantially true. They constitute raw material which Nerval, anxious that his over-publicised attack should be forgotten, kept for twelve years before fashioning it for publication (cf 'La Pandora').

In particular, the 1841 dating of the notes is confirmed - and this reinforces M. Richer's case - by the fact that they were clearly written while Jenny Colon was still alive, and Nerval's meeting with her in Brussels is given much fuller treatment than in the final version. In the final version primary importance is given

to her death, which is antedated.

However this does not mean that the notes collated by M. Richer constitute the whole body of the 1841 mss. It is clear that several sheets are missing. M. Richer suggests that these provided material for chapters i and xiii of 'Sylvie', postulating a "récit autobiographique qui devait donner naissance successivement à 'Sylvie', à 'La Pandora' et à 'Aurélia'". But if the missing pages had related the earlier stages of his affaire with the actress, as M. Richer would have us believe, then the first of the existing pages would not refer, as it does, to "une charmante cantatrice que j'avais connue à Paris" (my italics). This page reads, not like the continuation of an autobiographical narrative, but like the beginning of an autonomous work concerned exclusively with his insanity, which he dates here from 1840.

The correlation of the mss to the published text of 'Aurélia' is as follows:

pagination of 'Expérience et création'	chapter and pagination of 'Aurélia' Part I
421-423	ii & iii 365-368
425-426	iii 369 (?)
426-428	iii, iv, v 369-376
429-430	vii 378-379
431-433	vii 379
433	viii 383 (?)

Thus, although certain passages of the mss were excluded from

the final version, and although there are long passages of the final version for which no mss exist, we may be reasonably certain that chapters i-vii of 'Aurélia' Part I are all based on mss written in 1841, some of which are now lost.

This is confirmed when we notice that certain details of the final version which are not in the mss correspond so closely to the ideas of the 1840 preface to 'Faust' that we can be sure they were noted at the same period:

'Faust' (Gibert)	'Aurélia'
"Il doit exister dans l'immensité des régions ou des planètes où (les) âmes conservent une forme perceptible aux regards des autres âmes et de celles mêmes qui ne se dégagent des liens terrestres que pour un instant, par le rêve, par le magnétisme ou par la contemplation ascétique" (18)	"Dans cette étoile sont ceux qui m'attendent ... je quittais mes habits terrestres ... je restai les bras étendus, attendant le moment où l'âme allait se séparer du corps, attiré magnétiquement dans le rayon de l'étoile" (367-68) (NB: in the ms Nerval specifies that the star was the planet Saturn)
"les siècles écoulés se conservent tout entiers à l'état d'intelligences et d'ombres ... l'éternité conserve dans son sein une sorte d'histoire universelle, visible par les yeux de l'âme, syncronisme divin..." (15)	"L'oiseau me parlait de personnes de ma famille vivantes ou mortes en divers temps, comme si elles existaient simultanément" (370)
"Hélène ... va franchir les temps avec la rapidité du rêve ... l'horloge éternelle, retardée par un doigt invisible, et fixée de nouveau à un certain jour passé depuis longtemps, va se détraquér, comme un mouvement dont la chaîne est brisé, et marquer ensuite peut-être un siècle pour chaque heure" (21)	"mes facultés d'attention s'étaient multipliées sans se confondre, par un phénomène d'espace analogue à celui du temps qui concentre un siècle d'action dans une minute de rêve" (372)

Furthermore, there is clearly a correspondance between the opening chapters of 'Aurélia' and Nerval's letter to the head of the Beaux-arts

department of the Ministry of the Interior, dated 31 March, 1841, which describes a grandiose project of tracing the origins of the primaeval human family now dispersed by successive migrations and the accidents of history.

In the final version (1853-54) the 'Ur-Aurélia' of 1841 is re-shaped to fit subsequent events and to reflect current preoccupations[1]. In the 1841 version there is a suggestion that Nerval hoped to renew his relationship with Jenny Colon by securing "une mission qui me mettrait plus en lumière à mon retour dans les Flandres"[2] ('Expérience', 422). When, in the initial stages of his madness, he encounters the young woman with hollow eyes, he concludes simply: "C'est la Mort", associating her with the idea of his own death and also (though not explicitly) with the figure of his dead mother. But the final version is written in the knowledge that Jenny ("Aurélia") was to die less than two years after the events described: the hollow-eyed woman now "semblait avoir les traits d'Aurélia" and this is interpreted with hindsight: "C'est <u>sa mort</u>[3] ou la mienne qui m'est annoncée!" (I, 365). The role of the lady to whom he confides his

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1. See J. Richer, 'Notes sur <u>Aurélia</u>, 'Cahiers du Sud', No. 292, 1948, especially 433f and 440.

2. His work on the Belgian counterfeiting of French books and the negotiation of a possible agreement, for which he tried to obtain official backing (see Letters 72, 73, 74, 77 - especially the penultimate paragraph - and 85; also an article attributed to Nerval, O.C. I, 187-202).

3. Nerval's italics.

"ancienne passion parisienne" is also reinterpreted in accordance with the unified conception which the Nerval of 1853 imposes on his visionary experience.

Thus the final version of 'Aurélia' presents the later attacks of madness as a series continuing the first. This involves the telescoping of separate episodes: the events described in Part One, chapter ix took place in September, 1851[1], yet a few pages later he refers to the death of his father's servant, Gabrielle, which occurred soon before October, 1853[2], while the opening paragraph of Part Two, chapter V is obviously a reminiscence of the nocturnal adventures described in 'Les Nuits d'octobre', which was published in October and November, 1852. The same paragraph mentions the quarrel with a stranger ("à qui je donnai un rude soufflet") which is recalled in Letter 311 and which presumably also took place in 1853[3]. Finally, Part II, chapter vi refers to Nerval's installation at the clinic (7 - 8 October, 1853[4]).

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1. Compare Letters 179, 179 bis.
2. See Letter LIII, and cf I, 396 with Letters 254-257.
3. See Letter 311, Note 8.
4. See Letters LIII, 253-254, LIV.

CHAPTER VII: APPENDIX "B"

THE STROLLING PLAYERS

In the situation of the hero who joins a troupe of strolling players, Nerval appears to have seen a unique opportunity to act out fantasy, to shape one's own destiny at least in make-believe. I think this largely accounts for the importance of this theme in his work[1].

It dates back at least to 'Le Prince des Sots', conceived in the early 1830's, and is fed principally by Scarron's 'Roman comique' and Goethe's 'Wilhelm Meister'. Maître Gonin, leader of the "Enfants sans souci", changes his character like a chameleon to suit the parts he plays: "la mobile physionomie de ce personnage changeait subitement, selon les idées qui lui traversaient l'esprit et le rôle qu'il voulait jouer; vrai caméléon, comique ou tragique" (O.C.VI,4). For him life is a spectacle ("cette longue farce du siècle qui un jour s'appellera de l'histoire", 214), whilst "les oripeaux du théâtre sont aussi plus réels (sic) que l'hermine" (234). One of his master-strokes is to overpower Louis d'Orléans in his own pleasure-castle by making the play he is performing suddenly overflow into real life. In the role of Satan he threatens first

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1. Cf J. Richer: "le personnage de la comédienne ou de la chanteuse ... a joué un rôle important comme médiatrice entre le monde 'réel' et le 'surréel' ou univers des essences, surtout si, comme nous le croyons, cet univers était par lui conçu sur le modèle de celui des types de théâtre" (author's italics - 'Expérience et création', 214).

some of the damned who have escaped from hell and taken refuge in the audience, and then the audience themselves; gradually the general laughter gives way to a shiver of fear, and Maître Gonin's minions take advantage of the general dread caused by Satan's all-too-real appearance to tie up the duke and his servants. A few pages later, Nerval makes this comment about his hero: "De nos jours, un grand acteur, comme Talma le tragique, comme Frédéric Lemaître le dramaturge, nous impressionnent au point de faire vrai un personnage de Corneille ou de Racine, de Victor Hugo ou d'Alexandre Dumas, et durant deux heures ces grands artistes nous font vivre de la vie du héros, de Rome antique ou de notre moyen âge!... Il en fut ainsi du Prince des Sots: satanisé, il transporta pour vingt minutes son public en enfer!"[1]. Already it is more than the freedom and camaraderie (see for example 189) enjoyed by the strolling troupe that attracts Nerval: it is the possibility of interchange between dramatic illusion and reality.

In 1835, as editor of 'Le Monde dramatique', he promises his readers: "nous nous ferons les spectateurs errants des troupes errantes, nous les accompagnerons comme Wilhelm Meister pour l'amour de la comédie, ou comme Ragotin pour l'amour d'une comédienne", adding that all the fun has gone out of it these days, when the

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1. OC. VI, 130 & 134.

actors travel by "chaise de poste ou dans leur coupé" and think of nothing but their contracts and their takings. "Nos acteurs regarderaient en pitié la troupe nomade qui descend de son lourd chariot pour jouer la tragédie dans le drame d'Hamlet[1]; et pourtant, s'en trouverait-il beaucoup de ceux-là à qui le prince Hamlet voudrait bien dire après les avoir entendus: 'Soyez les bienvenus, Messieurs, à Elseneur!'"[2]. The old troupes were carefree and happy; something of their spirit, as well as their talent, has been lost in modern times. In the same article Nerval declares that the spectacle of the private lives of the actors, the play that is enacted behind the curtain, would be of even greater interest to the audience than the play itself. - Both this idea, and the notion that modern troupes have lost the carefree spirit of the old days, will play their part in 'Le Roman tragique', with, of course, the idea of joining a troupe for love.

And does not 'La Forêt noire' also belong to this train of the imagination? Here Brisacier, who will later be the hero of 'Le Roman tragique', meets a troupe of (apparently) strolling

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1. He mixes in a detail from 'Le Roman comique': the "lourd chariot".

2. O.C. I, 127-28. One can accept M. Richer's view that this text, like the one preceding it, is "très probablement de Gérard".

entertainers, who are described as "bohémiens"[1]. They are really members of his family from whom he had been separated as a baby, and later they enact before his very eyes the circumstances of the separation. In this case the "bohémiens" are identified with the lost family[2].

The important date of course is 1844, and it is to the Summer of that year that an article of 1848 presumably refers when it says: "Il y a quatre ans, des comédiens ambulants arrivèrent dans un village de l'Orne, où je passais l'été avec une dizaine d'amis"[3]. They made friends with the actors, and were much diverted by them, but the day before the play was due to be performed the company was cast into mourning by the death of a child, and it seemed that the performance would have to be postponed, in spite of the insistence of a hard-hearted manager who did not want to lose his takings. But the spectacle is announced and the curtain rises... "et qui vois-je paraître en scène?... Tous nos commensaux du château de B..., qui avaient pris la place et les costumes des ambulants en deuil!"

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1. In an article of 1848 which I shall come to in a moment, we read of "... comédiens ambulants, ces bohémiens de la société moderne" (O.C. I, 252; my italics).

2. Cf a curious passage on the strong-woman of one of the "théâtres du boulevard" (O.C. VIII, 70).

3. 'Les Comédiens ambulants', article signed C. de Chatouville, December, 1848. We cannot be certain that this is by Nerval, but it is extremely likely. (O.C. I, 25).

In 1844, in an article on 'Les Acteurs anglais'[1], Nerval wrote: "On sait ... quel charmant épisode il ('Hamlet') fournit à Goethe dans Wilhelm Meister. Qui n'a fait aussi, parmi nous, ce rêve du jeune Allemand enthousiaste? traduire à son gré, c'est à dire avec quelque chose de soi-même, de sa rêverie et de son coeur, ce chef d'oeuvre de la muse romantique du Nord; avoir autour de soi pour apprendre les vers, pour les réciter, pour s'empreindre de l'esprit de chaque personnage, une troupe choisie d'aimables bohémiens... Qui jamais a eu l'idée de réaliser, parmi nous, le chapitre de Wilhelm Meister?" (O.C. I, 222). Here Nerval expresses plainly for the first time what has been tacit in the works enumerated: the idea of joining a wandering troupe and acting out "quelque chose de soi-même, de sa rêverie et de son coeur" through the medium of the plays performed. This article appeared a few months after 'Le Roman tragique', and the passage quoted reads like a rationalisation of what Brisacier does instinctively[2].

What has crystallised this particular set of fancies is perhaps the person of Wilhelm Meister in Goethe's novel. Not that Wilhelm tries to act out his feelings for Aurelia through the character of Hamlet: his relationship with the embittered, slightly crazy actress is no more than a serious friendship. If Nerval applied

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1. 'L'Artiste, 22 December, 1844. This one is signed Gérard de Nerval.

2. Two years later, in an article on a performance of 'Hamlet' (translated by A. Dumas and P. Meurice) at Saint-Germain, Nerval wrote: "ce que Goethe a rêvé, Alexandre Dumas le réalise" (O.C. II, 694).

this name to his actress in 'Sylvie' and here, it was more on account of the heroine of 'Die Elixiere des Teufels', the pure, predestined lover who becomes a nun and is united with the hero after death, than of Goethe's moody actress. He took from Goethe only the circumstance of Aurelia being an actress in a travelling company. And Aurelia does take the part of Ophelia, which she feels with special intensity because she has herself been jilted (though not by Wilhelm). As for Wilhelm, his own destiny does seem to some extent to be at stake on the first night of 'Hamlet', in that the part of the ghost is taken by a mysterious stranger who later turns out to have been exerting a certain influence on his life. The appearance of the ghost fills him with such spontaneous dread that he speaks the lines "Angels and Ministers of grace defend us...", "in a manner so confused, so broken, so constrained, that the highest art could not have hit the mark so well"[1]. When the ghost says: "I am thy father's spirit", Wilhelm shudders back, for he thinks he has recognised the voice of his own father, who has died some time earlier. Thus, although the play is not used as a medium through which to enact the hero's feelings about the leading actress, as in 'Le Roman tragique', both hero and heroine in 'Hamlet' are deeply implicated in the play through the circumstances of their lives, though in their own

1. 'Wilhelm Meister', vol. I, 276.

separate ways. On an earlier occasion, though, Wilhelm has identified himself in quite a detailed way with another Shakespearean character, Prince Hal: "His friend Shakespeare, whom with the greatest joy he acknowledged as his godfather, and rejoiced the more that his name was Wilhelm, had introduced him to a prince, who frolicked for a time among mean, nay vicious companions, and who, notwithstanding his nobleness of nature, found pleasure in the rudeness, indecency and coarse intemperance of these altogether sensual knaves. This ideal likeness, which he figured as the type and the excuse for his own actual condition, was most welcome to our friend; and the process of self-deception, to which already he displayed an almost invincible tendency, was thereby very much facilitated ... Our friend, who, by his openhandedness, had acquired the right of treating his companions somewhat in Prince Harry's manner, ere long fell into the humour of himself contriving a few wild tricks, and presiding in the execution of them"[1]. In the glamourous hero of a play he finds a parallel with himself which justifies his present conduct in following the wandering company when he ought to be attending to affairs more fitting to his station in life. He even allows mimesis to change his character: the "wild tricks" are not the work of earnest Wilhelm but of Falstaff's Royal drinking-companion. Even his dress is

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1. 'Wilhelm Meister', vol. I, 181.

appropriate to the personality he has assumed: it is dashing, not to say theatrical; "and (he) got a few stripes of muslin sewed upon his shirt; making the pieces of considerable breadth, so that they presented the complete appearance of an ancient ruff" (181). - Although this confusion of life and literature is not the main point of Wilhelm's period as a strolling player (he does not live Hamlet so much as live with 'Hamlet' in order to study the play from the point of view of interpretation and production), one can see that there is enough to crystallise Nerval's fascination with the idea of the strolling troupe as a medium for enacting one's private fantasies.

All this culminates in 'Le Roman tragique', but the preoccupation continues after 1844. In 'Isis' (1845) Nerval describes a celebration arranged at Pompeii in which large numbers of people were enrolled to bring the past to life by dressing in ancient costume and acting the part of the original citizens of the town. The culminating ceremony was a service in the temple of Isis, and Nerval will remember this in 'Octavie' when he describes how he himself played the part of Osiris to the heroine's Isis, whilst explaining to her the details of the cult. Then in the same year, in a passage about the way Cazotte came to believe in his own fancies: "Ce fut, il est vrai, le malheur et la gloire des plus grands auteurs de cette époque; ils écrivaient avec leur sang, avec leurs larmes; ils trahissaient sans pitié au profit d'un public vulgaire, les

mystères de leur esprit et de leur coeur; ils jouaient leur rôle au sérieux, comme ces comédiens antiques qui tachaient la scène d'un sang véritable pour les plaisirs du peuple-roi" (II, 1135). In 1850, Nerval notes that Restif put on scenes representing his actual life (II, 1047f). In 'Sylvie', the autobiographical hero goes on tour with the actress in the capacity of "seigneur poète", but loses her to the "jeune premier ridé", whose prosaic love she prefers to the hero's attempts to annexe her to his dream-life. Finally, in 'Promenades et Souvenirs', he comes upon a family of itinerant entertainers who remind him of the troupe in 'Wilhelm Meister', and for a brief moment, he fancies that he might join them.

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