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VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM: METAPHYSICAL CONSTRUCTS AND
SYMBOLIC MODES

City University of New York

PH.D.

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VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM:
METAPHYSICAL CONSTRUCTS AND SYMBOLIC MODES

by

EMILIE N. COLAHAN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in French in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of French, The City
University of New York.

1980

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APPROVAL PAGE

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in French in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of French.

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PREFACE

It is significant that Edmund Wilson in his study of the Symbolist Movement in Axël's Castle views the hero of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's play, Axël, as the symbol of his era. Reality, with its relativities and imperfections becomes meaningless for Axël who views life from an absolute perspective. For Wilson, Axël is the incarnation of the symbolist hero living in the ivory tower of his personal vision. The underlying premise of Villiers' special vision was that beyond the visible manifestation of the ordinary, real world was a hidden, ideal world from which the visible drew its significance. Just as the romantic writers before him, Villiers would express his stirring for the infinite in symbolic terms based on occult and mystic thought.

It is not surprising that Villiers had turned to occult and mystic themes to express his disillusionment with the world in which he lived. The desire to go beyond or, in Baudelaire's words, to go "N'importe où hors du monde," echoing Poe's "Anywhere out of the World," seemed a natural outcome of the romantic "mal du siècle." For Villiers, the beyond or "l'au-delà" was the highest expression of man's spiritual imagination. To assert that beyond reality there exists a higher reality which remains forever hidden from us, forces us to confront a fundamental aspect of the human experience: our sense of separation from the ideal world and, more specifically,

from the divine. Villiers' idealism has its roots in the mystic and occult tradition as it reappeared in the nineteenth century. It is our purpose to examine Villiers' illusionary constructs of the ideal and the symbolic modes in which they were expressed in the light of those traditions from which they drew their principal source of inspiration.

The terms mysticism and occultism have been defined in a myriad of ways. Some have tried to explain two diametrically opposed dialectics, while others have found rational explanations for the similarities which are found in both psychological phenomena. To complicate matters, many of the poets of the presymbolist and symbolist movements in France have been explained in the light of either mystic or occultist terms.

According to Thomas A. Williams: "The first condition of mystical insight is the presence of a deep spiritual sense of the mystery of being, of the isolation of consciousness surrounded by the void, of light by darkness, of multiplicity by unity, of time by eternity . . ." ¹ In the light of such a definition Villiers de l'Isle-Adam may be considered a 'mystic'. For being acutely aware of his own estrangement in the world, Villiers tried to reveal the mystery of all creation in his poetic vision, as well as understand the meaning of what is hidden or 'occult' in the universe. Villiers' interest in the occult, especially in the thaumaturge, Eliphas Lévi, raises the question of the use of the term mystic. As we shall see, however, both terms are equally applicable to the visionary stance of the Orphic poets of the romantic and symbolist movements

in France during the nineteenth century. As John Senior points out, "Mysticism is the form occultism took in Christendom as yoga is the form it took in India."²

Basing his understanding of mysticism on W.T. Stace's Mysticism and Philosophy, Williams tries to show that even atheism is not incompatible with mysticism and interprets Mallarmé's "explication orphique de la terre" in this light. It is important, in the case of Villiers as well, not to confuse the terms mysticism and religion. In addition, the confusion between occultism and science or occult science must not be taken to mean modern science. In the words of Senior, "occultism . . . is profoundly anti-scientific, since it refuses to accept what A.A. Burtt calls the basic metaphysical assumption of modern science -- that positive knowledge must be quantitative."³ What both occultism and mysticism have in common with religion is a world view or a cosmology. What William James said about religion is also true of Villiers' spiritual idealism:

1. That the visible world is a part of a more spiritual universe from which it draws its chief significance;
2. That union or harmonious relation with that higher universe is our true end.⁴

Villiers' Catholic background, his Hegelian, as well as occultist leanings do not seem mutually incompatible in his search for cosmological meaning. Nevertheless, the nature of Villiers' spiritual concerns has been the cause of much consternation among his

more devout friends like Léon Bloy,⁵ and even among those critics who have studied his life and works, such as Henri Chapoutot and Pontavice de Heussey, his cousin. Villiers was "un catholique bouillant, un royaliste fougueux, et l'influence des bons pères fut telle que, jusqu'à sa mort, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam servit Dieu et le roi!"⁶

On the other hand, Villiers' philosophical interest in Hegel, his irreverent humor, his iconoclastic satires, and his interest in the occult raise the question of his true religious feelings. According to Raitt, "Seul parmi ces quatre précurseurs (Hugo, Balzac, Nerval and Baudelaire), Villiers nourrit toujours une prédilection marquée et même assez avertie pour les diverses formes de l'occultisme et fit son possible pour y attirer les autres."⁷

The philosophical doctrines of Hegel espoused by Villiers did not always agree with the implications of occult thought which he discovered at about the same time around 1860. "Qu'ils se détruisissent mutuellement, il n'en avait cure, pourvu que, pris séparément, ils le confirmassent dans son parti-pris pour l'idéalisme."⁸

For Villiers, his poetic idealism was identical with philosophy. Both poetry and philosophy furnished a revelation of the poet's inner self, a sort of microcosm in its entirety. In spite of the paradoxical nature of Villiers' religious beliefs and his philosophical preoccupations, he exhibits a sincere desire to understand his own creative visions and to defend the authenticity of illusion and of the fictional process on philosophical grounds.

Villiers, au fond, est chrétien, regarde l'oeuvre d'Hegel comme une explication incomplète de l'Évangile, et veut, comme je le pensais, faire d'Isis une oeuvre métaphysique et poétique. Quand je lui ai fait observer qu'un mélange indécis de philosophie et d'art risquait de mécontenter à la fois les philosophes et les artistes, il m'a répondu aussitôt par ce charmant sophisme, que la poésie et la philosophie étaient la même chose pour lui.⁹

The confusion of art and philosophy previously spread by the German aestheticians, reappears now, in quite a different form --that of the poet seer or the philosopher-poet. Literature had ceased to be a diversion for the struggling writers during the second half of the nineteenth century. For Villiers and Mallarmé it was sacerdotal. They were the poet priests who would create the "le Grand Oeuvre," also expressed by Mallarmé as providing, "l'explication orphique de la terre."

The decay of romanticism and German idealism was symptomatic of a profound transformation going on in European society as a whole and especially in France. How were beauty and ideals to survive under the pressure of reality, of mankind estranged from art and beauty by intolerable social conditions or by the avaricious pursuit of wealth at the expense of morality?

We shall see that, in his attempt to find meaning in his experience, it became more difficult to resolve the problems of self and of society for Villiers. His ideals and literary creation permitted him to go beyond the anguish of his temporal entrapment. His visionary literature thus permitted him to escape history and society.

FOOTNOTES TO PREFACE

- 1 Thomas A. Williams, Mallarmé and the Language of Mysticism (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1970), p. 1.
- 2 John Senior, The Way Down and Out: The Occult in Symbolist Literature (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1959), p. xviii.
- 3 Ibid., p. xvii.
- 4 William James, "Varieties of Religious Experience," quoted in Varieties of Experience, ed. Albert William Levi, (N.Y.: Ronald Press, 1957), p. 483.
- 5 See Léon Bloy, La Résurrection de Villiers (Paris: Bernouard, 1947).
- 6 Henri Chapoutot, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam (Paris: Delesalle, 1908), p. VII.
- 7 R.W. Raitt, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam et le mouvement symboliste, (Paris: José Corti, 1965), p. 187.
- 8 Ibid., p. 189.
- 9 Letter from Eugène Lefébure to Stéphane Mallarmé dated November 2, 1865 in Correspondance générale de Villiers, ed. Joseph Ballery, 2 vols. (Paris: Mercure de France, 1962), 1:80.

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CHAPTER I

VILLIERS AND THE ROMANTIC IDEAL

Villiers de l'Isle-Adam was the Wunderkind of the Paris literati during the second half of the nineteenth century. Members of the Parnassian as well as the later Symbolist schools were to view him as Mallarmé did: "Un génie: nous le comprîmes tel."¹ His mere physical presence was enough to make the myths surrounding his life and his name grow to spectacular proportions. For many he became the incarnation of a Hamlet figure, an estranged prince, haunted by dreams and burdened by reality. In fact, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, son of a poor family with noble ancestors, inherited only their princely pride and his father's dreams of past glory and riches.

Fortunately, in the beginning, the financial fiascoes which were incurred by his father, the Marquis Joseph Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Knight of the Order of Malta "de la Langue de France," did not affect his family thanks to the generosity of Villiers' maternal great aunt who supported them. Searching for buried treasure, family jewels, noble titles and sunken ships, as well as going on digs and excavations cost the Marquis more than he ever found. His wife, Marie Françoise le Nepveu de Carfort, finally received a legal separation of wealth from her husband in 1843 and devoted herself completely to her child. For his mother and his aunt Kérinou, Villiers showed signs of being an exceptional child. The love and

devotion that his mother had shown would always be remembered. Life in his home town of Saint-Brieuc and the idyllic towns of Brittany, where he spent a happy childhood, would be a nostalgic reminder of a paradise that was too quickly lost.

Villiers switched schools several times. Dismissed from Saint-Brieuc and transferred to the Lycée Laval for writing a story rather than doing his class work,² Villiers soon became a dreamer and a loner. Nevertheless, he managed to receive academic prizes at the Ecole Saint-Vincent, where he studied music, voice, Latin, Greek, writing and religion. Stendhal, Gautier, as well as Hugo and the romantic poets became his favorite authors.

Paris of the Second Empire was the center of all literary life. The young aspiring poet made several trips to the capital between 1855 and 1857. At the age of 18, young Mathias, as his family called him, arrived in Paris looking like a dandy in his Sunday best with long blond curls falling around his face. The reception that Villiers received in the literary magazine offices was not as enthusiastic as his reception among the Parnassian poets, who themselves were the butt of many jokes. Undaunted, Villiers appeared "enveloppé de magnifiques fourrures, les poches bourrées de manuscrits et de parchemins."³ It is difficult to say which manuscripts he had, but they were probably the poems which appeared at Tinterlin in 1859, "Deux Essais de poésie" or Les Premières Poésies, which appeared in Lyon in December, 1859. Les Premières Poésies include eight lyrical short poems grouped under the title, "Fantaisies Nocturnes," which

as their titles indicate, ("Barcarolle," "Chanson Arabe," "Une Bouteille de Vin d'Espagne," "Exil," "Prière Indienne," "Guitare," "Chanson," and "Zaïra,") capture many of the oriental and exotic themes of Hugo's Les Orientales. "Hermosa," a long narrative poem about Don Juan, and "Les Préludes," a group of lamentations on nature, love and life, follow the "Fantaisies." Les Premières Poésies end with "Chant du Calvaire," another long poem mixing choral incantations and dramatic dialogue. These early poems prefigure in form and religious concerns Villiers' future dramatic works Elën and Axël.

Villiers' early poetry echoes the Romantics, principally Vigny, Musset, Lamartine and Hugo. Villiers will discover and imitate the neo-Platonic themes and images evoked by the Romantics in their poetry: the search for the Absolute, the nostalgia and frustration of being separated from an ideal which survives only in memory and in the poet's dreams. Villiers will share the Romantic view of the poet's suffering, as a privileged mode of awareness, an ideal mode of being before man's fall into matter. Theological overtones of the theme of the poet's exile or separation from the divine will characterize Villiers' search for the ideal in his early poems in which he writes, "J'ai soif d'un paradis dont je suis exilé."⁴ The young Villiers will identify with the poets who were misunderstood by the world and who saw in their exile from God and from society a justification for their retreat to a world of their own creation.

Hugo, in particular, incarnated and imbued the exiled poet with

the attributes of a modern messiah with a mission was to redeem lost humanity. As early as 1855 Villiers dreamed of attaining glory by dethroning the reigning poet. In a letter to Lemerrier de Neuville he says: "Croyez-moi, quand Victor Hugo ronflera pour toujours dans son suaire de gloire et d'immortalité...je suis sûr que je monterai jusqu'au trône de la pensée où il s'est assis."⁵

In his early poetry, written at the age of 18, Villiers appears to have personally related to the metaphysical melancholy which characterized Lamartine's themes of ideal love, Hugo's lyric agony on death, and Musset's meditations on death and poetry. For Villiers, the death of a young girl who died at the age of seventeen was a shattering blow to the poet who had loved her. In "De Profundis Clamavi," Villiers rebukes the severity of God who permitted her to die.

Qu'avait-elle donc pour mourir la première?
Est-ce un crime de vivre? et l'amour, sur la terre,
N'est-il pas le pardon de Dieu?⁶

His first poetic expression reveals the injustice of having had a glimpse of love that death was quick to take away. Despite many common place images and rhythms borrowed from the Romantics with unequal success, a sincere and touching sense of loss resounds over the intellectualized, metaphysical preoccupations and contempt which otherwise characterize many of these early poems. In "Lasciate ogni speranza . . ." Villiers bids a sad farewell to his love, "Adieu, toi que ma voix ne réveillera plus."⁷

Les Premières Poésies merit consideration for several reasons. Many of the themes and images in these early poems reveal the preponderance of metaphysical concerns that Villiers will develop in his later works. It is precisely the Romantics' obsession with their metaphysical alienation from God with which the young Villiers will identify. Significantly, the neo-Platonism of the Romantics, who viewed the world as an inferior reflection of the absolute, ideal world, will provide the embryonic vision for Villiers' future interest in the occult. From the very beginning, Villiers will view the world in terms of man's primordial fall from God. In the poem to his friend, Amédée Le Ménant, Villiers asks if being born is a crime or a maladiction. For Villiers God is not manifest in the creation. He is silent in the face of man's misery and is referred to in "Découragement" as "le Créateur inconnu." As in Hugo's poetry, destiny is characterized by mystery and darkness. Humanity gropes in the dark of night because it has lost its "spiritual light." The theme of exile which will characterize Villiers' own personal myth and that of his idealistic heroes is the subject of the poem, "Exil," in which Villiers depicts humanity as fallen angels. He looks with contempt upon reality with its false sense of progress. "Ici l'on est maudit. . . Ici l'on n'aime plus."

Les Premières Poésies were dedicated to Alfred de Vigny and many of the images of modern life echo Vigny's sentiments. Villiers' condemnation of reality and its immoral pursuit of progress at all

costs are already evident in "Chant du Calvaire" in which he ironically retorts: "L'or ne sonne-t-il pas tous ses glas triomphants?" In his later writings, Villiers will characterize the spiritually void inhabitants of the modern world as "les passants." Here they are referred to as "les faux-vivants." Villiers' contempt for the so-called "grands savants" who crucify Christ foreshadows the character of Tribulat Bonhomet, "le vivisecteur de l'idéal." In "Chant du Calvaire," Villiers will describe their evil in much the same way he will later characterize Bonhomet.

Ils ont disséqué Dieu, les funèbres Vieillards!
 Et, comptant et sondant et recomptant ses plaies,
 Leurs scalpels avilis ne sont que des poignards!⁸

Many of these poems reveal the influence of Hugo's images of a mysterious and enigmatic universe. In "Chant du Calvaire," God, as in Hugo's poetry, is hidden but is represented in terms of light.

Mais, tout est resté calme dans le ciel.
 Nulle voix n'a parlé. Lorsque dans les tempêtes,
 Ou dans les jours heureux, nous inclinons nos têtes
 En disant: "Créateur des lumières muettes
 Où donc es-tu, Seigneur, qui te caches ainsi?"
 Ni les mers, ni les fleurs, ni l'aurore profonde,
 Ni l'astre dans les cieux, ni la vierge en ce monde,
 Ni la croix des tombeaux, rien ne répond: "Ici!"⁹

The silence of "Le Mont des Oliviers" by Vigny also echoes in Villiers' poem. Even though God is silent, the cross remains as a guiding light. The Bacchants immersed in the orgy of life are oblivious to the suffering of the Son of Man at Calvary, for the divine

light is invisible to those filled with darkness. Through pain and doubt, there remains only hope. One cannot help but hear a personal note when the poet asks Madeleine who stood by the cross:

Te voyant là parmi ces bourreaux pleins d'effroi,
 Peut-être qu'il t'a dit une parole, à cause
 De ton amour divin! un secret,...quelque chose...
 Un dernier mot de plus, à toi.¹⁰

The following verse from the Sibyls' chorus reads as a confession of an illusion of which he himself was a victim.

Souvent, jeunes encor, dans les nuits de délire,
 Espérant de l'Amour quelque chose de saint,
 Nous avons cherché Dieu jusque dans son sourire...
 Mais le sourire s'est éteint.¹¹

For Villiers, the attempt by man to find God through earthly love is a futile endeavor. The cult of ideal love, which will constantly haunt Villiers, makes its appearance in "Zaïra" one of his earliest poems. Based on an Arab legend which Villiers found in Stendhal's De l'Amour,¹² the story of Zaïra is that of a woman whose ideal of love is based on purity and loyalty. "Chez nous on meurt lorsque l'on aime!"¹³

In the poem "Hermosa," Villiers depicts Don Juan in search of an ideal which he cannot find in this existence. Villiers' Don Juan can no longer find satisfaction in earthly love: "Mon rêve est au-delà!" Both E.T.A. Hoffmann and Musset in his "Namouna" had created a Don Juan seeking an ideal rather than sexual debauchery. Musset's Don Juan suffers and lives in a fallen state because he sought God in the form of woman.

Toi! Croyant toujours voir sur tes amours nouvelles
 Se lever le soleil de tes nuits éternelles
 Prenant pour fiancée un rêve une ombre vaine
 Prêtre désespéré, pour y chercher ton Dieu.¹⁴

For Villiers, Don Juan, is yet another symbol of a tormented soul in search of the ideal. He seeks the hidden meaning behind the word love. For earthly love reflects, in a distorted and broken way, divine love which is characterized by its inaccessibility.

Eh bien, ce sentiment qui tourmente sans trêve,
 Cet idéal maudit, cet inconnu, ce rêve
 Devant qui les humains succombent tour à tour,
 Cet espoir, que les uns cherchent dans la science,
 Les autres dans la foi, d'autres dans la puissance,
 Moi, je l'ai cherché dans l'amour.¹⁵

It was not unusual to see the similar nature of the passions which consumed the various seekers of the ideal, whether they be Don Juan, Faust, Prometheus, or Cain. Villiers, in fact, compares Don Juan to Prometheus and Cain. Balzac describes the parallel between these mythical archetypes of revolt in a passage in La Fille aux yeux d'or:

Paquita répondait à cette passion que sentent tous les hommes vraiment grands pour l'infini, passion mystérieuse si dramatiquement exprimée dans Faust, si poétiquement traduite dans Manfred, et qui poussait Don Juan à fouiller le coeur des femmes, en espérant y trouver cette pensée sans bornes à la recherche de laquelle se mettent tant de chasseurs de spectres, que les savants croient entrevoir dans la science, et que les mystiques trouvent en Dieu seul. L'espérance d'avoir enfin l'Etre idéal avec lequel la lutte pouvait être constante sans fatigue ravit de Marsay, (etc).¹⁶

The syncretic nature of the quest for an ideal linked the

avatars of revolt such as Faust and Don Juan. As in the case of Faust, Don Juan's search includes the desire for illumination through hermetic science. He seeks the secret correspondence between the visible and the invisible.

Maintenant, que l'Etude aux sourdes amertumes
Condense à son appel ses antiques volumes;
Qu'il connaisse des lois les intimes rapports,
Que pour lui la science, interdite au profane,
Des prêtres de Memphis, des Mages d'Ecbatane,
Livre la clef de ses trésors.¹⁷

It is likely that Villiers' allusions to Faust stem from the fact that he always dreamed of writing his own version of Faust and included a strange love poem about him called "Chanson." Gautier's poem, "Don Juan" in La Comédie de la Mort (1838) contained verses which were sure to stir the imagination of the young Breton poet with their Faustian suggestiveness. Here, as in Villiers' poem, the secret of the absolute is referred to as a treasure, which is represented by the alchemist's search for spiritual gold.

Que n'ai-je feuilletant cabales et grimoires,
Auprès de mon fourneau, passé les heures noires
A chercher le trésor!¹⁸

As in the orphic poetry of the nineteenth century Illuminists, the ideal is characterized by its inaccessibility; and its mysteriousness is symbolized by the veil which acts as a barrier between the known and the unknown for Don Juan.

Je ne peux plus aimer, entends-tu, jeune femme!
Brûlé comme Cain d'une invisible flamme,
J'ai soif d'un paradis dont je suis exilé.
Vivre ne m'est plus rien: je suis las de moi-même.
Mon cœur, sépulcre sourd, ne garde qu'un blasphème
Pour ce beau ciel toujours voilé.¹⁹

Just as the poet has his dream of hope, the seeker of the absolute ideal is one who "remembers" the lost ideal or a previous life. "Cependant, j'aime encore ces souvenirs du ciel."²⁰

Don Juan is one of the first manifestations of Villiers' personal myth of an exiled idealist seeking perfection and a union with the ideal woman. As such, he is the precursor of Villiers' future young heroes -- Samuel, Lord Ewald and Axël, to name but a few. The heroes of romantic illuminist poetry will prepare the ground for further occult interests that Villiers will explore and refine in his later works.

CHAPTER I FOOTNOTES

- 1 Stéphane Mallarmé, Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 490.
- 2 Max Daireaux, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam: l'homme et l'oeuvre (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1936), p. 31.
- 3 Ibid., p. 45.
- 4 Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, "Hermosa," Oeuvres complètes, 10 vols. (Geneva: Shatkine reprints, 1970), X:94.
- 5 Correspondance générale de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam et documents inédits, ed. Joseph BOLLERY, 2 Vols. (Paris: Mercure de France, 1962), 1:30.
- 6 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, X:132.
- 7 Ibid., p. 141
- 8 Ibid., p. 150.
- 9 Ibid., p. 177.
- 10 Ibid., p. 180.
- 11 Ibid., p. 177.
- 12 Stendhal, De l'Amour, (Paris: Michel Levey, 1856), p. 178.
- 13 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, X:31.
- 14 Alfred de Musset, "Namouna," Poésie complètes, (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1957), p. 204.
- 15 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, X:89.
- 16 Honoré de Balzac, La Comédie humaine, 11 Vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1956-1959), V:315.
- 17 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, X:81.
- 18 Théophile Gautier, Poésies complètes (Paris: Charpentier, 1882), II:40.

- 19 Villiers Oeuvres complètes, X:94.
- 20 Ibid., p. 86.

CHAPTER II

FORMATION OF THE WRITER

Villiers' illustrious lineage combined with his father's obsession to re-establish the glory of the past probably made Villiers acutely aware of his role in life. Faced with financial hardship (his father had squandered more than the family possessed), Villiers placed all his aspirations on becoming a great writer. He energetically pursued the acquaintance of other writers and publishers. "Ce qui paraît certain, c'est que Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, depuis quelques semaines seulement à Paris, connaît déjà Leconte de Lisle, Banville, Asselineau, Catulle Mendès, Cladel et Glatigny."¹ It was Villiers' meeting with Charles Baudelaire, however, at Pontavice de Heussey's and at the Brasserie des Martyrs² that impressed the young Villiers the most. In a letter addressed to Baudelaire in 1861, Villiers proclaims a great admiration for many of the poems in Les Fleurs du mal and mentions their mutual interest in the music of Richard Wagner. "Je me suis rencontré avec vous au sujet de Wagner, et je vous jouerai Tannhaeuser (sic) quand je serai installé dans votre voisinage."³

There is no doubt that Villiers greatly prized his friendship with Baudelaire who was several years his senior. In Baudelaire, Villiers found a kindred spirit, someone who felt the irony of modern life, who was torn between the desire for salvation and the

temptations of evil, and who, in his revolt, wanted to "épater les bourgeois" by rivaling with Satan. Villiers would often quote Baudelaire's poems from memory, both verbally and in his writings. "Villiers adopta envers la vie et envers l'art une attitude qui est visiblement en grande partie inspirée de Baudelaire."⁴

That Baudelaire actually took an interest in the young Villiers may be seen in the fact that he allowed Villiers to read his unpublished poems and that Villiers was one of the few persons whom Baudelaire had invited to his apartment. Villiers was undoubtedly impressed with the beauty and metaphysical implications of Baudelaire's poems as well as their irony.

Baudelaire seemed to incarnate "le Prince de l'exil" for the young poet, who had recently arrived from Brittany and who was being seduced by the temptations of the modern day Babylon. Baudelaire, raised the theme of the poet as a privileged creator in revolt against a universe condemned by original sin.

Villiers will espouse Baudelaire's hatred of the world as created, his metaphysical preoccupation with the problems of sin and redemption, and his hatred of his own instincts and of female sexuality. Villiers will depict the hero of his play, Elën, succumbing to the temptations of a vampire-like woman, who is the cause of his suffering and of his abandonment of a mystic ideal. In his play, Morgane, Villiers proclaims, "Au fond des choses, la femme n'a jamais aimé que le serpent."⁵

For Baudelaire, losing oneself in another in the act of love was diametrically opposed to the function of the artist who must be self-contained, studied like the dandy, and the creator of the artificial. As such, the poet competes with the work of the Creator. For Villiers, the ideal woman is more than the esthetician's compensatory idol of contemplation, she is not only a symbol of the ideal, but a participant in the primordial drama of redemption.

The only women who permit Villiers' troubled idealists to attain mystic union with the ideal are those who are stripped of their sexuality and their reproductive powers. In Isis he says, "La tendance aux profonds recueils chez la femme accompagne presque toujours une complexion disposée à la stérilité."⁶ The new Eve in Eve future will be a sterile machine, reflecting the highest ideal of her creator, who also affirms the superiority of the artificial creation over its real-life model.

The quest for the ideal woman is related in terms of trial and suffering for Villiers' heroes. Union with the ideal woman will be possible only through sublimation, separation, or death. The occult theme of an androgynous divinity which unites in one being the male and the female will symbolize and sanctify the quest of Villiers' lovers who seek their redemption and reintegration with the divine.

Suffering to attain redemption, however, is a common occult theme. It is also a predominant theme in Les Fleurs du mal, as exemplified in Baudelaire's poem, "Bénédiction."

-Soyez béni, mon Dieu, qui donne la souffrance
 Comme un divin remède à nos impuretés
 Et comme la meilleure et la plus pure essence
 Qui prépare les forts aux saintes voluptés!⁷

In addition to certain common themes and metaphysical considerations, Baudelaire's influence on Villiers will include several major aesthetic and stylistic elements. Baudelaire can be held responsible for Villiers' abandoning the poetic genre and turning, instead, to prose in the form of the short story. He was certainly responsible for the young poet's discovery of Edgar Allen Poe. It is probable that Villiers had read Baudelaire's three volumes of Poe which were reedited in 1862.⁸

Baudelaire related to Poe whose destiny was astonishingly similar to his own and had extolled the idealistic and visionary qualities of his work.

Vous tous qui avez ardemment cherché à découvrir les lois de votre être, qui avez aspiré à l'infini, et dont les sentiments refoulés ont dû chercher un affreux soulagement dans le vin de la débauche, priez pour lui. Maintenant son être corporel purifié nage au milieu des êtres dont il entrevoyait l'existence, priez pour lui qui voit et qui sait, il intercédéra pour vous.⁹

Baudelaire saw in Poe a kind of occult seer who perceived the mystery of all things and who, through his poetry, gave man a glimpse of beauty that was only realizable beyond the grave. It is possible that Baudelaire tainted his interpretation of Poe's use of synesthesia with his own interest in Swedenborg's theory of correspondences. Villiers, on the other hand, was more impressed with the stylistic

aspects of Poe's irony, his use of horror and occult themes, and his use of fear to sustain the suspense until the final effect.

It was not until the publication of "Claire Lenoir" in 1867 that Poe's influence on Villiers becomes apparent. Villiers seemed to readily adapt to the short story format and to delight in the satirical and macabre humor which he found in Poe's irony. Under the veil of the supernatural, Villiers was also able to expose his metaphysical preoccupations in "Claire Lenoir." He pits Claire's Christian beliefs and her husband's Hegelian and occult ideas against Tribulat Bonhomet's positivism. The final irony of the story occurs when the positivist is confronted with the manifestation of occult forces, which he attempts to analyze, but which he can never hope to understand. Two other stories dating from this period, "l'Intersigne" (1868) and the first version of "l'Annonciateur" (published under the title "Azraël" in 1869) also reveal the appearance of occult phenomena. In "l'Intersigne" the occult appears in the form of omens and premonitory dreams. In "l'Annonciateur" the vision of the angel of death appears before King Salomon. Although the seer sees the angel, it has not come for him. In many cases, such as in "La Torture par l'espérance," Villiers would surpass Poe in the evocation of terror by purely psychological means. In this tale of psychological cruelty which takes place during the Spanish Inquisition, the Grand Inquisitor tortures his prisoner by merely providing the "hope" that freedom is possible. The irony and the cruelty derive from the fact that the prisoner's freedom is never possible.

Although many of Villiers' short stories in Contes cruels, Nouveaux Contes cruels, and Histoires moroses reflect Poe's taste for the fantastic, Poe's poetic theme of the death of a beautiful woman will reappear in Villiers' short story, "Véra," his play, Elën, and Eve future. Villiers' heroes, as in the case of Poe's, live only by "politesse" and seek their ideal in death. The ideal fusion of two lovers in death occurs not only in his major work, Axël, but also in his stories, "La Maison du bonheur," "L'Amour suprême," and "Akëdysséiril." In "Akëdysséiril" (1886), two lovers attain ultimate happiness because they die at the moment of their long awaited reunion and at the height of their love. "Certes, le supplice eût été, pour eux, de survivre à cet instant non pareil!"¹⁰ The theme is the same for Sara and Axël who hastily seek death at the very moment that their love still retains its most sublime purity.

It was not only in Poe but in Wagner that Villiers would find inspiration for an ideal union of Eros in death. The fate of two predestined lovers who seek death was the prevailing theme of Wagner's Tristan and Isolde. The theme will coincide with the Celtic mysticism of Villiers' native Brittany and the evocative symbolism of occult mysteries.

Villiers' boundless enthusiasm for Richard Wagner was probably due to the convergence of several factors which filled with passion the young and impressionable Villiers. First, his love of music which led him to write articles on music in La Causerie at the very beginning of his career. Villiers often improvised on the piano and even

composed some of his own music, although he could not transcribe it himself.

Although it has never been proven, Pontavice de Heussey claimed that Villiers met Wagner as early as 1861 when three concerts of Tannhäuser were presented in March of that year.¹¹ According to Villiers himself, he had attended the scandalous reception given to Tannhäuser at the Opéra. Although it is doubtful that Villiers had met Wagner at this time, there is no question that his enthusiasm dates from this period.

While it cannot be said that Baudelaire was responsible for Villiers' appreciation of Wagner's music, he may have been partially responsible for Villiers' discovery of the poetic potency of myth and of an art form which combined all the arts -- poetry, music, and theater. Baudelaire had sent a copy of his article on Tannhäuser to Villiers. Since Baudelaire rarely gave copies of his articles to anyone, we can only assume that Villiers' enthusiasm for both his poems and Wagner's music favorably impressed the author of Les Fleurs du mal. Baudelaire had written in his article:

. . . Le mythe est un arbre qui croît partout en tout climat, sous tout soleil, spontanément, et sans boutures, . . . Comme le péché est partout, la rédemption est partout, le mythe est partout. Rien de plus cosmopolite que l'éternel.¹²

In his article, Baudelaire also referred to Wagner's dramatic art as the most perfect synthesis of several arts and, in this respect, may have influenced Villiers' decision to explore the

dramatic format. Villiers would combine poetry and short lyric songs with dramatic narrative in Elën, Morgan, Le Nouveau Monde and Axël.

André Lebois sees three directions that Wagner's influence had on Villiers: ". . . une mystique de la musique qui devient chez Villiers une mystique du Verbe: une conception du drame, où doivent s'unir une philosophie, l'émotion, la plastique et la musique; enfin, la découverte de l'Orient."¹³

Several of Villiers' works were inspired by Wagner, "Le Secret de l'ancienne musique" and "Le Tsar et les Grands-Ducs," which was written after Villiers' trip to the Wagnerian festival in Saxe-Weimar in 1870. Villiers' "La Légende Moderne," Le Nouveau Monde and "Azraël" were all dedicated to Wagner, "Au prince de la profonde musique."

According to Jean-Aubry, Villiers was "parmi les grands écrivains français . . . qui témoignait pour cet art de la plus vive ferveur et qui prenait la musique le plus au sérieux."¹⁴

However, it was not until 1869 that Villiers saw practically all the major works of Wagner: Lohengrin, The Rhinegold, Walkyrie. Villiers accompanied both Catulle Mendès and his wife, Judith Gautier, to the 'Exposition Universelle de Munich." Judith Gautier is perhaps referring to Villiers when she writes, "Nous allons à Lucerne voir, pour la première fois, Richard Wagner. . . Nous ne l'avions jamais vu. . ."¹⁵ For Mendès had met Wagner in 1861 while Tannhäuser was being presented in Paris.

Villiers, Mendès, and Judith went to visit Wagner who was living in Tribschen, not far from Lucerne. The impression that

Wagner had made on his guests caused boundless enthusiasm which is reflected in Villiers' letters, written in 1869. As one of his letters indicates, it was not only Wagner's music but his visionary genius in expressing the ideal that captured Villiers' imagination.

Wagner's enthusiasm for Villiers was not exactly reciprocal. The eve of Villiers' departure from Tribschen in 1869, he read his drama, La Révolte, to Wagner who did not seem to understand it, considering it a bourgeois drama. Villiers had to explain that Elisabeth was "un Prométhée femelle, dont le foie est dévoré par une oie."¹⁶ Obviously, La Révolte, which prefigures Ibsen's The Doll House, was not appreciated by Wagner who remarked: "Vous êtes un vrai poète et je voudrais vous voir jeter sur le monde idéal, plus important que le réel pour nous autres artistes, le regard pénétrant dont vous avez transpercé le monde existant!"¹⁷ It appears that if it had not been for Wagner's fascination with Judith Gautier, Villiers and Catulle Mendès would not have been as welcome. At any rate, the stay at Wagner's gave Villiers the opportunity of seeing practically all of his operas first hand and of meeting several Wagnerians such as Eduard Schuré who, in his Drame musical (1875), would do much to interpret the ideas of Wagner on poetry and music, the 'total art', for the new generation of symbolists.

Although Villiers sent articles to l'Universel and Rappel, they were never published. He seemed to be more preoccupied with the events and the grand master himself as his letters to Jean Marras attest. With the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War the three

travelers left Wagner and went to Avignon where they stayed with Mallarmé. Mendès had written to Mallarmé: "Je me fais une fête de vous initier à l'art nouveau qui n'est ni la poésie ni la musique et qui est en même temps la musique et la poésie, créé par Richard Wagner."¹⁸ Villiers will essentially be impressed with the force of Wagner's music, the ceremonial aspects of the stage presentation, and his mythical themes -- elements that he had attempted in his first play after having seen Tannhäuser.

The composition of Elën, Villiers' first dramatic attempt, dates from 1861, at the time of his initial enthusiasm for Wagner. Thematically, there is a parallel between Elën and Tannhäuser. Tannhäuser is seduced by Venus, the pagan Goddess of love, and spends more than a year in the grotto of Venusburg indulging in the passions of love. He has jeopardized his own salvation and forsaken the pure love of Elizabeth. Villiers' play, which takes place in Germany, presents the seduction of Samuel by the courtesan, Elën -- an archetype of both Venus and the legendary Helen of Troy. Samuel is first drugged and then lured by the seductress into believing that she loves him. In his drugged hallucination, Samuel forsakes his spiritual life for the promise of earthly love. Tannhäuser, however, receives salvation because of Elizabeth's spiritual love for him. She seeks her own death in order to save the soul of the man she loves. In Wagner's opera sacred love is triumphant; in Villiers' play it is profaned.

It is quite possible to see the influence of Baudelaire's scepticism and irony in Elën, but the events in Villiers' life seem to be the real cause for his pessimism. Elën was written at a time when Villiers seemed to be abandoning his faith for a woman who resembled Elën in her callousness. According to Villiers' parents, the life that he was leading in the cafés, the evil influence of his literary friends, and the immoral liaison with Louise Dyonnet, a woman of dubious reputation, were about to put his immortal soul in jeopardy.

In 1862, when their affair first started, Villiers' mother, a devout Catholic, arranged to have him spend some time at the abbey of Solesmes. However, once at Solesmes, Villiers spent more time in the library than he did in religious meditation. While at Solesmes, he discovered La Mystique by Görres, which he will recommend in a letter to Baudelaire. He managed to finish writing Samuèle (Elën), the third volume of Isis, and thought of writing Axël. He also translated a sardonic tale from Latin for Baudelaire. In fact, the stay at Solesmes did not seem to assuage any of Villiers' religious doubts, his interest in philosophical and occult speculations, or his interest in Louise. Upon his return, he continued his stormy liaison, giving her the little money that he could, but the biche, as such women were called during the Second Empire, did not reserve her favors solely for the poet who loved her.

A year later in August 1863, his mother again persuaded him to return for a second retreat at Solesmes. Villiers wanted to leave

the abbey so badly that he felt that staying any longer might make him become, in his own words, "anti-chrétien, presque."¹⁹ Thanks to his most loyal and devoted friend, Jean Marras, who sent him the money, Villiers was able to return to Paris. After his return, he would continue frequenting his old haunts. Although he made several new literary acquaintances such as Verlaine, Coppée and Hérédia at the Marquise de Ricard's salon, he would continue to see Louise until 1864. It was not until he met and fell in love with Théophile Gautier's daughter, Estelle, that he would find someone who would share his spiritual and intellectual sensitivities.

Villiers had met Estelle through his friend Catulle Mendès, who was married to Estelle's sister, Judith Gautier. It was also through Mendès that Villiers would meet one of his closest, life-long friends, Stéphane Mallarmé. Villiers and Mallarmé met for the first time in 1864 at the home of Catulle Mendès' father in Choisy-le-Roi. It was the beginning of a long and exceptional friendship for both poets. Mallarmé recognized in Villiers a potential genius and discovered a kindred soul who was seeking, as he himself was, to write "Le Grand Oeuvre." Both poets discovered their mutual interest in the mystical themes of occultism and encouraged each other in attempting to render, in Mallarmé's words, "l'explication orphique de la terre." Mallarmé would always admire the fact that Villiers truly sacrificed every normal human comfort just to be able to pursue his vocation as a writer.

While Mallarmé survived by teaching, Villiers would wait until he was practically destitute before he would seek work, and then he would always choose the most bizarre jobs imaginable. In a letter to Mallarmé, Villiers would write; ". . . ne désespérons de rien et n'oublions jamais les fonctions quasi-sacerdotales dont nous sommes revêtus, vis à vis des masses."²⁰

Their mutual interest in occult themes include: the Kabbalah and alchemy. Villiers was not only responsible for introducing Mallarmé to the occult writings of Eliphas Lévi but also to the philosophical idealism of Hegel. In a letter to Mallarmé dated 1866 we read:

Quand paraîtra le Traité des Pierres précieuses? J'ai plus confiance en votre alchimie qu'en celle d'Auréole Théophraste Bombaste, dit le divin Paracelse. Toutefois je vous indiquerai les "Dogmes et Rituels de Haute Magie" d'Eliphas Lévy (sic), 2 vol. in-8° (1850, Dentu, Paris) s'ils se trouvent à la Bibliothèque de votre ville. Ils sont l'étonnement même. Quant à Hegel, je suis vraiment bien heureux que vous ayez accordé quelque attention à ce miraculeux génie, à ce procréateur sans pareil, à ce reconstruteur de l'Univers.²¹

Hegel and Lévi would always seem to follow one another in Villiers' mind. He had discovered both about the same time and would constantly seek to illustrate Hegel's philosophical idealism with the occultist's belief in the supremacy of man's power to become a true thaumaturge, or magus, according to the ancient mysteries revealed in the Kabbalah. Villiers' enthusiasm for both Lévi and

Hegel date from about 1861. Pontavice de Heussey claims that it was his uncle who introduced both subjects to Villiers and recalls the two men engaging in long conversations on Hegel and occultism. ". . . Les volumes de La Logique (de Hegel), alors traduits, et d'assez fâcheuse manière, par M. Véra, paraissent l'avoir tout de suite enthousiasmé."²²

Although Villiers' interest in Hegel never waned, he appears not to have read any of Hegel's original works and satisfied himself with what he had discovered in Véra's translated excerpts. This was not the case, however, with his interest in occultism which provided Villiers with a very fertile inspiration in the form of evocative symbols and imagery, derived from its diverse myths and theogonies. As Drougard has pointed out, however, it was Eliphas Lévi's Dogme et rituel de la haute magie which was Villiers' principal guide to the occult.²³

Eliphas Lévi was, perhaps, the most important representative of the occult and illuminist movement in the middle of the nineteenth century. Since we will discuss the occult themes that influenced Villiers in our subsequent chapters, it is our intention to present only background on Lévi who appears to represent for Villiers the synthesis of all occult and illuminist thinking.

Abbé Alphonse-Louis Constant (1810-1875), as he was known before he adopted the Hebrew translation of his name, was a former deacon at the theological college of Saint Sulpice. However, instead of entering the priesthood, he became a leftist pamphleteer and went

to work with his former classmate, Alphonse Esquiros, a friend of Hugo's. Esquiros was the author of Le Magicien (1830) and a popular magnetiser who used to conduct séances. More than any other one person, Eliphas Lévi, seemed to be in contact with the majority of poets, writers, occultists and secret societies of his day.

Baudelaire had met Constant when they collaborated with a group of writers in 1843 to publish Les mystères galans des théâtres de Paris.²⁴ Constant was closely associated with the followers of Fourier and completed and edited Flora Tristan's Assomption de la Femme. Constant's interest in occultism included, the Gnostics, the Kabbalah, Boehme, Swedenborg, Saint-Martin and Fabre d'Olivet. However, it was not until he met Hoëné Wronski, a Polish "émigré," in 1850 that he actually became an initiate.²⁵ Once Constant became an initiate or "magus," he left behind Esquiros' and Fourier's ideas of socialism, and condemned magnetism as practiced in the Parisian salons, as a profanation of the power of Astral Light, which he described as follows:

The primordial light which is the vehicle of all ideas, is mother of all forms . . . hence the Astral Light, or terrestrial fluid, which we call the Great Magnetic Agent, is saturated with all kinds of images and reflections.²⁶

He completed Dogme et rituel de la haute magie in the early 1850's which he published under the name Eliphas Lévi. In this work, which Villiers had closely studied, Lévi attempts to reveal the unity of all occult doctrines -- the science of the Magi, the

Kabbalah, and the new wave of illuminist writers. He also attempts to show the compatibility between catholic morality and the ascetic discipline of the occult magus. Lévi wanted to demonstrate that the word of man will unite with the work of God by revealing the harmony and the analogy of contraries. Lévi speaks of Joseph de Maïstre who showed that Newton brought us back to the ideas of Pythagoras and that someday, through analogy, science and faith will come together, to be once again what it was in the ancient doctrines of the Chaldeans, the Egyptians and the Hebrews.

Soon after the completion of Dogme et rituel, Lévi went to England, where he met members of the English occult society of the Rosicrucians. He met Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, a fellow Rosicrucian and author of the novel, Zanoni which Villiers will also read. When Lévi returned to Paris he frequented the home of Charles Fauvety where the following men met: Littré, Considérant, Pierre Leroux, Louis Ménard, Desbarrolles, (the palmist), Caubet (future Worshipful Master of the lodge of the Rose of Perfect Silence), Louis Lucas (author of the Roman alchimique), Alexandre Weil (Jewish philosopher of the Kabbalah), Charles Renouvier (the physician and astrologer), H. Favre, Leon Richer, and others.²⁷ Villiers would meet Littré and Taine at Solesmes in 1863 and knew Ménard, Lucas and Richer. He would also read Desbarrolles' les Mystères de la main révélés et expliqués.

The new wave of occultists and Kabbalists in the second half of the nineteenth century would continue to turn to Eliphas Lévi as the

great authority on the Kabbalah and occult magic. Villiers' interest in Lévi was shared by Judith Gautiér and Catulle Mendès. It is also possible that Villiers was among their guests which included Hugo when they invited Lévi to their home in 1873. Lévi's occult ideas would continue to influence Stanislas de Guaita, the founder of the Kabbalist order of the Rosy Cross and V.E. Michelet, as well as de Guaita's disciples, Péladan and Papus.

It was Villiers' friend, V.E. Michelet who even intimates that Villiers was an initiate of an occult society and that he had collaborated with the Martinist review, L'Initiation, although neither fact has ever been proven.

Villiers chercha de ces côtés sa voie, la bonne voie, l'unique. . . Il s'agit de trouver, selon la belle expression de Thomas de Vaugan, le Philalèthe, L'entrée ouverte au palais fermé du Roy. Ce ne fut certes pas sans peines, sans tâtonnements et sans inquiétudes que Villiers franchit "l'entrée ouverte". Mais il triompha des épreuves, et il faut saluer en lui l'un des plus hauts et des plus parfaits Initiés de France, un des plus sûrs mainteneurs de la Tradition occidentale, un guide et un maître. . ." 28

The literary milieu in which Villiers found himself included many occultists. Around 1865 Villiers was involved with the Librairie de l'art indépendant where another review, La Haute science, was also being published. It is possible that he became involved with some of the collaborators such as Redon, Debussy, Michelet, Jean Lahor, Huysmans, Louis Ménard and other occultists and members of the Rosicrucian lodges.²⁹ Villiers' interest in initiation rites as

practiced in the secret societies of the time began with his writing of Isis and continued through the writing of Axël in which there are several mentions of the rose and the cross, the symbols of the Rosicrucian lodge.

In 1869 Villiers became a frequent guest at the home of Nina de Villard, a popular pianist and poet who was also interested in the Kabbalah and spiritism. Villiers would often play the piano and recite his stories to an admiring audience which included many close friends such as Mallarmé, Léon Bloy, Verlaine and Marras. In "Chez les Passants," Villiers describes a typical evening at the salon of Nina de Villard where a strange mixture of writers, bohemians, musicians and occultists gathered.

M. de Polignac, le jeune et sympathique incendiaire à la mode, l'anarchiste à la tenue correcte, aux manières exquises, -- lequel causait, à voix basse, avec M. Henri Delaage, le médium, qui, entre deux évocations, venait parfois consumer un Cigare-des-Brahmes en ce séjour.³⁰

Delaage claimed to have been initiated by his grandfather who had been a close friend of Saint-Martin. Although it is doubtful that he had been, the majority of young symbolists considered him the true link between the original mystical purpose of secret societies, as taught by Saint-Martin, and the new wave of occultists who seemed to be more interested in evoking spirits and hypnotizing people. Villiers would describe Marras engaging in conversations on the secrets of magic with the adept, Henri La Luberne.

Although Villiers showed an ardent interest in the evocation of spirits (the theme of "Claire Lenoir" and Eve future) he will, towards the end of life, satirize those who study "l'art d'évoquer les morts en vingt-cinq leçons," in "Les Expériences du Dr. Crookes," "La Séance du Dr. Muller" and "Conte de Fin d'Eté." Obviously, he felt, as many true idealists before him, that the charlatans who perpetrated party games and the frivolous people who dabbled in such sacred domains as death and a person's soul were profaning the mysteries of life which Villiers, for one, held sacred.

Villiers certainly never doubted, however, that man has a soul and that it would survive after death. In occultism, Villiers would find a system that confirmed his belief in the Absolute and would always defend the sacred mystery of being against the positivists of his age.

Quant à nous, nous croyons que Villiers s'est donné la mission (ou a été missionné pour. . .) de répandre, sous une forme impérissable, les enseignements de la Haute Magie. Ce qu'Éliphas Lévi semait parmi quelques disciples et d'étroits conventicules, Villiers estima qu'il le devait répandre en pleine lumière parmi un public cultivé. Le temps était (à son avis) venu que la Lumière ne restât plus sous le boisseau.³¹

Villiers' idealism and his occultism were one and the same. The primordial mystery of Being, a Celtic trait, was an integral part of Villiers the man and the poet from Brittany.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER II

- 1 Daireaux, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, p. 45.
- 2 Raitt, Mouvement symboliste, p. 63.
- 3 Villiers, Correspondance générale, I:46.
- 4 Raitt, Mouvement symboliste, p. 73.
- 5 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, VIII:69.
- 6 Ibid., IX:113.
- 7 Charles Baudelaire, Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), p. 9.
- 8 Raitt, Mouvement symboliste, p. 87.
- 9 Baudelaire, Oeuvres complètes, p. 217.
- 10 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, V:280.
- 11 Emile Drougard, "Richard Wagner et Villiers de l'Isle-Adam," Revue de littérature comparée 14 (avr.-juin, 1934): 298.
- 12 Baudelaire, Oeuvres complètes, p. 1,229.
- 13 André Lebois, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam: Révélateur du verbe (Neuchatel: Messeiller, 1952), p. 129.
- 14 Jean Aubry, "Villiers et la Musique," Mercure de France 288 (1938): 7.
- 15 Judith Gautier, Le Troisième Rang du Collier, p.14 quoted by Drougard, "Richard Wagner," p. 302.
- 16 Raitt, Mouvement symboliste, p. 110.
- 17 Judith Gautier, Le Troisième Rang, pp.119-110 quoted by Raitt, Mouvement symboliste, pp. 109-110.
- 19 Villiers, Correspondance générale, I:61.
- 20 Ibid., I:83.
- 21 Ibid., I:100.

- 22 Teodor de Wyzewa, Nos Maîtres (Paris: Perrin, 1896), p. 143.
- 23 Emile Drougard, "Villiers de l'Isle-Adam et Eliphas Lévi," Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire 10 (1931): 506.
- 24 Enid Starkie, Baudelaire (Conn.: New directions, 1958), p. 227.
- 25 Gwendolyn Bays, The Orphic Vision: Seer Poets from Novalis to Rimbaud (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1964), p. 112.
- 26 Eliphas Lévi, Transcendental Magic, trans. A.E. Waite (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1972), p. 149.
- 27 Auguste Viatte, Victor Hugo et les Illuminés de son temps (Montréal: Editions de l'Arbre, 1942), p. 110.
- 28 V.E. Michelet, Les Compagnons de la Hiérophanie quoted by Pierre Mariel in his preface to Axël (Paris: Le Courrier du Livre, 1969), p. 12.
- 29 Ibid., p. 11.
- 30 Villiers, "Chez les Passants," Oeuvres complètes, XI:83.
- 31 Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Axël, ed. Pierre Mariel, (Paris: Le Courrier du Livre, 1969), p. 27.

CHAPTER III

CELTIC ORIGINS: LA VIE ANTERIEURE

Villiers saw himself as a solitary figure, the last of a princely race exiled in a modern world devoid of spiritual and moral ideals. Descendant of an illustrious lineage, the most famous of them being: Pierre de Villiers, grand master and porte-oriflamme of France; Jean de Villiers, Maréchal de France, born in 1347; Philippe de Villiers, grand master of the Order of Malta and the defender of Rhodes against Soliman's siege in 1521.¹

Villiers de l'Isle-Adam would be the last representative to try to uphold the motto inscribed on the family crest, "Va oultre et La main à l'oeuvre." Janvrais describes the symbolic meaning the crest had for Villiers: "Il portait d'or au chef d'azur chargé d'un dextro-chère vêtu d'un fanion d'hermines; son oeuvre, d'une franchise de métal, idéaliste et chaste, répond à ce triple symbole héraldique."² Fiercely proud of his noble heritage, Villiers would risk whatever time and money he had in order to defend his family name. He brought suit against the authors of an historical melodrama, Perrinet Leclerc, in which his ancestor, the Maréchal Jean de Villiers, was depicted as a traitor. Between 1875 and 1877 Villiers was busily involved in amassing historical documents to prove his descendancy. He sent letters to journals in order to try to have the play stopped, but,

unfortunately, this only provoked a challenge to prove his true lineage. Up until 1888, Villiers continued to forage through archives in order to complete a history of his family which he compiled in three works that were never published: *Histoire du Maréchal de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam racontée par les Historiens*, *Documents sur les Règnes de Charles VI et Charles VII* and *Histoire de la Maison de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam*. Needless to say, some of Villiers' contemporaries felt he was too eager to embellish his own legend while others thought he was too eccentric to be taken seriously. The affair with the director of the Châtelet theater, where Perrinet Leclerc was being presented, provoked yet another incident with a certain George de Villiers des Champs whose family received the royal permission to affix the title of the 'de l'Isle-Adam' to their name. This time Villiers was called upon to defend the right to his name in a duel. However, when both he and George de Villiers supplied ample proof of their lineage to each other, the affair was dropped.

Previously, when the throne of Greece was left vacant in 1863, Villiers, being the descendant of the Grand Master of Rhodes, claimed a right to the throne and asked to see Napoléon III. When he was received by the Grand Chambellan instead, Villiers refused to reveal his projects.³ Adventures such as these mixed with Villiers' often eccentric behavior and outrageous dreams were the basis for his becoming a legend in his own time. Unfortunately, as Raitt has

pointed out, the legend grew at the expense of his work which remained fairly unknown except among his friends. "...Il est certain que beaucoup d'entre ses contemporains le considéraient comme un clown de talent plutôt que comme un génie méconnu."⁴

A noble but cruel destiny was to be the fate of the young Villiers, remnant of a race destined to oblivion and disinherited socially by the Second Empire. The haunting dream of glorious exploits coupled with ancestral pride will characterize not only Villiers, but also the young and idealistic heroes of his stories and plays. It is not difficult to see the fictional projection of Villiers in the description of characters such as Wilhelm de Strally, Lord Ewald, Felicien de la Vierge, Le Comte Maximilien de W., and Axël D'Auersperg.

Part of Villiers' personal myth is linked to the land in which his family eventually settled -- Brittany.

Je suis né d'une très vieille race, magnifique et que, depuis trois cents ans en Bretagne et plus de cinq en France, l'Histoire universelle a illuminée; les hauts faits accomplis par les miens sont appris par les enfants, même dans les écoles d'aujourd'hui.⁵

Brittany represented a spiritual homeland. Villiers often nostalgically evokes Brittany as a kind of mythical dream place imbuing it with a primitive harshness and a savage purity. Brittany seemed to symbolize a steadfastness which remained unchanged over the course of time. Villiers' idealistic heroes are indelibly linked by a mysterious correspondence to the land which mirrors their hopes

and feelings. Félicien de la Vierge in "l'Inconnue" is described in such a manner.

C'était un adolescent sauvage, un orphelin seigneurial, -- l'un des derniers de ce siècle, un mélancolique châtelain du Nord échappé depuis trois jours de la nuit d'un manoir des Cornouailles.

Il s'appelait le Comte Félicien de la Vierge; il possédait le château de Blanchelande, en Basse-Bretagne. Une soif d'existence brûlante, une curiosité de notre merveilleux enfer avait pris et enfiévré, tout à coup, "ce chasseur, là-bas!"⁶

Villiers' love of his homeland appears in his predilection for stormy and cloudy landscapes and visions of the sea. The Breton landscape corresponds to the poet's feelings and often appears as a primal metaphor of exile which he tries to capture in his writings.

In Elèn we read:

Alors, je me souviens, j'habitais les plages du Nord comme un exilé. L'inquiétude du ciel me travaillait; je ne pouvais découvrir, je le sentais bien, hélas! un idéal digne de moi, que dans les royaumes de la mort. Ce fut une folie si terrible que je me levais au milieu de la nuit, lorsque j'entendais les tempêtes; j'allais en mer, me perdre dans les lames, et, hagard, je m'incarnais dans l'Océan. L'infini, les clameurs du vent, les rochers perdus devenaient le prolongement de moi-même.⁷

Although the play is set in Germany, which Villiers had not visited, it is the harsh and mysterious climate of Brittany that Villiers utilizes to create the atmosphere which corresponds to the inner turmoil and shattered illusions of his characters. Once deceived by the modern world, his sublime heroes of another age retreat to an ancient chateau, fortress, or manor. Their retreat is linked to

the theme of exile. In "La Maison du Bonheur" the two young lovers, aware that time will destroy their perfect love, also retreat to the exile of their ancient manor. Theological overtones of the fall and man's exile from God appear in every major work. Axël and Sara will seek exile from life; their death is referred to as an exile in heaven.

Villiers will evoke Scotland in the "Duke de Portland," the Black Forest of Germany in Axël and England in Eve Future much in the same way as he evokes Brittany in "L'Intersigne" and in his poem "El Desdichado" which later appeared as "Souvenirs Occultes."

Je suis issu, me dit-il, moi, dernier Gael, d'une famille de Celtes, durs comme nos rochers. J'appartiens à cette race de marins, fleur illustre d'Armor, souche de bizarres guerriers, dont des actions d'éclat figurent au nombre des joyaux de l'Histoire. . . . J'ai hérité, moi, le Gael, des seuls éblouissements, hélas! du soldat sublime, et de ses espoirs.⁸

One can easily trace the celtic traits in Villiers' works according to Renan's description of "le génie/celtique" in his "Poésie des races celtiques."⁹ "L'élément essentiel de la vie poétique du Celte, c'est 'l'aventure'; c'est-à-dire la poursuite de l'inconnu, une course sans fin après l'objet toujours fuyant du désir."¹⁰ Great exploits were part of Villiers' private dream. Following the example of his ancestor, "le Spoliateur de tombeaux," Villiers dreamed of stealing money from the Stock Exchange in Paris in order to liberate it from the heathens. The true quest was, however, for perfection,

an ideal, which implied a long and arduous preparation for such heroes as Samuel and Axël. Villiers viewed the quest for the ideal in terms of the ancient rites of initiation which demanded both purity and discipline. The ideal or the object of his heroes' quest often takes the form of woman. The ideal woman is essentially characterized by her spirituality: her physical beauty must reflect the beauty of her soul. It is a never-ending quest usually ending in failure; for the correspondence of inner and external beauty is often cruelly set askew by the incapacity to feel sincere feelings by women such as Elën, Alicia Clarey, and Maryelle who reflect the mediocre materialism in the times in which they live.

The disillusionment which Villiers' characters face is offset by hope. A kind of illusionary construct of the ideal that is sometimes even more cruel than reality itself, as in "La Torture par l'Espérance." Ultimately, the idealistic heroes seek a mystic union with the ideal woman. The new Eve is referred to as "l'espérance galvanisée" and union with her would complete the cycle. "Il n'est qu'un perpétuel et toujours stérile essai de rédemption."¹¹ For Villiers as for the ancient Celts, "La femme y apparaît comme une sorte de vision vague, intermédiaire entre l'homme et le monde surnaturel ... cet idéal ... posé comme but suprême de la vie ..."¹²

The cold, translucent beauty of the ideal woman incarnated in Tullia Fabriana, Hadaly in Eve future, "l'Inconnue," and Sara de Maupers prefigure in some cases Mallarmé's "Hérodiade." As Renan had pointed out, there is among the Celts the feeling that love and

women are both mysterious and sacred. Villiers had expressed this very same feeling in his early poems "Hermosa" and "Le Chant du Calvaire." Lord Ewald longs for "la soeur promise" in Eve future. Axël refers to Sara as "soeur sacrée." André Lebois has pointed out the Celtic origins of Villiers' ideal woman.

En plein naturalisme, Villiers, seul, restaure le culte de la Dame. Il obéit à son instinct, mais il prend aussi place dans une tradition qu'il ne pouvait ignorer: La Villemarqué avait publié en 1842 ses Contes populaires des Anciens Bretons, traduction des récits recueillis par Lady Charlotte Guest à partir de 1837; et, en 1859, les Romans de la Table Ronde. C'est dans le Mabinogion (récit gallois et kymrique) de Peredur (Perceval que l'on voit s'épanouir la fleur de chevalerie, une vision idéaliste de la femme, être mystérieux à mi-chemin entre l'homme et le surnaturel).¹³

The ideal woman acts as a vehicle through which the unknown speaks to the hero who seeks a spiritual union with her. In Isis, Tullia Fabriana possesses magic skills which permit her to incarnate the ideal that Wilhelm de Strally seeks. In the same manner, Hadaly, the artificial creation of Edison, is endowed with a soul by supernatural forces which enable her to become the ideal that Lord Ewald wishes to possess.

In Villiers' writings, we constantly see the invasion of the supernatural. Magic and the marvelous are integral parts of Isis (1862) and "L'Annonciateur" first published in June 1869 under the title "Azraël." According to Renan, one of the principal characteristics of Celtic legends is "le principe de la merveille qui est dans la nature elle-même dans ses forces cachées, dans son inépuisable fécondité."¹⁴ The austere climate of Brittany was the natural

setting for the disquieting tales of both "L'Intersigne" (1867) and "Un Singulier Chelem" in which the howling winds of Brittany appear to communicate with the characters in the stories. Natural phenomena not only create the mysterious atmosphere, but also appear as plausible explanations for the incursion of the supernatural. The Duchess in "Un Singulier Chelem" living in her solitary Breton manor is described in terms which remind one of Villiers' Aunt Kerinou. "Ainsi s'écoulaient les soirées de ces trois être nobles et simples, (the Duchess, the Abbé and the chevalier d'Aiglelent), rares survivants d'une société disparue et qui demeuraient, quand même, des gens de jadis."¹⁵ Exiled from the modern world, the Duchess is in close contact with invisible forces that speak to her through nature.

Confondus, les vents du large et des bois, par les crépusculaires et froids corridors, se plaignaient en toute saison, soit gémissant à travers les ais rouillés de quelque armure, soit hurlant entre les cadres effacés des ancêtres la nudité des murailles: mais ces rumeurs du Passé ne déplaisaient pas à la grave habitante du lieu. C'était pour elle comme des voix; elle y distinguait peut-être des paroles.¹⁶

The cautious use of words such as "peut-être" place the fantastic phenomenon of communication with the beyond in the vague realm of the subjective while implying the possibility that another reality exists.

The belief in the existence of independent beings possessing the principle of their force is another trait of Celtic mythology that Villiers utilizes in some of his fantastic tales. Spirits

appear or communicate indirectly with the inhabitants of this world in Isis, "Conte de fin d'été," "Véra," Eve future, "Claire Lenoir," "l'Intersigne," and Le Nouveau Monde.

The secret doctrine of the Druids reveals many similarities between esoteric doctrines popularized during the nineteenth century. The Druid myth recounts that the Gallic race was descended from a large subterranean God, "le lumineux Esus", who had changed his name and his aspect by covering his face in an armature of clouds to protect himself and the Celtic race from invaders. As in the myth of Isis, the true face of the divinity is hidden. The moral ideal and the necessary discipline of the Druids to attain perfection is not unlike the asceticism demanded of initiates in the rituals of initiation which were popularized by the secret societies which re-emerged in nineteenth century France. The doctrine of correspondence also appears in Druid cosmology. "Les druides savaient que tout se correspond et s'emboîte dans le monde divin comme dans le monde humain."¹⁷ Just as the Gnostics conceived the world as evil, the Celts believed existence to be a necessary expiation of one's crimes and a preparation for union with God. The Celtic obsession with death characterizes many of Villiers' stories and, particularly, Axël where death is viewed as a release from the material constraints of the world and as an occasion to realize an ideal state of perfection. According to Celtic legend, "C'est par leurs fautes et leurs crimes que les âmes sont tombées d'abord dans l'Abîme (Anoun) puis dans le cercle étroit de la Nécessité (Ankena) sur la terre. Or,

tout leur effort doit tendre à rejoindre leur génie primitif (Awen) pour resplendir d'un nouvel éclat sous le rayonnement de leur vrai Dieu (Bélen) le roi du Soleil."¹⁸ Villiers recounts Axël's initiation in practically the same words without, however, making reference to this myth in particular. The transmigration of Tullia's soul in Isis, better known as the theory of metempsychosis, can be found in the esoteric doctrines of the East as well as in the Druid myth. Metempsychosis or the transmigration of souls (La Vie antérieure) runs as a leitmotif throughout Villiers' writings; for his idealistic heroes often recall with nostalgia the lost ideal of a primordial existence.

The words that Renan uses to describe the Celtic race seem to apply directly to Villiers: "Cette race veut l'infini, elle en a soif, elle le poursuit à tout prix, au delà de la tombe, au delà de l'enfer ..."¹⁹

CHAPTER III FOOTNOTES

- 1 For Villiers' genealogy see P. G. Castex, "Villiers, historien de sa maison", Revue de Nord, (April-June, 1954); E. Drougard, Villiers défenseur de son nom, (Rennes: Librairie Plihon, 1956); "Pour le nom: Villiers et ses homonymes," Revue des Sciences Humaines, (Oct.-Dec. 1957).
- 2 Th. Janvrais, Le berceau des Villiers: Penhandhoos L'Isle-Adam, Châtelains hôtes, métayers, p. 67, quoted in Lebois, Révélateur du Verbe, p. 25.
- 3 Daireaux, Villiers, pp. 77-78.
- 4 Raitt, Mouvement symboliste, p. 21.
- 5 Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Nouvelles reliques (Paris: José Corti, 1968), p. 15.
- 6 Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, "L'Inconnu," Contes cruels et Nouveaux Contes cruels, ed. Pierre-George Castex (Paris: Garnier, 1968) p. 240.
- 7 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, VIII: 224.
- 8 Villiers, Contes cruels, p. 277 and p. 282.
- 9 First published in the Revue des Deux Mondes (1 fev. 1854) and later included in les Essais de Morale et de Critique.
- 10 Ernest Renan, Oeuvres complètes, Vol. 2: les Essais de Morale et de Critique (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1948), p. 258 (hereafter referred to as Essais).
- 11 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, 1:136.
- 12 Renan, Essais, p. 258.
- 13 Lebois, Villiers, pp. 33-34.
- 14 Renan, Essais, p. 277.
- 15 Villiers, "Un Singulier Chelem," Histoires Insolites (Paris: Librairie Moderne, 1888), p. 35.
- 16 Ibid., p. 34.

- 17 Edouard Schuré, La Druidesse (Paris: Librairie Perrin, 1914), p. 37.
- 18 Ibid., p. 42.
- 19 Renan, Essais, p. 259.

CHAPTER IV

THE VISIONARY MODE

Villiers' interest in occultism appears to be essentially literary and philosophical. Initially, Villiers came to understand the term through the poetry of the Romantics who had turned to the visionary themes of the mystics and occultists to assuage their own religious and metaphysical doubts and to express their longing for the infinite. Based on the underlying philosophical idealism of Hegel, Villiers' occultism developed into a comprehensive metaphysical construct, which enabled him to free himself from life's contingencies. Villiers would posit the existence of the Ideal as an illusionary construct that was more real than reality itself and would equate the process of imagining its existence with a metaphysical option. The common vision of an a priori ideal, poetized by the Romantics and reconstructed philosophically by Hegel, derived, for the most part, from the occult mysteries and cosmologies of the ancient Egyptians and the mysticism of the Kabbalists.

The reemergence of occult traditions and symbolism at the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century manifested itself in the doctrines of the secret societies in France and in the writings of the Illuminists and the Romantics. The most important concept of the occult movement at that time was

the vision of a dual reality. Beyond the tangible, real world exists a hidden, ideal world which is not directly perceptible. At the time, such a concept implied that the way things "are" is not necessarily the way they "ought" to be. It provided a framework for a vision of a universe more atuned to nature and to its spiritual source. As Auguste Viatte has pointed out, perhaps there was need to restore mystery in a society bored with itself and desirous of experiencing anything new.¹ For Villiers in the second half of the nineteenth century, his ideal vision developed from an overt skepticism that went so far as to doubt man's capacity to attain Utopia in this world. Disillusioned by the false hopes propagated by the post revolutionary political system and by the nineteenth century's faith in scientific progress, Villiers would seek an atemporal, apocalyptic time revealed in symbolic myths and legends, the source of all religious thought. Revelation of the ancient mysteries appeared as a citadel of hope for the disillusioned idealist as it had for prerevolutionary France on the edge of despair.

It is ironic but not surprising that interest in the occult had reemerged during the heyday of eighteenth century rationalism. The movement to establish secret societies based on freemasonry in France started in the early 1720's. "By the time the Revolution broke out in 1789 there were between six and seven hundred lodges in France, totalling about 30,000 members."² Obviously, the establishment of a 'counter-church' was a threat not only to the established Catholic Church but also to the political system of the "Ancien

Régime." Discovery of man's spiritual roots in religions more ancient than the Catholic Church succeeded in chipping away the authority of the monarchy that derived its supremacy from that religion.

For France at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the citadel of hope was based on inner religion as well as on a desire to communicate individually with the spiritual world. Ancient theosophy presented an answer, for it maintained that this communication was intuitively obtainable by man. The vision of an ideal world was resurrected; poets extolled the mystics and visionaries who sought union with the ideal; some, like Hugo, believed they themselves were in direct contact with the invisible forces of the beyond, while others became the interpreters of the cosmological archetypes and symbols of ancient myths. Based on the authority of the ancients, the "mages" of the esoteric societies claimed to reveal to their initiates the ancient secrets which had been handed down from the two primary sources: The Kabbalah and the Corpus Hermeticum.

The Kabbalah, the Hebrew word for tradition, was a series of writings produced by Jewish mystics between the second century and the Renaissance. The Kabbalah, therefore, is not a system, but rather a long and varied mystic tradition which attained its highest expression in thirteenth century Spain. The most important work was the Sepher na Zohar (The Book of Splendor) which was based on dialogues between Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai and his pupils in the second

century, with later commentaries added by Spanish Kabbalists during the Middle Ages.³ In the Zohar, the Torah is represented as having a literal meaning as well as a profound secret meaning. It is exoteric and esoteric, just as everything in the universe is both manifest and hidden. The oldest books were the Sefer Yetzirah (The Book of Creation) and the Book of Enoch.⁴

In the Book of Creation, the notion of sefiroth first appears. Sefiroth refers to the ten archetypal numbers which symbolize the divine aspects emanating from God. The Kabbalists always spoke of these attributes of God in symbolic terms because they considered that His being was not accessible to man's direct perception. The symbolic meaning set forth in the numbers of the Kabbalah are as follows:

. . . From one to five we have moved from the Macrocosm to the Microcosm, that is, from God to God made man; from five to ten we have moved from the Microcosm back to the Macrocosm, that is, from God made man to man who has returned to God. The circle which has thus been completed represents the beginning which contains within itself the end and the end which is also a beginning (cf. "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end"). The Hebrew letter Jod (Ten) appears on all Masonic rings, signifying the idea of God in man and man in God.⁵

Directly or indirectly almost all the writers or thinkers that had an impact on Villiers' philosophical formation were influenced by the Kabbalah. One of the fundamental concepts of kabbalist thought that Hegel and Eliphas Lévi would emphasize pertains to the universal law of opposites: from nothing came everything; from evil good-

ness can again be made manifest; from God incarnated in man comes man with a sacred mission to become one again with God. The writings of Jakob Boehme, perhaps one of the most influential mystics of Protestant theology, had been rediscovered by French occultists through the translations of Saint-Martin. Boehme had succeeded in reviving kabbalist cosmology while combining it with the Christian ideal of redemption and resurrection. Many of the writers whom Villiers admired such as Hugo, Blake, Lavater and Hegel had all been influenced by Boehme. Hegel was profoundly impressed by Boehme's view of the "struggle of contraries within God" and of creation as an emanation from nothingness -- an eternal desire to become manifest. According to Boehme, nothing can be known except through the contrast with its opposite. Villiers will utilize this concept to illustrate the manifestation of evil in his fantastic tale, "Claire Lenoir," in which he quotes Boehme. As in the case of so many of the authors that Villiers quotes, it is doubtful that Villiers had actually read any of Boehme's works. Yet Boehme's ideas were so well known that it was difficult for Villiers to ignore them.

Although tainted with personal views which often contradict the kabbalist theogony, Boehme and Hegel presented a view of the visible world whose essence derived from an invisible spiritual world -- a view which reiterated a fundamental aspect of the Kabbalah. Every human act was ultimately linked with cosmic myth. For Boehme, as for the new wave of mystico-socialists -- followers of Saint-Simon and of Fourier -- heaven and hell were made manifest on earth through

man's free will, either by choosing to develop the light from the Divine or by denying goodness and choosing to remain in the darkness of evil. "For each man is free, and he is like his own God."⁶

For Villiers, as for the Illuminist writers before him, man's dreams and the archetypes of his myths and cosmologies all had meaning. In the Zohar, the myth of creation is explained as follows: in the beginning, en-soph, the infinite, beginningless and uncreated pulled itself from its own hiddenness to create the ten sefiroth. Nothingness, the root of everything, had just been a previous aspect of the first sefiroth of God.. It is the inner-most mode of being of God, beyond which nothing is knowable. His hiddenness is, thus replaced by his unfolding in light. The ten sefiroth represent the ten branches of the tree of life, which is the source of creation. The first and highest is nothingness from which God unfolds into his male and female potencies. The first six serfiroth symbolize parts of the Primordial Man's body. The universe is, thus, likened to an enormous man in his purest form called Adam Kadmon. He is considered an androgynous first principle containing both male and female potencies.⁷

For the Kabbalists, as well as for Boehme and Villiers, the primordal unity of the universe was broken; the only true progress was to re-establish the divine unity from which all things emanated. Adam's fall into the material world severed his original androgynous and perfect state. For man to become divine again, he must re-establish divine fusion with his "soeur promise." The desire for the

absolute, a oneness with God or eternal being, became incarnated in the symbolic construct of the androgyn, or a mystical union of the male and female. For Villiers, the archetypes of the magus and the ideal woman will symbolize superior beings attempting to re-establish their unity of being or the hieros gamos. As Thomas Williams reminds us, "The symbolism of the hieros gamos -- of physical union with the divine -- touches on the most central experiences of the mystic: the deep longing of consciousness for reintegration into Being."⁸

Villiers probably had no direct knowledge of the Kabbalists until 1866 with his discovery of Eliphas Lévi's Dogme et rituel de la haute magie. Lévi attempted to reconcile occult magic and Christian beliefs and to present an occult system based on the Kabbalah. Unfortunately, Lévi's knowledge of the Kabbalists was based on fragmentary writings and on less than perfect translations. However, he knew Hebrew and read Khorr von Rosenroth's Kabbala Denudata.⁹ It is most likely that Villiers supplemented Lévi's presentation of kabbalist symbolism with Adolphe Franck's La Kabbale (1843) in preparation for writing "Claire Lenoir." It is also evident that Villiers tainted his interpretation of the Kabbalah with Hegel's conception of the identity of thought with the true being of God. This appears quite understandable since Franck also makes several references to Hegel and indicates the parallel between Hegel's idea of pure being and the kabbalist notion of the concentration of God into his own substance.¹⁰

Les Kabbalistes ont enseigné une doctrine assez semblable à celle que les métaphysiciens de l'Allemagne regardent aujourd'hui comme la plus grande gloire de notre temps, ils ont cru à l'identité absolue de la pensée et de l'existence; et par conséquent, le monde ne pouvait être à leurs yeux que l'expression des idées ou des formes absolues de l'intelligence: en un mot, ils nous laissent entrevoir ce que peut la réunion de Platon et de Spinoza."¹¹

In La Kabbale, Villiers would also find a justification of the evocative powers of the mind and of language to create the vision of an Ideal. "They (the Kabbalists) believed that all that emanates from the mind must manifest itself and become visible outside of it."¹² Angels, Villiers explains in "l'Annonciateur," are the manifestation of God's thoughts. "Efflux éternisés de la Nécessité divine, les Anges ne sont, en substance, que dans la libre sublimité des Cieux-absolus, où la réalité s'unifie avec l'idéal."¹³ There is no question, however, that Villiers' striking images and symbols of the magus and his power were inspired by Lévi. In addition to Franck, Hegel and Lévi, Villiers would delve into the occult myths and legends exposed in Collin de Plancy's Dictionnaire des Sciences Occultes and Légendes de l'Ancien Testament¹⁴ for the writing of "l'Annonciateur" and Eve future.

For modern interpreters of the Kabbalah in the nineteenth century the revelation of the divine to the world was a knowledge that only the poet-seer such as Orpheus or the initiates of occult wisdom possessed. The poet, like the man of genius, is an interpreter of either God's word or, at best, of the hidden message of

nature. The purpose of poetry, in Hugo's words, is to reveal that which is hidden.

Sous le monde réel, il existe un monde idéal qui se montre resplendissant à l'oeil de ceux que des méditations graves ont accoutumés à voir dans les choses plus que les choses . . . La poésie n'est pas dans la forme des idées mais dans les idées elles-mêmes. La poésie, c'est tout ce qu'il y a d'intime dans tout. 15

Villiers believed that he had a sacred mission to evoke the hidden, divine world to "les passants," as he referred to the rest of humanity. According to Mallarmé, Villiers was the incarnation of the poet-priest, "recherchant en soi la personnification d'un des types humains absolus."¹⁶ For Villiers, revelation of the divine was reserved for "les âmes élues" -- the poet or the magus. As is often the case in Hugo's writing, the magus is also a symbolic representation of the poet. In Hugo's poem, "les Mages," the poet is a prophet, the only true priest, chosen by God. Hugo had become interested in the Kabbalah through his meeting with Alexandre Weill, the Fourierist and Jewish philosopher of the Kabbalah. In Weill's l'Idéal (1854) the poet was also referred to as "l' élu du ciel." Hugo represents the poet-magus as a staircase by which humanity ascends towards God or a higher sphere of existence. Villiers also considered both the magus and the poet as mediators between the divine and humanity. Villiers expressed the sacred mission of artistic genius as ". . . l'expression suprême de l'Humanité, en sa plus haute acception; ils tiennent d'un monde supérieur, occulte, dont

ils attestent l'existence. Ce sont des missionnaires d'une vie ultérieure: ils avertissent; ils élèvent!"¹⁷ In his desire to reinstate the sacerdotal mission of the poet as cosmic interpreter, Villiers was, in fact, continuing the tradition of the Orphic poet whose sacred and revelatory mission had been heralded by the Illuminists such as Ballanche.

Pierre Simon Ballanche, one of the most important initiators of symbolic literature in the early part of the nineteenth century, would, with Saint-Martin, influence the thought and poetic vision of Baudelaire, Villiers' mentor. Both Ballanche and Saint-Martin viewed the history of man in terms of exile and atonement for one's sins. Man must perfect himself in order to re-establish the original divine sphere of unity from which he had been separated. For Baudelaire, deliverance from original sin appears only in death; the poet through his art can only revolt against the world as it exists. Ballanche proposes, on the other hand, a spiritual palingenesis.

For Villiers as for Ballanche, human progress could only be measured in terms of spiritual and moral progress. According to Ballanche, it was the man of genius, like Orpheus, the poet-priest, who, because of his vision, would lead humanity and initiate them to the mysteries, restoring the universal language and knowledge of the divine. In Book VII of "Orphée," Ballanche speaks of Prometheus from whom men had received "l'intelligence et la science . . . (et) que les dieux laissent à la nature le pouvoir de résister à l'homme;

moi, je lègue à l'homme la puissance de dompter l'aveugle nature, j'ai introduit sur la terre la loi du progrès."¹⁸

Villiers sees the sacred mission as a means to the poet's own salvation.

Le génie est devenu sa rédemption: il s'est transfiguré sous le sceptre de diamant du magicien sacré: sujet de l'intelligence idéale, il ne relève plus de la conscience hypocrite, changeante et diverse des hommes.¹⁹

Villiers will utilize the theme of the magus to represent the Promethean desire of his heroes who seek the Absolute. Tullia Fabriana in Isis and Samuel in Elën are both referred to as magus. Axël traces the spiritual itinerary of the young initiate, Axël, guided by the magus, Maître Janus. In their quest for the Absolute, his heroes must first perfect their soul by means of a spiritual palingenesis. Their aim is to become one with the divine, symbolized by the numbers, five to ten, in the Kabbalah. In "l'Annonciateur," Villiers presents Salomon, the "Roi-des-Mages," as a great seer who desires death in order to be reunited with God.

Le Mage n'est que par accident où il paraît être. Il ne connaît plus les désirs, les terreurs, les plaisirs, les colères, les peines. Il voit; il pénètre. Dispersé dans les formes infinies, lui seul est libre. Parvenu à ce degré suprême d'impersonnalité qui l'identifie à ce qu'il contemple, il vibre et s'irradie en la totalité des choses.²⁰

Salomon is referred to as "l'Elu magnifique du la Judée," "le Maçon du Seigneur," and "le Royal-Inspiré." He is not only the

Salomon of the "Cantique des Cantiques," but the founder of the masonic societies and the great thaumaturge described by Lévi. Lost in sublime dreams, he appears to listen to "les versets du Sépher, qui retracent la création du monde."²¹ As Drougard has pointed out, the references to the symbolism of the kiss of love and to "les dix rameaux de l'arbre Séphiriothal (sic)" are based on the Kabbalah.²² We might add that Salomon considers his life on earth as exile. Exile from God, is one of the central themes of the Zohar, which we will discuss in more detail in relation to the concept of the Shek-hinah.

Knowledge of the absolute, whether referred to as God or as "la lumière incréée," as Villiers and Lévi would say, was obtainable through intuition by "les élus" -- the poets who possessed a kind of inner vision of the cosmos. The poets and dreamers had the sacred mission to imagine and evoke the vision of the absolute for the rest of humanity that was blind of the hidden correspondence of all things. In a letter to Judith Gautier, Villiers wrote:

Les êtres divins, -- c'est-à-dire ceux qui prennent cette attitude intérieure tout naturellement, -- n'ont pas à se préoccuper du reste; et il n'y a pas d'autre grandeur intellectuelle que le tout puissant ennui sauvé par la vue de l'univers en général et de nos apparents semblables en particulier. Heureux donc les morts, comme nous, qui sommes irréveillables! même défunts.²³

It was often felt that the mysterious, hidden world revealed itself to the soul in one's dreams or after death. Lévi tells that behind every form is a veiled word; behind every word is a thought.

Villiers will consider thoughts, dreams, and words as a kind of a priori essence -- the only true reality.

For Villiers, Richard Wagner incarnated the poet-priest who could evoke the great vision through the universal and mystic language of music. In "l'Amour sublime," Villiers expressed the effect that Wagner's music had on the heroine of his story:

. . . Cette musique dont l'aile porte les intelligences bien nées vers ces régions suprêmes de l'Esprit qu'illumine la persistante notion de Dieu, -- d'une espérable immortalité en cette incréée "Lumière" où toute souffrance mortelle est oubliée.²⁴

Just as Pythagoras rendered the harmonious correspondence of heaven and earth through music, Wagner's music could speak directly to the soul. Music, for Villiers, was a symbolic language which could evoke without describing the essence of the sacred vision of "l'Idéal Eternel," which by definition was indescribable in finite terms.

Toute libre intelligence ayant le sens du sublime sait que le Génie pur est, essentiellement, silencieux, et que sa révélation rayonne plutôt dans ce qu'il sous-entend que dans ce qu'il exprime. En effet, lorsqu'il daigne apparaître, se rendre sensible aux autres esprits, il est contraint de s'amoindrir, pour passer dans l'Accessible. Sa première déchéance consiste d'abord à se servir de la parole, la parole ne pouvant jamais être qu'un très faible écho de sa pensée.²⁵

Mallarmé believed that the language of the poet could attain the same evocative powers as music and that Villiers incarnated the poet striving towards that end. The basis of Mallarmé's esthetic was to

reclaim that mysterious power for the poet's words contrary to Villiers' feeling of his own inadequacy to express the ineffable.

Toute chose sacrée et qui veut demeurer sacrée s'enveloppe de mystère. Les religions se retranchent à l'abri d'arcanes dévoilés au seul prédestiné: l'art a les siens. . . . J'ai souvent demandé pourquoi ce caractère nécessaire a été refusé à un seul art, au plus grand. Celui-là est sans mystère contre les curiosités hypocrites, sans terreur contre les impiétés, ou sous le sourire et la grimace de l'ignorant et de l'ennemi. Je parle de la poésie . . .26

The poet-priest became the interpreter of the cosmological allegories of creation, providing what Mallarmé called "l'explication orphique de la terre." Myth and legend belonged to the realm of the eternal, escaping the boundaries of time. Both Baudelaire and Wagner viewed myth as "la matière idéale du poète."²⁷

The Kabbalah, Eastern religious texts,²⁸ Celtic legends and Egyptian myths provided fertile ground, rich in mythical imagery, symbols and archetypes for Villiers to develop in his stories, plays and novels. It was the combined potency of these symbolic modes that Villiers admired in Wagner's operas.

La légende et le rêve s'imposent à force de relief et de symboles; la réalité devient oubliée et secondaire; on se sent enlevé de terre et emporté, dans les régions de l'idéal, sur des ailes de musique, de flamme et d'espérance. Et lorsque cette phrase de la demande interdite se précise tout à coup, par deux fois, Lohengrin est passé dans l'intelligence comme une personnalité surnaturelle qu'on ne discute plus, à force d'admiration.²⁹

Villiers will resurrect the occult concept of the redemption of woman by means of a mystic union. One of the great mysteries of

Eastern askesis, or fusion with the identity of God or oneness of Being, was assimilated into the feminine mysteries of the West, particularly, in the Orphic and Isisiatic mysteries, Celtic cosmology, the mysticism of the Cathars, and in the symbolism of the Manichaeian and Gnostic sects. Union of the masculine and the feminine became tantamount to participating in the mystical union of the primordial, androgynous Godhead.

Villiers' heroes, defenders of a rigorous idealism, seek union with the ideal woman, attempting to re-establish the primordial union of the androgyn. Villiers defines a major theme of his visionary writing in "l'Amour sublime" in which his two lovers only speak of "'idéalités', de surexistence par delà le trépas, d'unions futures, de nuptiales fusions célestes. -- ou de choses d'un art très élevé, . . ."³⁰ In early kabbalist texts, the separation of the male and female aspects of God occurred because of human sin. Adam's sin was to see the last sefirah, the Shekhinah, a symbolic representation of a lower form of the female principle, and mistake it for the whole of the Godhead. The Shekhinah, which seemed to represent everything, is also represented symbolically as the dwelling place of the soul. Thus, man shattered the original unity of the Godhead by seeking only one of God's aspects represented in the female. The Shekhinah is symbolized in mythical terms as representing man's exile from God and in cosmic terms as the moon which is reduced to only a lightless receiver of light. "The reunion of God and His Shekhinah constitutes the meaning of redemption. In this state

again seen in purely mythical terms, the masculine and feminine are carried back to their original unity, and in this uninterrupted union of the two powers of generation will once again flow unimpeded through all the worlds."³¹

The theme of the ideal woman is raised practically to an obsession in Villiers' works. The haunting memory of the "femme éternelle" is incarnated in his feminine heroines: Isis, Elën, Eve and Sara. These archetypes of myth and religious history are manifestations of the different aspects of the Great Mother Archetype: redeeming virgin, vengeful and powerful mother, devouring vampire and whore. As in the case of Nerval's feminine characters, the eternal feminine is known by many names, but her origins are in the Egyptian myth of Isis revealed in the Corpus Hermeticum.

The Corpus Hermeticum, a series of theosophical Egyptian writings from the third century A.D., were supposedly written by Hermes Trismegistos.³² Hermes is the Greek name for the Egyptian God, Thoth, the guardian of knowledge, writing, and the arts. Words were magic since they were the clues to all religious mysteries. The hermetic tradition was preserved by the writers of Alexandria who believed that the Egyptian myths contained the hidden meaning of divine revelation. If the meanings of these myths could be deciphered, the mystery of creation would become known. The hermetic writings were thus placed under the protection of Hermes Trismegistos, god of knowledge and seeker of truth. Hermes-Thoth was the inventor of the alphabet. As in the Kabbalist tradition, "the basis of absolute hieroglyphical science was an alphabet in which deities

were represented by letters, letters represented ideas, ideas were convertible into numbers, and numbers were perfect signs. This hieroglyphical alphabet was the great secret which Moses enshrined in his Kabbalah."³³

Hermes interprets the myth of the Egyptian Goddess, Isis, as a parable of creation. "The original light is Nous the Father, in which all forms exist. His son, the Verb, or logos, was begotten by the hermaphroditic Father who had separated himself into his male and female parts."³⁴ Light, the force of the universe, creates a Demiurge who in turn creates seven "Governors" which are the planets. The Demiurge also produces a Celestial Man in his own image. The Man moves through air and fire, but upon seeing his own image reflected in the waters he falls in love with it and becomes ordinary man.³⁵ Man, must now seek to attain his original divine state by perfecting his soul -- freeing himself from his attachments to his own being and to his desires.

During the Hellenistic age, studies on astrology, alchemy, medicine and magic were attributed to Hermes. The main principles set forth were: the universe is a unity; all things are thus interdependent; balance is maintained by the law of opposites.

A religious movement known as gnosticism from the Greek word meaning "knowledge," was begun at the time of the early Christian Church. These early mystics included many Hebrew writers who utilized the teachings of the early Kabbalists, Platonic philosophy as well as the Corpus Hermeticum.

Gnosticism saw a revival in Spain in the fifteenth century with the Jewish Kabbalists and a group called the Alumbrados. In Germany during the sixteenth century, many Gnostic ideas were incorporated in the secret initiations of the Rosicrucian and Freemason movements. In these sects the "title 'Magus' is used to refer to someone who has become illuminated."³⁶ The term comes from the name of one of the first Jewish gnostics, Simon Magus, who believed he obtained magical power from God.

Certain conceptions of Gnostic theology were to influence Goethe, Novalis, Hegel and, ultimately, Villiers. From the beginning of his career Villiers was profoundly influenced by Goethe's Faust as well as the philosophical idealism which he discovered in Hegel. Basically, the Gnostics believed that the unconscious part of man is one and the same with God, but because of man's falling away from God, the unconscious is beyond the comprehension of ordinary man. Man's ultimate destiny is revealed to him only by intuition, as opposed to divine grace or by study of the Scriptures. The world which is dominated by evil forces cannot be the creation of God. God is viewed as an eternal and highly abstract principle of good. Good spirits emanate from God and are symbolized as light. In a corresponding manner, men are divided according to their spiritual, psychic or material natures.³⁷

For Baudelaire and for Villiers, the creation was considered the materialization of God and was intrinsically linked to evil. Baudelaire expressed it as follows: "Qu'est-ce que la chute? Si

c'est l'unité devenue dualité, c'est Dieu qui a chuté. En d'autres termes, la création ne serait-elle pas la chute de Dieu?"³⁸ Evil was a falling away from God, or unity, and was symbolized by multiplicity or duality. As in all occult traditions, the first two principles are conceived to be in eternal opposition. The fall from unity towards mutiplicity was our original fall. Man can only rejoin the unity of God in search of the absolute.

The chain of being in Pythagoras ends with number symbolism to which Balzac and Hugo refer and which Baudelaire resumes:

Tout est nombre. Le nombre est dans tout. Le nombre est dans l'individu. L'ivresse est un nombre.³⁹

Significantly, Villiers will refer to Tribulat Bonhomet, the incarnation of all that was mediocre and evil in the nineteenth century, as "une nombreuse personne" in order to underscore the ubiquity of this modern day archetype. In the case of the magus -- Isis, Salomon, and Axël -- it is a fused identity or unity that is sought. The medium, Sowana, speaks of the fusion of her soul with that of the andréïde, Hadaly, in Eve future: "Elle existe de l'état supérieur où je me trouve en ce moment: elle est imbue de nos deux volontés s'unifiant en elle: c'est UNE dualité. . ." ⁴⁰

Besides, Boehme, the person who most dramatically depicted the duality between heaven and earth, the visible and the invisible, the inner and outer man was Swedenborg. Swedenborg provided impetus for romantic writers to resurrect the theme of the duality of man.

It seemed to follow that if there was spiritual reality and a natural reality, there was also an internal as well as an external man in each of us.

According to Jacques Roos, Swedenborg, the Swedish seer, and Jakob Boehme, the cobbler from Görlitz "se partagent la gloire d'avoir fourni à presque tous les fondateurs de sectes les éléments constitutifs de leur enseignements."⁴¹ Swedenborg's vision of the divine world succeeded in concretizing by means of symbols the hidden reality behind God's word. He provided a vocabulary for the romantic mind avid to explore man's inner being and his spiritual needs which had been neglected in the search to improve his outer reality. Swedenborg had a divine revelation in which he conversed with angels who revealed the hidden meaning of the universe to him. His vision revealed that all of natural creation is the manifestation of the spirit emanating from God. God communicates to man through "correspondences," that is to say, by analogy between the natural world and the spirit world.

In a word, all things that have existence in nature, from the least to the greatest thereof, are correspondences because the natural world with all things in it springs forth and subsists from the spiritual world, and both worlds from the Divine.⁴²

Swedenborg's idea of the correspondence between the here and now and God was perhaps the cause of Hugo's visionary optimism in his poem "Les Mages," in which he celebrates God through the glory of his creation.

C'est Dieu qui remplit tout. Le monde, c'est son temple.
 Oeuvre vivante, où tout l'écoute et le contemple.
 Tout lui parle et le chante. Il est seul, il est un!
 Dans sa création tout est joie et sourire.
 L'étoile qui regarde et la fleur qui respire.
 Tout est flamme et parfum!⁴³

As Viatte points out, abbé Constant's (Eliphas Lévi) poem, "Les Correspondances," in Trois Harmonies (1884) is similar to Hugo's poem. In Lévi's poem we read:

Formé de visibles paroles,
 Ce monde est le songe de Dieu;
 Son verbe en choisit les symboles,
 L'esprit les remplit de son feu.

 C'est là que lisent les prophètes;
 Et ceux dont les yeux sont ouverts
 Sont eux-mêmes les interprètes
 De l'énigme de l'univers.⁴⁴

Pommier will consider Lévi's poems as an influence on Baudelaire's poem of the same title. Hugo's God is manifest in the universe, whereas Baudelaire envisions the universe as an inverted mirror image of the divine which survives through memory and imagination much as Lévi had and as Villiers will. The first stanza of Baudelaire's poem, however, does reflect the Swedenborgian idea of nature being an allegory of what is above.

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
 Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
 L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
 Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.⁴⁵

Much as in Plato's cave myth, Swedenborg believed that the material world was only a reflected image of the spiritual world. The part of creation which is invisible to man has a hierarchy of angels living in kingdoms or spheres which lead by degrees towards God. That part of the creation, being divine, is indecipherable to mere mortals. The divine can only be revealed to man by symbols which he no longer can interpret due to his gradual falling away from God. According to Swedenborg, however, primordial man was capable of receiving the word of God during a Golden Age of divine communication through correspondence.

Swedenborg's idea of the universe having the form of a "giant man" closely resembles the Kabbalists, whose writings Swedenborg was familiar with.⁴⁶ Similarly, man became the microcosm which corresponded to the universe or the macrocosm, as in the Renaissance.

Although most of Swedenborg's thoughts were not original, as Emerson and Blake had pointed out, the majority of writers during the romantic period were "prêts à vanter un Visionnaire qui démontre si bien la possibilité de relations avec le monde surnaturel."⁴⁷ By means of universal correspondence man is once more linked by his actions to the spiritual world.

. . . So that man might be a medium uniting the Divine with the world of nature, and uniting the world of nature with the Divine, that thus, through man, as through the uniting medium, the very ultimate of nature might live from the Divine, which would be the case had man lived according to the Divine Order.⁴⁸

Thus, Swedenborg provided the promise that through knowledge of correspondences man could reestablish Divine harmony.

Raitt has asserted that the term correspondence was not utilized by Villiers until 1880 and that he seemed to ignore Swedenborg's theory of correspondence, popularized by Balzac and Baudelaire. We find, on the contrary, that as early as 1861 at the writing of Isis Villiers did, in fact, make use of the term to describe a cosmic vision of the magus, Tullia Fabriana:

Je méditais sur la correspondance de l'Universel, du Particulier et de l'Individuel avec l'Identité, la Différence et la Raison d'être, antérieurement présupposées et reconstituées en moi par l'Esprit. J'étais plongée dans l'Abstraction visionnaire, . . ."49

It is also true that Villiers used the term "correspondence" on several occasions to describe the analogy between human vice and the ferocity of animals or malignancy in the plant world.⁵⁰ According to Raitt,

C'est quelquefois le sens qui correspond à l'analogie universelle des fouriéristes, qu'on retrouve chez Baudelaire, mais Villiers fait aussi un usage hétérodoxe du mot qui n'a rien à voir ni avec Swedenborg, ni avec Fourier, ni avec Baudelaire. Dans ce sens, Villiers emploie 'correspondance' presque comme synonyme de 'prémonition', pour désigner un concours d'objets ou d'incidents qui préfigure d'une manière surnaturelle les événements futurs.⁵¹

The use of the term in this sense is the basis of Villiers' "Intersigne," in which the protagonist has a nightmare that is, in

fact, a premonition of his friend's death. The term "intersigne" in Brittany refers to dreams or omens which announce a forthcoming death.

The notion of correspondence between reality and premonitory dreams was not alien to Swedenborg who foresaw many events in dreams, or to Balzac's Louis Lambert had the gift of second sight and was capable of displacing himself in time and space. Villiers appears to have confused Balzac's often incorrect elaboration of Swedenborg's ideas with Lévi's idea of "astral light." According to Lévi, astral light was a type of primordial light which acted as a vehicle for ideas and a mirror of imagination and dreams.

The science of Joseph was none other than a comprehension of the natural analogies which subsist between ideas and images, or between the word and its symbol. He knew that the soul, when immersed by sleep in the Astral Light, perceives the reflection of its most secret thoughts and even of its presentiments; he knew further that the art of translating the hieroglyphics of sleep is the key of universal lucidity, seeing that all intelligent beings have revelations in dreams.⁵²

Lévi also equates Mesmer's discovery of magnetism with the power found in astral light.

Mesmer (1734-1815), the Austrian physician and translator of Jakob Boehme, developed the theory of "animal magnetism" to explain the physical phenomena of the visionary. In his book De planetarum Influxu, Mesmer refers to magnetism as the "universal fluid" which could influence other bodies. Mesmer's discovery was greeted with much enthusiasm by those who viewed such powers as a demonstration

of occult powers. Magnetism and somnambulism tended to give credence to the unknown occult forces of the universe. It also enabled man to exert some control over the invisible world. It was the concrete proof of the existence of the soul which the mystics of the day had been looking for.

Villiers was probably familiar with Mesmer's concepts through Lévi's Dogme et rituel de la haute magie and Henri Delaage's books. Lévi interpreted magnetism to be the secret power of the magus or the Astral Light. Each person is double: one aspect is manifest in the visible world; the other is invisible but appears as a spiritual aura. The astral body is the reflection of the visible body and manifests itself in visions, in phenomena of second sight and can often survive after the death of the material body as a spirit. Villiers would utilize these concepts in "Claire Lenoir" and in Eve future to illustrate the manifestation of occult forces. Villiers uses Lévi's concept of astral light to explain the manifestation of an image on Claire's eyes and the correspondence between Lenoir's soul and that of a vampire. It enabled Villiers to provide a rational illustration of man's dual nature. Villiers would also find the theme of the duality of man elaborated in the works of Balzac, Nerval, Hugo, and the Swiss mystic and physiologist, Jean Lavater, all of whom had been influenced by Swendenborg. Baudelaire had also described the duality of man's aspirations in a fashion similar to Boehme.

Il y a dans tout homme, à toute heure, deux postulations simultanées, l'une vers Dieu, l'autre vers Satan. L'invocation à Dieu, ou spiritualité, est un désir de monter en grade; celle de Satan, ou animalité est une joie de descendre. C'est à cette dernière que doivent être rapportés les amours pour les femmes et les conversations intimes avec les animaux, chiens, chats, etc. . .53

In discussing the influence Baudelaire had on the young Villiers, it is also important to point out some of the divergent attitudes which separate their work. Baudelaire's inspiration derives principally from the physical world, revealing a sensuality that is alien to Villiers. Baudelaire finds it difficult to separate love of women and evil which is also expressed by erotic sadomasochism. Villiers posits a world which is principally derived from the psyche. He attempts to purify the material world, condemns passion and all that is sensual. Love is mainly intellectualized in Platonic relationships and spiritualized in death.

As with many Neo-Platonists of the romantic and illuminist era, Villiers' idealists will see the correspondence between the beloved's beauty and the lost Ideal. Villiers had occasion to read Baudelaire's article on Gautier in which Baudelaire explains his esthetic theory in terms of a correspondence between terrestrial beauty and heaven.

C'est cet admirable, cet immortel instinct du Beau qui nous fait considérer la Terre et ses spectacles comme un aperçu, comme une correspondance du Ciel. La soif insatiable de tout ce qui est au delà, et que révéla la vie, est la preuve la plus vivante de notre immortalité.54

In this same article, Baudelaire distinguishes several aspects in Gautier's writing that Villiers would adopt: a mysterious delicacy, an orientalism evoked through the mysterious awareness of the cult of woman, and a profound sense of the sacred nature of "le verbe." The "Word" itself is sacred and the poet who tries to translate the universal analogy by means of symbols and metaphor participates in a type of evocative witchcraft.

Il y a dans le mot, dans le verbe, quelque chose de sacré qui nous défend d'en faire un jeu de hasard. Manier savamment une langue, c'est pratiquer une espèce de sorcellerie évocatoire. C'est alors que la couleur parle, comme une voix profonde et vibrante; que les monuments se dressent et font saillie sur l'espace profond; que les animaux et les plantes, représentants du laid et du mal articulent leur grimace non équivoque; que le parfum provoque la pensée et le souvenir correspondants; que la passion murmure ou rugit son langage éternellement semblable.⁵⁵

It is not hard to see why Balzac, Nerval, Baudelaire and the symbolist poets would espouse many of Swedenborg's ideas which coincided with their view of the poet as "voyant," "mage" and "le déchiffreur des hieroglyphes." It is doubtful, however, that Villiers had actually read any of Swedenborg's works; his notions concerning the Swedish mystic were generally filtered through Balzac and Baudelaire. Balzac, in particular, was inspired by the transcendental themes of Swedenborg and was one of the first to successfully utilize the illuminist themes in literature in his three books which compose his Livre Mystique: "Louis Lambert," "Séraphîta" and "Les Proscrits," published together in 1835.

Although some of Swedenborg's works had been translated into French around 1770, Balzac probably was familiar with the abridged edition of Daillant de la Touche published in 1788.⁵⁶ Moët's complete translation of Le Ciel et L'Enfer did not appear until 1820. It is important to consider Balzac's contribution to the understanding of the visionary's spiritual quest as depicted in his Livre Mystique; for it is certainly through Balzac that Villiers came to realize the one of the fundamental aspects of quest -- the mastery of will.

Baudelaire had also recognized Balzac not only as "a passionate visionary," but also as "le théoricien de la volonté, ce jumeau spirituel de Louis Lambert."⁵⁷ Louis, the seer, and the narrator of the story, are called "le Poète et Pythagore" by their classmates. The entire story is based on Swedenborg's theory of external and internal man. Heaven is seen as the place where man's perfected faculties survive, where the interior being attains eternal life. Louis believes in the materiality and the power of thought, but it is this power of the mind that will ultimately destroy him. He cultivates the inner man at the expense of his physical being. Through the power of his will he develops second sight, recreates the past, foresees the future, and breaks the barriers of space as well as time. Louis eventually goes mad on the eve of his wedding day. "Enfin, peut-être a-t-il vu dans les plaisirs de son mariage un obstacle à la perfection de ses sens intérieurs et à son vol à travers les Mondes Spirituels."⁵⁸ Louis, the seer, and the narrator,

who represents the worldly artist, are symbolic representations of the dual aspects of Balzac's personality: the mystic and the artist. Louis Lambert represents the seer's inability to live in this world. Thus, the alchemist of thought, the seer, in Balzac is destroyed while the poet lives to create.

In Les Proscrits (The Exiled) Balzac describes three types of visionaries that will also characterize Villiers' visionaries. Doctor Sigier, teacher of mystical theology at the Sorbonne during the Middle Ages, also engages in the study of the occult. He attains illumination through knowledge and represents the Philosopher-Seer. In his lectures, Dr. Sigier depicts man as a being who is constantly reaching out towards the Infinite which always eludes him. However, there exists a hierarchy of spheres or levels of spirituality leading to God which man can traverse by faith. The second "illuminé" is Godefroid, a gentle young boy who is a born seer. Intuitively, Godefroid remembers his "vie antérieure" and is filled with nostalgia. He, too, is in exile and sees the world as his prison. The third "proscrit" and seer is the poet, Dante, exiled from Florence. He is enlightened to the mystical ways of the universe neither through philosophy nor through grace but through his poetic imagination. All three illuminists attained a superior type of existence, although the poet's way was clearly preferred by Balzac. As he says in the beginning, ". . . il s'agit de donner à l'homme des ailes pour pénétrer dans le sanctuaire où Dieu se cache à nos regards."⁵⁹

Early on in his career Villiers appears to incarnate the philosopher-seer. His interest in Hegel's philosophy and occultism are compatible modes in his mind. He subsequently reconciles them with faith (which he often referred to as "hope"). We are also reminded of his statement that philosophy and poetry were the same thing in his mind. His idealists, whether sensitive, young noblemen or lovers, magi such as Isis or Salomon, or poets, all feel exiled and seek detachment from their earthly prison. They intuitively are aware of their previous ideal state as is the "born seer." The vision of a union in the beyond, of an eternal "rendez-vous," is an integral part of the Villiers' compensatory dream incarnated by the poet, Dante.

Et, depuis, grandi par le souvenir de cette Béatrice, je sens toujours, au fond de mes prunelles, ce mystique regard, pareil sans doute à celui qui, tout chargé d'exil d'ici-bas, remplit à jamais de l'ardeur nostalgique du Ciel les yeux de Dante Alighieri.⁶⁰

One of the most poetically suggestive presentations of the mystic fusion of the male and female also occurs in Balzac's "Séraphita." Séraphita-Séraphitus, is a divine being, an androgyn, who is loved by two young people, Minna and Wilfred. Their worldly love is not sufficient to retain Séraphita's desire to attain the ultimate sphere of divine love. Séraphitus' knowledge and spiritual conviction represent a masculine force to Minna which gives her the strength to transcend her earthly envelope. Wilfred, on the other hand, will receive a glimpse of the spiritual Absolute through the feminine

forces of love and faith that he sees in Séraphîta. The androgyn must detach herself from all earthly bonds and seeks divinity in death. Séraphîta bids goodbye to Wilfred with these words: "N'est-ce pas aller au delà de l'AIMER des hommes que de se sacrifier complètement au bonheur de celle qu'on aime?"⁶¹

We are in the spiritualized world of Villiers as revealed in the words of Axël:

L'homme n'emporte dans la mort que ce qu'il renonça de possé dans la vie. En vérité -- nous ne laissons ici qu'une écorce vide.⁶²

Death loses its finality. It becomes a higher form of life for those who have purified their spirit. We are reminded that Swedenborg asserted, ". . . that once free of the body, the soul would live a life free beyond imagination."⁶³

A new element is introduced, contemplation of an ideal world no longer suffices. The aim of the visionary is no longer just "to see" or "to know" the ideal but to actively seek integration with pure being. The hidden desire which has been alluded to, but which few had so clearly revealed as Villiers, was the desire for death.

CHAPTER IV FOOTNOTES

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- 23 Villiers, Correspondance générale, I:181.
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- 25 Ibid., XI:99.
- 26 Mallarmé, "L'art pour Tous," Oeuvres complètes, p. 257-258.
- 27 Pierre Albouy, Mythes et Mythologies dans la littérature française (Paris: Armand Collin, 1969) p. 103.
- 28 According to Gwendolyn Bays, "Within the brief space of about thirty years (1771-1800) many of the important works of Hinduism and Zoroastrianism were made available to the literary and scholarly world through manuscripts brought from India." (Bays, Orphic Vision, p. 31.) Poetry and important myths were also being translated from Persian and Sanskrit for the first time. With the archeological discoveries of the Napoleonic armies in Egypt, the Illuminists of the nineteenth century became interested in Egyptian cosmology and deciphering the secrets of the ancient hieroglyphics. Ballanche who considered the Orient as "notre berceau cosmogonique et intellectuel," was instrumental in popularizing Oriental themes among the romantic poets such as, Lamartine, Leconte de Lisle, Gautier, and Hugo. Villiers will also be influenced by the "Culte de l'Orient," particularly, Leconte de Lisle's poem, "Bhagavat." In "Bhagavat" the divine is referred to as "l'Abstraction suprême" and "l'Ame des âmes"; the universe is created by means of His dreams. (Leconte de Lisle, Poésies complètes (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1927), p. 9 and p. 57. Villiers will present a similar view of God in Isis and "l'Annonciateur."
- 29 A.W. Raitt, "Lohengrin, raconté par Villiers de l'Isle-Adam," Revue de Sciences Humaines (juillet 1956), p. 308.
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- 32 The name, Trismegistos, means the thrice greatest. The guardian of the three magic powers becomes the antithesis of God the trinitarian for Baudelaire in the first poem, "Au Lecteur," in Les Fleurs du mal.
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- 51 Raitt, Mouvement symboliste, p. 209.

- 52 Lévi, History of Magic, p. 81.
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- 54 Ibid., p. 686.
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- 59 Ibid., XVI:431.
- 60 Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, "L'Amour Suprême," Contes et Récits, ed. Jacques Chupeau (Paris: Bordas, 1970), p. 221.
- 61 Balzac, Oeuvres complètes, XVI:691.
- 62 Axël, p. 253.
- 63 Toksvig, Swedenborg, p. 233.

CHAPTER V

THE PROMETHEAN MODE

Visionary and philosophical contemplation of the ideal will not satisfy the heroic idealists who actively seek the realization of their ideal in this world or who seek to discover the mystery of the beyond. Villiers makes a distinction between how the poet and the magus obtain awareness of the Absolute. While illumination or gnosis for the poet is obtained through intuition, the magus and Villiers' Celtic heroes from another age must challenge known laws of nature, seeking divinity by perfecting their inner soul and by facing obstacles which must be overcome. The obstacles present themselves generally as symbolic incarnations of the hero's own desires, the chains that bind him to his terrestrial prison: erotic love, earthly wealth, and, eventually, his instinctual desire to live. He must become Hegel's "surhomme," seeking an identity with non-being.

The Promethean desire of Villiers' idealistic heroes to obtain the Absolute is represented by the theme of the magus. Villiers will present the magus as the active creator of his own redemption. He will study the occult arts, learn to control the forces of astral light or magnetism: he will sacrifice himself to his ideal. He will become both magus and saint.

Much of Villiers' description of the magus is based on Lévi's Dogme et rituel de la haute magie, in which Lévi attempts to show the similarity between the kabbalist idea of man seeking his primordial divine state and Christian redemption. According to Lévi, Catholic morality was not inhuman but superhuman. "L'homme, devenu Créateur, à l'instar de Dieu, sera l'ouvrier de son développement moral et l'auteur de son immortalité glorieuse."¹ The magus' desire to attain perfection is not incongruous with the teachings of Christ. As in the case of the majority of Illuminist writers such as Ballanche, Fabre d'Olivet, and Fourier, Lévi compares Christ's suffering with that of Prometheus. The sins of Satan, Eve and Prometheus of attempting to rival with the divine are expiated by arduous trials, suffering and ascetic discipline. For Lévi, human liberty, as symbolized by the revolt of Lucifer, is an active force which shows man the way to free himself from his enslavement; for without the revolt of Lucifer, the idea of liberty could not confront destiny. As in Hugo's La Fin de Satan, the theory of palingenesis or of being reborn again will provide new hope that redemption is possible. The example for humanity was set by the coming of Christ: "La Divinité rendue humaine avait pour oeuvre de rendre l'humanité divine."² At the heart of the illuminist and occult revival resounds the reaffirmation of man's individual power to recreate himself and the world around him, as evidenced by the words Faure had engraved on Fabre d'Olivet's tomb: "Au sein des Immortels, deviens un Dieu toi-même."³ It is the lesson that Maître Janus will

teach Axël. "Tu es ton futur créateur. Tu es un Dieu qui ne feint d'oublier sa toute-essence qu'afin d'en réaliser le rayonnement."⁴

The active pursuit of the Absolute by means of a spiritual palingenesis would vindicate for the Western world the right of attaining divinity through self-mastery much as the yoga does in the East. Basing his ideas on Ballanche's interpretation of palingenesis and Fabre d'Olivet's theory of "volonté," Lévi will interpret the mastery of the magus as an attempt to re-establish the equilibrium of opposing forces as symbolized by his theory of Astral Light. Astral Light was the great secret of magic, the fire which Prometheus stole from the gods. The power of Astral Light is the key to man's liberation and to his control of animals, the symbols of his passions. The properties of Astral Light are similar to the positive and negative flux of current, the masculine and the feminine, the forces of light and darkness. By developing his power the magus can oppose fatality, which Lévi refers to as the "necessity of things."⁵ Lévi quotes Ballanche:

Made subject in the first place to the influence of the elements, man's own influence must afterwards govern these. Creation is the act of a divine magism which is continuous and eternal. True being resides for man in self-knowledge. Responsibility is for him a conquest and the very penalty of sin is another occasion for victory. All life is founded on death, and palingenesis is the law of reparation.⁶

Palingenesis has its basis in the theory of metempsychosis, the transmigration of souls. Belief in a soul which separates itself

from the body exists in Buddhism and Hinduism, as well as in the Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries, the teachings of Pythagoras, and the writings of Pindar. According to Plato, the soul undergoes numerous reincarnations to purify itself and to free its divine essence so it may again return to the company of the gods. Pythagorean theories had become popular during the Renaissance and had also influenced the Kabbalists. We read in Franck's La Kabbale:

It is for the very purpose of reconciling liberty with the destiny of the soul and of giving man the means of expiating his faults without banishing him forever from the bosom of God, that the Kabbalists adopted and ennobled the Pythagorean dogma of metempsychosis . . . through many trials (they) must attain consciousness of themselves and of their origins.⁷

Fabre d'Olivet was one of the principal popularizers of Pythagorean themes in the nineteenth century. As a young seminarian at Saint-Sulpice, Eliphas Lévi (the abbé Constant) was required to study and meditate over Fabre d'Olivet's Les Vers dorés de Pythagore.⁸ Fabre d'Olivet was perhaps the most scholarly of all the revolutionary Illuminists.⁹ He spent over twenty years trying to synthesize all the knowledge accumulated by humanity. He not only studied Arabic, Hebrew, Greek and Chinese, but delved into the Bhagavad-Gita and the teachings of Zoroastre, Swedenborg, and Saint-Martin. In Les Vers dorés de Pythagore, published in 1813, Fabre d'Olivet explained the Pythagorean themes of metempsychosis, numerology and the purpose of the rituals of initiation according to the esoteric wisdom of the ancient Egyptians.

In Vers dorés, we read that the purpose of the ritual of initiation is to lift the weight of matter from man's soul so that it may be purified and be raised to the source of its existence. It is man's duty to fulfill his destiny by a series of successive metempsychoses.

Villiers will utilize the theory of metempsychosis in Isis to evoke the various reincarnations of the Eternal Feminine, the Egyptian goddess, Isis. In "l'Annonciateur," he will also refer to Salomon's previous existences to represent the magus' search for spiritual regeneration. When Azraël appears before Salomon, the latter becomes aware that he has lived before and describes his previous lives as tests of suffering and as obstacles which he had to overcome. He recalls the very beginning of creation when man was still in a divine state. "Son aspect actuel annonce qu'il est né en des âges plus anciens que l'heure de sa naissance terrestre."¹⁰

The personal myth that Villiers created about his destiny by virtue of race coincided with the occult doctrine of metempsychosis which also occurs in many Celtic myths. The dominant image of the heroic quest is characterized by the ritual of initiation. The image of a ritual of initiation provided a symbolic mode as well as a structure for his major works. Isis, Elën, Eve future, and Axël all trace the progressive illumination of his idealistic heroes in their spiritual journey towards the Absolute.

The ritual of initiation is characterized by the symbolic descent to the depths of non-being or death and ascent to a new mode

of being. It is a reenactment of the cyclical cosmological drama of birth, death and rebirth found in the Isis-Osiris myth and in the myth of Orpheus. The process symbolized not only the regeneration of the individual but also the change of seasons, the progressive stages of agriculture, and the spiritual development of the race from the beginning of creation. According to Mircea Eliade, the purpose of the ritual of initiation was to permit man to participate once again in sacred history so that he may become One again with the Gods.¹¹

For the Egyptians the descent back in time was often represented as a return to the dimensionless, uroboric unity of the primeval waters. The Book of The Dead describes these waters as existing "in the infinity, the nothingness, the nowhere and the dark."¹² It may be likened to the mystic's "dark night of the soul" or to Jung's description of the "collective unconscious," a primal state which precedes the affirmation of the individual consciousness. Villiers will describe Samuel's hallucination in Elën as a descent to the timeless waters. Samuel will traverse the waters of Hell with Maria, who is a symbolic incarnation of the archetype of the Virgin Mother. There were numerous other sources, in addition to Lévi and d'Olivet, that Villiers was familiar with and in which the symbolism of the ritual of initiation was described. Villiers had recommended Görres' Mystique to Baudelaire while at Solesmes. Görres' description of the emergence of "the new man" after the ritual of initiation is described in the chapter on Elën. Villiers had also read Plutarch's

Isis et Osiris which he quotes in Isis and Henri Delaage's Le Monde occulte ou mystères du magnétisme when writing Eve future. Delaage will also include a description of the Isiatic ritual and of Séthos in his Doctrines des sociétés secrètes which was published in 1852. Delaage, whom Villiers was eventually to meet at Nina de Villard's, had also shown the connection between magnetism and the truths revealed in ancient and modern initiation rites.

It is interesting to note that in September 1867, Mallarmé would describe his own spiritual crisis in a letter to Villiers in words that echo the description of the descent to the source of Being in Isis (Tullia's vision of the universal correspondence of all things which appears as a result of a concentrated effort of self-examination and the contemplation of suicide -- a descent to one's own underworld).

Ma pensée a été jusqu'à se penser elle-même et n'a plus la force d'évoquer en un Néant unique le vide désséminé en sa porosité. J'avais, à la faveur d'une grande sensibilité, compris la corrélation intime de la Poésie avec l'Univers, et, pour qu'elle fût pure, conçu le dessein de la sortir du rêve et du hasard et de la juxtaposer à la conception de l'univers. Malheureusement, âme organisée simplement pour la jouissance poétique, je n'ai pu, . . . comme vous, disposer d'un esprit. --et vous serez terrifié d'apprendre que je suis arrivé à l'idée de l'Univers par la seule sensation, (et que, par exemple, pour garder une notion ineffaçable du Néant pur, j'ai dû imposer à mon cerveau la sensation du vide absolu.) Le miroir qui m'a réfléchi l'Etre a été le plus souvent l'Horreur et vous devinez si j'expie cruellement ce diamant des Nuits innommées.¹³

The arduous journey of the initiate was a symbolic metaphor for Villiers who sought, like Mallarmé, to create "Le Grand Oeuvre." There is little doubt that for both Mallarmé, who had traversed the

dark night of the soul, and for Villiers, who had a similar but less devastating experience in 1863, the metaphor of the ritual of initiation had a deep personal meaning that surpassed several literary precedents which had utilized the theme to evoke an exotic décor.

The popularity of exotic tales, especially those based on the ritual of initiation and Oriental themes, was well established in eighteenth century literature. The abbé Terrasson had already summoned up the curiosity of his readers with the ritual of initiation based on the Egyptian myth of Isis. Prince Séthos, the hero of his tale, Séthos: Histoire ou Vie tirée des monuments, anecdotée de l'ancienne Egypte, published in 1731, must meet the challenge of fire, water, and the ivory door in the temple of Isis. In order to become a new man, endowed with antique knowledge and moral virtue, Séthos must first drink the potion of forgetfulness in order to be cleansed of the falsity he has learned from profane men. He must then take the potion of memory in order to receive the new wisdom. The success of abbé Terrasson's tale is attested to by the numerous editions which were published until the end of the century.¹⁴ Mozart would use Séthos as the basis of his opera, Die Zauberflöte (The Magic Flute), in which he presents the isiatric initiation ritual on the stage.

At the writing of Isis, Villiers was also inspired by Bulwer Lytton's Rosicrucian novel, Zanoni. Lytton was a close friend of Villiers' English relative, Frederick Villiers. Both Lytton and Lévi, the two writers whose works profoundly influenced Villiers,

were members of the Rosicrucian society. Villiers' use of the esoteric symbols of alchemy and the rose and the cross in Axël derive from the Rosicrucians whose doctrines were assimilated by the Freemasons.

The principal theories of the Rosicrucian society were based on German documents dating from the late sixteenth century, specifically the Fama Fraternitatis Rosae-Crucis. The Fama was followed by the Hermetic Romance or the Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkruz written by Johann Andreas. Andreas was spokesman for the fraternity that included many alchemists who were concerned with political, religious and Hermetic questions.¹⁵ Their theories were essentially derived from Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombast von Hohenheim), whom Villiers also mentions in a letter to Mallarmé. Paracelsus, (1493-1591), the Swiss mystic and physician, was truly a Promethean figure, seeking to cure men both through the power of science and through the powers of mind. For Paracelsus, as for the Rosicrucians who were inspired by his thoughts, man and the universe were one; man's aim was to obtain nature's secret which he expressed allegorically as the "philosopher's stone." It was a principle of wisdom on which to build the foundation of the philosopher's spiritual house. True alchemy was a symbolic process by which an element (including man) could be raised to a higher and purer state of existence, "by the living power of the Spirit."¹⁶ As Bettina Knapp remarks:

Alchemy is a Promethean act, an aggressive and active way of controlling what lies beyond man's capabilities -- the world of chance. . . Such goals were man's way of reducing

feelings of isolation and powerlessness and of escaping, at least through his imagination, from a world embedded in metaphysical anguish and physical wretchedness.¹⁷

Paracelsus had even described, in highly symbolic terms, the creation of the homunculus by alchemical means. The homunculus, in many respects, symbolizes the inner man, a creation of the higher mind. The process of its creation presents one of the greatest arcanum. The difficulty of creating the homunculus parallels the difficulty in attaining the philosopher's stone. There is much similarity between Paracelsus' symbolism of the homunculus and Villiers' artificial creation of the andréïde in Eve future. "For Paracelsus the homunculus (referred to by the Gnostics as "Anthropos" or "Divine Original Man") was capable of transcending the old divisions of time, space, birth, and death, and could unite with higher forms."¹⁸ In a similar manner, Villiers' andréïde is the creation of Ewald's higher mind. The andréïde also transcends the barriers of time and space; for she incarnates the first Eve and the future Eve. The interesting difference is that Villiers creates an ideal woman, the incarnation of Ewald's anima, or feminine half, and succeeds in representing two great mysteries -- that of Gnosis and of Eros as Goethe had done.

The alchemical process which describes the transmutation of base metals to gold also symbolized the creation of the new man with spiritual light for the initiates of the secret societies.

Paracelsus' ideas spread with the Rosicrucian movement which found impetus with the English theosophist, Robert Fludd. Fludd founded a Rosicrucian society in England which became the basis of Freemasonry in England and France. Rosicrucian societies had practically died out by the mid-eighteenth century, supplanted by the spread of the Martinists under Martines de Pasqually. Nevertheless, Rosicrucian doctrines and their symbolism had a profound influence on the initiation ritual for both the Martinists and the Freemasons, including the lodge of the Rose of Perfect Silence which several of Villiers' friends belonged to.

The desire to steal the fire of the gods, as Prometheus had done, or to create a new man endowed with antique powers, were desires which were tantamount to rivaling God's power. It was the power promised to the magus and to the initiates of the great mysteries. It was the power that the poet had to usurp, if he was to create. It was the power to accomplish the imitatio christi -- to show the way to redemption. The magus, the poet and the saint become one.

CHAPTER V FOOTNOTES

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CHAPTER VI

ISIS

The poet's first major attempt in prose was to combine both the philosophical message of Hegel and the visionary aspects of occultism in the composition of Isis (1862) in which the theme of the "mage" first appears. Villiers presents Isis as the great archetype of the Eternal Woman as well as a symbol of the magus.

Isis, the presiding goddess of all initiation rites in occult societies and the symbol of Gnosis in illuminist writings, is particularly significant for the Breton Villiers. According to Nerval, "...une statue de la même divinité (Isis) se voyait encore à Quenpilly, en Bretagne, il y a quelques années, et recevait les hommages de la population."¹

Isis, as the title infers, deals with the difficult path of initiation for the Princess Tullia Fabriana and the Count Wilhelm de Strally d'Anthas. Tullia Fabriana is both an initiator and an initiate herself. She is an exceptional woman in terms of beauty and power, with a commanding presence in the Florentine society of the late eighteenth century. Tullia Fabriana combines both a Stendhalian taste for energy and adventure in the political and historical process of Italy. She belongs to the nobility and possesses a Villierian purity of purpose. She possesses the magus' ascetic nature; she is characterized by her purity, intelligence and coldness.

Tullia Fabriana has all the attributes of the great and particularly of the adept of occult sciences. One might even say that she is the incarnation of Villiers' ideal of himself. Heads of state seek her support and the destiny of Italy depends in many respects on her. A type of samurai code in her family demands both a readiness for great action and a willingness to uphold one's convictions unto death. It is significant to note that Tullia, a symbol of the ideal woman and precursor of Sara in Axël, possesses a variety of masculine traits, an allusion to her proximity to the divine, which according occult definition is androgynous.

The plot, which traces Tullia's spiritual development, is loosely held together, being interrupted constantly by philosophical digressions and flash-backs to her previous lives. Her initiation or search for reintegration with Being involves Karmic expiation (metempsychosis) and an attempt to become one with Wilhem, her masculine counterpart. The story, which Villiers never completed, trails off in a sensual vision of the fusion of the two lovers.

The purpose of the novel appears to be an attempt to demonstrate the philosophical message of Hegel's idealism which posits the power of thought to perfect the individual. However, the poetically evocative elements in the novel derive primarily from the visionary symbols of occultism.

It is difficult to ascertain the exact occult sources Villiers had consulted, but certainly the literary milieu which he found in Paris must have had an influence on him since most of the writers

had an interest in the occult. It is possible that Villiers was already familiar with Lévi's writings at the time of Isis' composition in 1860-61. Yet, only a few sentences of a superficial nature indicate a direct knowledge of Lévi in Isis. The allusions to occult images are exceedingly vague. Tullia's "Bibliothèque inconnue" was saved by one of her ancestors who studied occult science, philology, the Kabbalah and toxicology. It is composed of religious books and commentaries of the forgotten science of Egypt.

There were, however, several possible literary sources such as Bulwer Lytton's Zanoni, Gautier's La Nuit de Cléopâtre and Le Roi Candaule, and Nerval's Voyage en Orient and Les Filles du Feu. As Drougard has shown, Villiers did read Zanoni from which he borrowed an epigraph and a quotation from Schiller of which he gave an erroneous rendering.² The occult theme of a fusion of love in death which is alluded to at the end of Isis is also the subject of Zanoni. Zanoni concerns two Rosicrucian adepts, Madjnour and Zanoni. The latter falls in love with Viola and uses his occult powers to win her back. Frightened by his magic, she manages to escape to Paris at the time of the Reign of Terror. Condemned to die at the guillotine, Viola is saved by Zanoni who dies in her place. At the moment of execution Viola dies and joins him in death. One may see, as Raitt does, the theme of the initiate abandoning his true vocation for love.³ One might also consider that through complete abandonment of self the initiate attains an even higher degree of perfection by virtue of his love.

Bulwer Lytton in his preface refers to four manias described by Plato:

Firstly, the musical; secondly, the telestic, or mystic; thirdly, the prophetic, and fourthly, that which belongs to Love.

One may suffice (especially that which belongs to Love) to lead the soul to its first divinity and happiness; but that there is an intimate union with them all; and that ordinary progress through which the soul ascends is, primarily, through the musical; next, through the telestic or mystic; thirdly, through the prophetic and lastly, through the enthusiasm of Love.⁴

One can see the parallel between the theme of love in Isis and Zanoni. However, since Villiers never finished his work it is difficult to say whether he considered Tullia guilty of abandoning the asceticism of the "mage" as in Elën or, if in fact, the joining of two souls can achieve the divine state of the Androgyn through mutual sacrifice as in Axël.

The second influence that can be seen in Isis is a particular ideal of beauty that was common to both Gautier and Nerval. Georges Poulet aptly refers to it as "l'homogénéité historique d'une certaine façon de rêver."⁵ Villiers says of Tullia Fabriana: "Il est difficile de se figurer une femme plus belle. C'est une blonde, avec un teint blanc comme cette statue; des yeux noirs d'une expression admirable!"⁶ Poulet has already shown the importance of "la blonde aux yeux noirs" for both Nerval and Gautier. In addition, Tullia Fabriana possesses the Oriental beauty of Gautier's Cleopatra and

Nerval's "Reine de Saba," the enchantress of Salomon and archetype of the amazon.⁷

Villiers leads us to believe that Tullia was, in fact, Cleopatra in her former life. Gautier had already compared Cleopatra's beauty to the goddess Isis.⁸ In Gautier's story, Meïamoun falls in love with Cleopatra and is permitted to spend one night with the Queen in exchange for his life. Their night together has the poetic enchantment of a vision as in Isis and Elën. When the night is over the young man drinks poison that will end his life. "Cléopâtre baissa la tête, et dans sa coupe une larme brûlante, la seule qu'elle ait versée de sa vie, alla rejoindre la perle fondue."⁹ Tullia, in prayer before the crucifix which is placed next to the image of the Madonna, lets escape "deux larmes, les deux premières qu'elle versait dans la Vie, coulèrent le long de son visage."¹⁰ Cleopatra will never know again the innocent love which Meïamoun felt for her, while Tullia will leave the symbols of Christianity, never to return again.

There are several striking similarities in the exotic décor of Villiers' and Gautier's stories. As Drougard has shown, Tullia's salon is similar to Cleopatra's as well as to the Roi Candaule's.¹¹ Much of the supernatural magic described in Isis can also be found in Le Roi Candaule. In Gautier's story "Les statues de basalte remuaient les yeux et ricanaient hideusement."¹² While Wilhelm de Strally, transported as in a vision, sees the Caryatids move their terrible eyes, Nyssia, Candaule's wife, possesses a magic stone and

is a clairvoyant as is Tullia. Nyssia is the veiled Queen who has her husband killed for having permitted another to see her without her veil, defiling her purity by revealing her beauty to the public. One can see that she is yet another manifestation of Isis, the veiled Queen, in Gautier's mind.

For Nerval, in particular, the goddess Isis plays an important role resuming all the qualities of the ideal woman from the Reine de Saba to the Virgin Mary. She is the patron saint of his personal initiation to love from Sylvie to Aurélia. At the beginning of chapter four of "Isis" in Les Filles du Feu, Nerval describes the various manifestations of Isis.

Cette éternelle Nature, que Lucrèce, le matérialiste, invoquait lui-même sous le nom de Vénus Céleste, a été préférentiellement nommée Cybèle par Julien, Uranie ou Cérés par Plotin, Proclus et Prophyre; Apulée, lui donnant tous ces noms, l'appelle plus volontiers Isis; c'est l'identité primitive de cette reine du ciel, aux attributs divers, au masque changeant!¹³

Nerval also speaks of the Egyptian lodges that Cagliostro and his wife established under the auspices of the symbol of Isis. In "Les Femmes de Caire" in Voyage en Orient, Nerval based his description of the initiation rites in the temple of Isis on Séthos and was inspired as well by Mozart's "The Magic Flute" and Apuleius' L'Ane d'or.

A common source which both Nerval and Villiers read was Plutarch's Isis et Osiris of which several translations existed. In

Plutarch we read that on the temple of Saïs the following inscription was engraved: "Je suis tout ce qui a été, tout ce qui est et tout ce qui sera, et mon voile, jamais aucun mortel ne l'a encore soulevé."¹⁴ We find practically the same wording in Villiers. "Les prêtres, dans les temples d'Egypte, auprès de ton image, la statue voilée d'Isis, la figure de la Création; sur le socle, ils avaient inscrit ces paroles: 'Je suis ce qui est, ce qui fut, ce qui sera, personne n'a soulevé le voile qui me couvre.'"¹⁵

The couple Osiris and Isis were part of the myth of the god, Atum, in the Heliopolitan system. Atum, whose name means "the whole," "the Complete," had existed always, even in the beginning when there was nothing but chaos, a shapeless ocean, containing only the possibility of life. Capable of fertilizing himself, Atum produced the elements of the universe without the help of a female principle for many generations until he evolved the first couple, Shu and Tefnut -- the air and the moisture in the air. Then came Geb, the earth-God, and Nut, the sky-Goddess. From Geb and Nut came two couples, Osiris and Isis, and Seth and Nephthys. The total number in this system was nine. However, it was not long before Atum became associated with the name Ra, the sun.¹⁶ Ra's hieroglyphic symbol is a pyramid, a symbol of the sun. As Senior has pointed out, "since the Pyramid Texts often describe the dead mounting to heaven on the rays of the sun, it is simple enough to assume that the Pyramid was a means of ascension."¹⁷ The essence of all things was light coming from the manifestation of God's visible symbol, the

sun. The sun's revolution represented a cycle of transformation since Ra was supposed to be swallowed up by the sky-Goddess, Nut, and reborn again at dawn. Light in the Egyptian myth thus corresponds in most of the occult systems to astral light, "the great medium of occult force."¹⁸ Symbolically, one attains divine knowledge through the rays of light which lead to the divine.

According to the ancient myth, Osiris, whose name means "the Seat of the Eye," was the god of the underworld and prince of the dead. With the help of his sister-wife, Isis, Osiris imparts knowledge to humanity -- agriculture and the arts. His brother, Seth (Typhon) who represents evil, tries to destroy him out of jealousy. Eventually, Seth cuts Osiris' body into fourteen pieces, which he scatters over the earth. Isis succeeds in finding the various parts except for the phallus, and with the help of some other gods, she creates the first mummy. Osiris, who has returned to life because of Isis, gives his earthly powers over to Horus, his son with Isis, who eventually becomes god of the sky and light. Thus the divine triad -- Osiris, Isis, and their son Horus -- together accomplish the fight against evil represented by Seth. The ceremony of Osiris ritualizes the cycle of nature, cyclical renewal -- a symbol of death and resurrection.

Isis, in her own right, was considered to be a great magician since her knowledge encompassed all that existed in heaven and on earth. The story is told, however, that while living on earth, she had great beauty and had seductive powers, but she longed to be the

supreme goddess. Her powers were limited since she did not know the secret name of Ra. Consequently, she devised a trick by turning a mixture of Ra's saliva and mud into a serpent which bit Ra's foot. In great agony, Ra is forced to reveal his secret name, thereby relinquishing much of his power to Isis.

Revealing a person's name corresponded to having magic power over the person for it revealed the key to his true identity. In later day secret societies, each initiate, after having submitted to an initiation involving fire and water, was given a special name that he could never reveal. The secret name symbolized the new man. Some Egyptian myths were combined without difficulty since many deities possessed similar attributes. Isis became associated with Hathor, the cow-goddess; with Nekhber, the tutelary goddess of El-Kab; and was also confused with Mut, the great mother goddess, whose name in fact means 'the mother'.¹⁹ Sometimes she is represented crowned with cow's horns around a disc or sun, or with a crescent moon on her head. Local legends added to the confusing and contradictory aspects of Isis. Hathor, for example, exhibited extremely destructive powers. Yet, as patron of music, dancing and love, she eventually was identified with Aphrodite by the Greeks.²⁰ It is not surprising that Villiers will present Isis and Elën by different names to symbolize the dual nature of the feminine archetypes.

Through the occult doctrine of metempsychoses Villiers will represent Tullia Fabriana and Cleopatra as incarnations of Isis, known by different names in her various manifestations. Alternating

solar and lunar images will symbolize the regenerative nature of the mother goddess and the dark passages of the soul before attaining spiritual enlightenment.

Tullia is keenly aware of her 'race' and is the first of a long line of heroic characters in Villiers' writings who, like himself, will be the last representative of an illustrious heritage. As Burgisser remarks, "C'est comme si le temps avait la fonction de modeler d'une manière de plus en plus parfaite une idée sublime qui se trouve à l'origine d'une race."²¹ For Tullia, "il fallait des siècles pour arriver à produire son individualité." Awareness of one's race implies both obligation to maintain the race's dignity, a destiny which one must fulfill, as well as a feeling of superiority of one's timelessness: "He who remembers his 'births' (origin) and his former lives (i.e., periods made up of a considerable series of events undergone) succeeds in freeing himself from Karmic conditionings; in other words, he becomes the master of his destiny."²² Tullia Fabriana, in her dreams and in the ancient manuscripts of her occult library, relives her past lives in which she journeyed from Bessarabia to Baghdad, found adventure in the jungle, was reincarnated as Cleopatra, and served in the temple of Isis in Egypt. Her soul is not of the present bitter times. In each previous life, she has suffered and overcome obstacles. Each metempsychosis is but a symbol of her long initiation along the path of self perfection. The active quest in which she participates is that of initiates to the great mysteries; mysteries which are never totally revealed, like the face of Isis forever covered by another veil.

Mes jours se soudent à mes jours comme les anneaux d'une chaîne que je suis obligée de porter et qui m'accable sous son poids. Il me semble que depuis longtemps mon âme s'est brusquement arrêtée au milieu de je ne sais quelle route immense, et la terre me paraît lugubre comme une prison. Ah! c'est cela, c'est cela surtout qui m'interdit! Je souffre de vivre, n'ayant plus rien à tirer de la terre...et ne pouvant cependant pas m'en détacher.²³

Her capacity for action, however, has been turned inward in contemplation and study. Her life is "voilée" to the outside world in order that she may delve into the inner life by means of "concentration égoïte."²⁴ Her meditative life has enabled her to attain a higher "sphère" in the hierarchy of existence. She has the mystic's "goût de l'infini."

Je ne sais pas me satisfaire de ce qui dure peu; je n'ai point d'enthousiasme pour ce qui finit; je n'aime pas le bruit du vent dans les forêts; je n'aime pas l'Océan ni les astres de la nuit; je ne tiens guère à une beauté qui doit s'annuler d'elle-même et qui est à la merci du moment qui passe; rien, désormais, de terrestre, ne me captivera.²⁵

The passage to her previous lives is achieved through memory. The unknown, the invisible world, appears to be more a forgotten part of her own soul which is reconstructed by means of a dream sequence. "On n'eût pas deviné de quelle nature était l'effrayant rêve, le rêve inoui, qui vivait dans son âme inexplorée."²⁶ That the soul can recreate the vast dream of existence is more a psychological phenomenon than a miraculous transgression by the magus. The description of her powers is not so much an empirical modification of reality as a disquieting evocation of surreality achieved through

the senses. "A sa volonté, la chambre devenait profonde; sous son regard, les murailles se reculaient et se faisaient lointaines. Ces colosses noirs, arrachés aux tombeaux des rois d'Abyssinie et d'Egypte, réveillaient en elle des faits anciens."²⁷ The revelations of her psychic inner world produce the effect of delving into the mysteries of the universe. What appears to be an occult mystery is in fact the exploration of self, characteristic of the Romantics, but now realized through the Promethean willpower of the magus and through Hegel's faith in powers of the mind to solve the mystery of Being.

The revelation of self is similar to the heroic quest or voyage. Through memory Tullia Fabriana feels a nostalgia for a "paradis perdu," and is able to participate in the cyclical drama that Joseph Campbell refers to as the monomyth of the hero -- "a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation-initiation-return."²⁸ Through the dream state Tullia Fabriana sees the panorama "des formes du Devenir." The abstraction of thought attains the form of supreme poetry for her. "Elle était comme un voyageur qui revient des pays inconnus."²⁹ Her existence is linked to the invisible world which contains "une signification lointaine pour son âme."³⁰ By returning to her origins, she seeks the eternal. Similarly Pythagoras' belief in metempsychosis reiterates the soul's immortality through the memory of past lives in dreams. According to Lévi,

"For him (Pythagoras) also the particular immortality of human souls consisted in persistence of memory. He is said to have been conscious of his previous incarnations,

and if the report is true it was something suggested by his reminiscences, for such a man as he could have been neither imposter nor fool.³¹

Dissolution of one's present form into the past enables one to participate in the cosmological beginning. Conversely dissolution through death in the Orphic myth also implies transcendence of one's own mode of being. Both are followed by a regenerative recreation of self. One becomes the "contemporary of the gods" to use Eliade's phrase. "For to wish to reintegrate the time of origin is also to wish to return to the presence of gods, to recover the strong, fresh, pure world that existed in illo tempore. It is at once thirst for the 'sacred' and nostalgia for 'being'."³²

The descent of the hero is characterized here by the spacial image of the labyrinth. "Le palais Fabriani était un labyrinthe superbe dont les méandres cachaient un ordre savant."³³ Like the minotaur, Tullia lives at the center of her sinister and geometrically patterned palace built on a hill and surrounded by foreboding walls. At the heart of this "Thébaïde soudaine" and hidden in the shadows lies an inaccessible garden whence emanate oriental perfumes; it is likened to the gardens of Circe. For the unwary, penetration into the inner sanctum is met with immediate death.

Tullia Fabriana possesses a magic ring, "ce talisman de liberté," probably the ring of Solomon which symbolizes all the powers of heaven and earth available to the magus. Villiers will place a much

greater influence on the magic powers of Salomon's ring in "L'Annonciateur" but, for the time being, instead of transgressing into the world of supernatural powers, Tullia dispenses with the ring. "Je suis parvenue à force de lutte, à l'identité de moi-même."³⁴

La transcendance préexiste dans l'homme, et l'action qui le mène à sa reconquête est un acte de souvenir, une anamnèse. Chaque homme porte donc dans son âme son propre ciel, ciel qui se manifeste obscurément par une sorte de pressentiment qu'il s'agit d'approfondir et d'éclaircir par le souvenir. Ainsi, le souvenir se montre comme un approfondissement de l'âme, comme un progrès vers l'unité et vers l'absolu, vers la libération. . . de l'être.³⁵

Lévi preaches a psychological transcendence of the self through discipline and will: "The destiny of man, as we have said, is to make or create himself; he is and he will be the son of his works, both for time and eternity."³⁶ For Villiers and for the occult doctrine expressed by Lévi, the word is the creative force in the universe. "Hence, for the wise man, to imagine is to see, as, for the magician, to speak is to create."³⁷ As we have seen previously in the Gnostic doctrine, the word creates or manifests the Idea from the Divine light. It follows that for Villiers "l'homme et son idée finissent par devenir miraculeux."³⁸

What sanctifies the quest is the desire to attain the Absolute, the Eternal. The ephemeral nature of earthly experience cannot possibly tempt Tullia. Her successive reincarnations have purified the world's hold on her. For palingenesis leads to redemption.

It is possible to escape death after two manners -- in time and in eternity. . . . We escape it in respect of eternity by perpetuating in memory personal identity amidst the transformations of existence. Let it be certified that the life resulting from motion can only be maintained by succession and the perfecting of forms.37

The final quest for the infinite will reveal the ultimate correspondence of all things with their absolute explanation.

Je méditais sur la correspondance de l'Universel, du Particulier de l'Individuel avec l'Identité, la Différence et la Raison d'être, antérieurement présupposées et reconstituées en moi par l'Esprit. J'étais plongée dans l'Abstraction visionnaire, et, saisie par l'Immensité, je ne m'aperçus pas de ce qui me menaçait.40

As in the case of the mystic, it is through her visions that she attains the revelation of the unknown. One cannot help but see the influence of Swedenborg, although it is doubtful that Villiers had actually read any of his works. It is more likely that Villiers based the visionary conceit on Balzac's Louis Lambert and Séraphîta and the sweeping cosmic images of Jean Raynaud's Terre et Ciel.

The ascetic life of the mystic demands a renunciation of earthly attachments and ultimately leads to a desire for death which is the quickest way to re-establish ultimate unity. However, Tullia is not yet ready to accept death and turns, instead, to the active pursuit of divinity through the occult, engaging in the "Science du Feu," and imitating the other avatars of revolt -- Satan and Prometheus.

Satan, d'après le poème symbolique, ayant forcé les portes de l'enfer, regarda les ténèbres et s'élança, dans leurs profondeurs à la recherche de l'Eden. Ses ailes battaient dans le vide que ses regards exploraient. Ainsi l'âme qui, venant d'échapper à son cachot par la conscience de l'identité, se précipite dans le mystère de l'Etre pour y trouver la cause et la raison des déterminations ultérieures, réalise cette conception.⁴¹

The secret of magic is the science of fire. It is this power that Tullia seeks; for as Villiers says, "L'Esprit, constamment maître de lui, reste toujours maître des autres."⁴² Tullia is referred to several times as "la belle vierge prométhéenne," reminiscent of Isis who tried to steal the magic name of Ra in order to gain power over him. Plutarch relates that some authorities recount that Isis is the daughter of Hermes while others refer to her as the daughter of Prometheus. "Les uns appuient leur assertion sur ce que Prométhée passe pour l'inventeur de la sagesse et de la prévoyance; les autres, sur ce qu'Hermès est regardé comme ayant découvert l'écriture et la musique."⁴³

The Myth of Prometheus was an important symbol for the occult societies of the nineteenth century and for illuminist writers such as Edgar Quinet who published Prométhée in 1838. The revolt of Prometheus, much like the magus, is said to possess voyance -- visionary knowledge which implies the secret of man's power and immortality. After having stolen the divine fire, Prometheus is punished by Zeus who chains him to a pillar or mountain where an eagle devours his liver which is regenerated each succeeding night. Prometheus' torture is thus perpetual. Prometheus' ordeal can be likened to the Karmic cycle which leads to perfection from suffering. Bound to the

mountain which symbolizes his aspiration, Prometheus is delivered by Hercules who kills the eagle and is forgiven by Zeus who permits his son to gain immortality.

Even though Tullia Fabriana is on the threshold of the 'unknown', she is, nevertheless, the victim of "Necessity" against which she must fight. "Necessity" was viewed by Fabre d'Olivet,⁴⁴ Ballanche and the Illuminists of time as human destiny unfolding in its historical process and was associated with the monarchy as opposed to divine Providence. For Hegel, it was divine providence. The ideal state was for human will to be perfected in accordance with divine enlightenment -- the only true progress was to overcome necessity. According to Lévi, "Will is the directing faculty of intelligent forces for the conciliation of the liberty of persons with the necessity of things."⁴⁵ In his epic poem, Orphée, Ballanche speaks of man's Promethean mission: "L'homme appelait à vaincre constamment les lois de la nécessité à se perfectionner malgré le destin . . . , la marche progressive du genre humain, se faisant lui-même, et la haute mission des hommes de génie s'avancant le premier, dévancant les autres hommes, pour leur frayer la route."⁴⁶

Gwendolyn Bays differentiates the Orphic and Promethean quest as follows: the myth of Orpheus represents the passive quest of the magus who, like the seer-poet, follows his unconscious desires by descending to the depths of death; whereas the quest of Prometheus is active, paralleling that of the mystic because it is associated

with suffering and images of ascent and verticality.⁴⁷ However, in the occult tradition Prometheus and Satan are comparable avatars of revolt. Balzac in La Recherche de l'Absolu finds both sardonic and Promethean qualities in Balthazar Claës who practices the science of fire. Both Lévi and Hugo refer to the redemption of Satan.

Tullia Fabriana incarnates the necessity of revolt against centuries of humiliation and the infinite sadness of the bitter times in which she lives. Incomprehensible to the vulgar, "la femme de Caïn l'eût comprise."⁴⁸ Like Prometheus, Cain is the revealer of truth to Nerval's hero Adoniram in Le Voyage en Orient and in Byron's Cain. He who seeks liberty is punished, but it is through his quest that he gains knowledge.

Lévi adds, "The Great Magical Secret is therefore the lamp and dagger of Psyche, the apple of Eve, the sacred fire of Prometheus, the burning sceptre of Lucifer, but it is also the Holy Cross of the Redeemer."⁴⁹ Christ the giver of spiritual light offers the gift of redemption to humanity, and it is He who suffers and is sacrificed for our sake. Thus, one finds the reoccurring theme of the heroes of knowledge, the guides of the absolute suffering for humanity.

According to Villiers, we cannot conceive of Prometheus without the eagle which devours him. Thus, Tullia was obliged to overcome a new series of obstacles in each of her lives. She is then prepared to face her initiation.

Ayant autour de moi, dans l'éther, les vertus de la chasteté, ayant les six jours de jeûne derrière mes paroles,

ayant enduré la soif pendant ces six jours et m'étant baignée la nuit précédente, ma main traça dans l'air, à tout hasard, les signes convenus, depuis les temps, entre les vivants et les morts.⁵⁰

The world which Tullia Fabriana denounces is the world in which Villiers lives. It is an era characterized by doubt, decadence, and temerity. It is also the twilight of the gods. "On dirait que la mort a jeté son ombre sur ce siècle."⁵¹ The gods cannot compete with our death machines and our scientific progress. According to Villiers, all our ideals are dead: poetry, religion, love, and even paradise is reproduced artificially as in Baudelaire's Les Paradis artificiels and in Gautier's Le Club des hashichins.

Quant à l'Empyrée (the most elevated of four celestial spheres) le séjour des bienheureux, une feuille de chanvre arabe dans un cigare, trois pastilles des haschich égyptien sur la langue ou quelques gouttes d'opium brun dans la carafe d'un narguilhé et nous le "voyons" aussi bien que les dieux, mieux peut-être.⁵²

Modern science has usurped the power of the gods and has placed man at the helm of his own destiny. Villiers is forced to concede that Hegel's explanation of man's destiny as an "eternal devenir" was correct. Just as Baudelaire saw progress only in terms of spiritual progress, Villiers does not see a moral progress in man to match the so-called 'progress' of science. He asks with irony: "Hélas! est-ce que nous serions le Devenir de Dieu? Quel fatigue!"⁵³

At the time of writing Isis, Villiers was thinking of a fellow disciple of Hegel from his native Brittany, Renan, who said that man's goal, in fact, was to become God; that is to say, a God who is the sum of man's transcendent needs. Renan, who was to make science into a religion, was particularly despised by Villiers.⁵⁴ In the epigraph to chapter six of Isis, Villiers quotes three questions from Renan's discourse in 1862 at the Collège de France on Les Peuples sémitiques:

Cette science, à laquelle nous consacrons notre vie, vaudra-t-elle ce que nous lui sacrifions? ... Arrivera-t-on à une vue plus certaine des destinées de l'homme et de ses rapports avec l'infini? ... Saurons-nous plus clairement la loi de l'origine des êtres, la nature de la conscience, ce qu'est la vie, ce qu'est la personnalité?"⁵⁵

Renan's answer to these questions was: "Je l'ignore." On the other hand, it appears that for Villiers the ancient myths interpreted in the light of occult thought revealed basic truths about man and nature more than modern science did. "L'homme a voulu s'affranchir de vieux préjugés; il désirait 'épurer son idéal', devenir libre, enfin, -- suivant son indéfinissable expression. -- Le voilà servi à souhait il n'y plus que l'artificiel."⁵⁶ If never ending progress is man's lot and his reason for being, why is man suffering from an inexplicable malaise? Surely, Villiers is not as optimistic as Renan who said in the same discourse that Villiers quoted:

L'histoire démontre cette vérité qu'il y a dans la nature humaine un instinct transcendant qui la pousse vers un but supérieur. D'où vient, cependant, l'impossibilité que nous éprouvons de ne pas hésiter devant notre gloire, nos

travaux et notre divinité de fraîche date? Nous la trouvons lourde, cette divinité! Bref, c'est peut-être le manque d'habitude mais il nous serait dur d'être des dieux.⁵⁷

Although Villiers has reservations as to the ultimate 'good' of man's Herculean desires, he nevertheless accepts Hegel's ideas concerning the irreality of the material world and the power of man's mind to create his own ideal.

Certainly Villiers was profoundly influenced by Hegel's ideas at the writing of Isis as can be seen in the various footnotes and remarks in which he refers the reader to Hegel, Fichte and Schelling. Villiers read A. Véra's translation of La Logique de Hegel published by Ladrance in 1859 and was particularly fascinated by the boundless powers inherent in the human mind. Perhaps it is, as Michel Carrouges suggests, that from the moment Faust asks the question: Am I a god? he feverishly attempts to become a "surhomme" by breaking the bonds which tie him to the human condition.⁵⁸ It is a challenge which is in keeping with Villiers' heroic nature and which will haunt the heroes of his stories and plays.

The intellectual prowess of Tullia Fabriana indicates not only a Hegelian but also a Gnostic conception of the world. "Pour Hegel la véritable chute primordiale n'est pas celle de l'homme, mais celle de Dieu et que le salut final au contraire n'est pas l'oeuvre de Dieu, mais celle de l'homme."⁵⁹

Tullia Fabriana, like the Sophia-Pistis of the Gnostics, is capable of communicating with spirits. She knows the secrets of medicine and healing just as the mythical Isis, and possesses the secret of the beginnings. It is not difficult to see Tullia's quest as anti-Christian since it derives from the Gnostic concept of man's attempt to become divine instead of from the Christian view of the incarnation of God in man. Villiers could not have failed to grasp the similarity between this view and Hegel's philosophy. As Carrouges remarks: "Au Dieu Incarné, Hegel oppose un Homme divinisé. Cette subversion des mystères est en même temps la clé de la mystique hégélienne et celle de tout le prométhéisme moderne."⁶⁰ Villiers saw the connection between the occultist's view of being, as an act of will directed towards understanding and utilizing this power, and the transcendental idealism of Fichte and Schelling which he refers us to. As with the earlier "Sturm and Drang" movement, Fichte only conceived God in terms of a "moral order of the world as revealed to the individual in the idea of moral perfection which man can only approximate."⁶¹ Since we cannot possibly know a thing in itself, the ideal established by reason becomes the supreme goal. The self proposes its own reality through knowledge and action. Therefore, philosophical idealism proposes the absolute as simply the supreme form of human knowledge.

If nature is a visible manifestation of the divine spirit, then everything in the universe is animate. The true nature of all things is in the identity of body and soul, the form and the spirit.

Everything is in the process of trying to achieve being. The pantheism of German romanticism does not see the Supreme Being as object, but as the omnipresent manifestation in all things.

The absolute meaning of reality is attained through intellectual reconstruction by the magus. However, as Van der Meulen pointed out, for Villiers personally, "l'intuition de l'Esprit est toute mystique, intuition d'initié, de délivré, de poète. Chez Hegel l'intuition reste connaissance rationnelle intérieure, divination."⁶² In fact, we see that throughout Villiers' writing from Isis to Axël, he believed in the mind's potential to restructure reality. The inner revelation is attained through effort, study, chastity, purity of purpose, but it is realized through creative action.

Le rêve doit s'incarner dans l'exécution, dans le mécanisme froid de l'accomplissement, et ce sont les résultats qui lui assignent sa valeur; l'idéal n'a d'autre juge que lui-même. Chacun regarde un idéal, chacun doit tout faire, tout braver, tout sacrifier pour l'accomplir; mais, en soi-même, il ne faut pas tenir à l'accomplir. Tous les rêves s'entrevalent; la réussite pose la différence . . .⁶³

The difficulty for Tullia Fabriana as well as for Villiers is in their inability to define themselves according to one school of thought. Villiers' religious doubts are in evidence when he seeks a reaffirmation of his Catholicism, or rather some manifestation of divine revelation in the person of Christ.

Ah! le convive nocturne n'est pas venu souper avec moi dans Emmaus; il n'a point laissé tomber sur mon front ses formules de miséricorde; il ne s'est pas transfiguré devant mes yeux sur les collines de Sion! Et cependant, Fils de l'Homme, et moi aussi j'ai bu l'eau du torrent!

Les vivants ont jeté leurs ombres sur celle qui parle toute seule dans les ténèbres. Comme vous, j'ai regardé doucement les souffrants et les faibles; comme vous, Emmanuel, je fus tentée sur la montagne. Vous savez par quels actes et quels recueils j'ai sanctifié, moi aussi, le jour du sabbat; vous savez si, comme vous, j'ai prévu toutes choses, autant qu'il m'a été possible, pour que tout fût accompli.⁶⁴

The aim of the magus is to imitate Christ. Just as Christ's death promised redemption for humanity, the magus seeks immortality in death. Having reached a privileged mode of awareness through vision and a series of reincarnations, Tullia Fabriana wishes to stop time in order to end her atonement in subsequent reincarnations. "La pensée unique et fixe du suicide s'était roulée et enlacée autour de moi, comme un serpent autour d'un marbre!"⁶⁵ The death that she longs for is no longer in the form of a metempsychosis but rather a reabsorption in the world spirit or Atman for the Buddhist, which is all and nothing. "Que le vent dispersât les atomes insaisissables de mon corps, que l'ombre reçut les lignes de ma forme, que mon esprit rentrât dans l'anéantissement divin de son unité, telles étaient, pour moi, les décisions dictées par la véritable sagesse."⁶⁶ Denis de Rougemont explains the Buddhist philosophy of metempsychosis as follows:

En somme, l'adversaire principal des Védantins comme des premiers bouddhistes, ce n'est pas encore la personne, mais l'obstination de l'ego qui veut durer au-delà de la mort sans rien comprendre aux conditions de cette survie, sans purifier d'avance le Jîva -- sans s'ordonner d'avance, dirions-nous, aux exigences du vrai moi, qui est notre répondant céleste. Et faut-il qu'il existe et qu'il soit fort, ce moi qu'on répute illusoire, pour qu'un des buts majeurs des méthodes spirituelles soit de l'empêcher de renaître!⁶⁷

Tullia's wish for death is symbolized by the raising of the veil: "... Que ce dernier pan du voile fût arraché pour moi, ici."⁶⁸ The veil was a common image to express that which is hidden, the secret imparted to the initiate, and the truth concealed in the gnosis. Three conceptions, all of which Villiers alludes to, are contained in the revelation of the lifting of the veil -- death, the self and immortality.

Nerval refers to the first conception in "Isis", Les Filles du Feu: "Les mortels en sont-ils venus à repousser toute espérance et tout prestige, et, levant ton voile sacré, déesse de Saïs! le plus hardi de tes adeptes s'est-il donc trouvé face à face avec l'image de la Mort?"⁶⁹

The second image utilized by Novalis in Les Disciples à Saïs (1798) and by Schiller in a poem inspired by Plutarch is to find only a reflection of oneself under the veil. The third, is to find the promise of immortality as in the resurrection of Osiris referred to by both Apuleius and Plutarch. "(Isis) C'est moi qui ai pour les hommes institué les initiations...Elles perpétuaient les rites par lesquels Osiris avait été rendu à la vie, et donnaient ainsi aux initiés un gage certain d'immortalité bien-heureuse."⁷⁰

Just as in other myths of initiation -- Orpheus' descent to hell or Tristan and Iseut's death -- Tullia must face the image of death. The foreboding images throughout the work imply that it is not only her own death that she seeks but that of Wilhelm de Strally's as well. Consequently, death also implies a purification

and the mixing of two bloods.

As Denis de Rougemont points out in the Tristan myth, the passion that the two lovers feel for each other is intimately linked with death: ". . . Death is for love, a deliberate death coming at the end of a series of ordeals thanks to which he (Tristan) will have been purified, a death that means transfiguration, and is in no way the result of some violent chance."⁷³

Secondly, we see the theme of the mirror. Earthly love is an illusion. Essentially, Wilhelm de Strally will love only a projection of his own ideal, a narcissistic illusion originating in one's own image of the ideal. As Tullia says,

Ce qu'il aimera, ce ne sera pas moi, telle que je suis, mais cette personne de sa pensée que je lui paraîtrai. . . . Ainsi est la loi des êtres dont le regard mental ne dépasse pas la sphère des possibilités, des formes et des espérances; ils ne peuvent sortir d'eux-mêmes dans leurs amours mystérieux.⁷²

Wilhelm de Strally, consumed by his desire upon seeing Tullia, will confuse love with his own ideal of absolute beauty. Villiers sees the essential error of love whereby the lover seeks the image of his ideal incarnated in the other without ever really knowing the other. Therefore, the other exists only as illusion.

Villiers aptly entitled this chapter "L'Eternel féminin." The cult of Eros and mysticism had become interchanged not only in Arab mystical poetry but in the courtly romance of the Cathars of twelfth century France where "troubadours of supreme love, of the Veiled

Idea, which they treated as beloved object but also as symbol of a longing for the divine."⁷³

The error is based on a materialization of one's own soul. Dedicated to the ideal rather than to the other, Tullia does not really love Wilhelm. She admits that if she had time to lose, she would almost regret not being capable of loving him. Nor does Wilhelm really love her. If Tullia were to reveal the truth concerning his ideal, they would pass eternally away from each other.

Si j'essayais de lui dévoiler la vérité, je passerais parallèlement à côté de lui à jamais, parce que cette vérité, modifiée à l'instant par son esprit, ne serait plus ce qu'elle doit être. Il ne la comprendrait que selon tel cercle, et alors il aurait raison de ne pas l'aimer. Elle l'attristerait, parce qu'elle ne lui paraîtrait pas en rapport avec la vision qu'il conçoit, avec l'idéal qu'il nomme de mon nom!⁷⁴

Because the other is only an image of what is beyond the form, one can never find satisfaction with the form alone. The Eternal Feminine leads us toward the ideal. Tullia must therefore lead Wilhelm beyond 'the Form' symbolized by the ascension of the various degrees of the supernatural world. The essential aim is to be joined in spirit and soul.

It is here that Tullia reveals an essentially Christian idea of love. She must sacrifice her individuality to become his vision. "Je dois être morte pour lui d'abord, et me survivre selon lui."⁷⁵
The Christian school of thought implies:

Se sacrifier pour l'autre aimé, c'est d'abord sacrifier son moi à son vrai moi, -- l'ordonner à sa vocation. Ou c'est encore: se sacrifier tel que l'on est, à soi-même tel qu'on va le devenir par l'esprit. C'est rejoindre la forme immortelle de son être au travers d'une 'mort à soi-même' tranfigurante.⁷⁵

The inherent analogies found in Egyptian, Buddhist, Gnostic, and Christian thought would justify Villiers' religious syncretism, as it had for Lévi and the Illuminists. Speaking of Wilhelm de Strally in a letter to Houël Du Hamel, Villiers says: "Wilhelm de Strally va bientôt paraître. Je suis au milieu du troisième et dernier volume de cette étude. (Il s'agit d'une application pratique de la théorie des Anciens touchant l'âme double.)"⁷⁷ The theory of homoduplex found in Pythagoras, Swedenborg and many of the Romantics, such as Nerval, Hugo, and Novalis, will be one of the dominant occult themes in Villiers' Elën and "Claire Lenoir."

The quest for the eternal feminine, a complementary soul, for the idealistic and estranged heroes of Villiers' fiction begins with Isis. A sacred and mystical union of the two souls would complete the cycle of redemption -- the fusion of the masculine and feminine. The mutual death, which is prefigured in Isis, will only be realized in Axël, in which the two lovers form the divine, androgynous union in death.

CHAPTER VI FOOTNOTES

- 1 Gérard de Nerval (Paris: J'ai lu, 1965), p. 282.
- 2 Drougard, Trois premiers contes, II:61, n.1.
- 3 Raitt, Mouvement symboliste, p. 213.
- 4 Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, Zanoni: A Rosicrucian Tale (N.Y.: Steinerbooks, 1971), p. 13.
- 5 Georges Poulet, Trois Essais de Mythologie romantique (Paris: José Corti, 1966), p. 137.
- 6 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, IX:23.
- 7 Ibid., IX:82. For Nerval's description of the "Reine de Saba" and the amazon see Jean Richer, Nerval: Expérience etCréation (Paris: Hachette, 1963), p. 183.
- 8 Théophile Gautier, Nouvelles (Paris: Charpentier, 1867), p. 325 and p. 337.
- 9 Ibid., p. 360.
- 10 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, IX:80.
- 11 Emile Drougard, "Villiers de l'Isle-Adam et Théophile Gautier," Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France 39 (oct.-dec. 1932), pp. 510-536.
- 12 Gautier, Nouvelles, p. 419.
- 13 Nerval, p. 361.
- 14 Plutarque, Isis et Osiris, trans. Marie Meunier (Paris: L'Artisan, 1924), p. 44.
- 15 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, IX:115.
- 16 B. Van de Walle, "Egypt: Synchretism and State Religion," World Mythology (New York: Prometheus Press, 1965), p. 31.
- 17 Senior, The Way Down and Out, p. 35.

- 18 Lévi, History of Magic, p. 79.
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- 20 Van de Walle, World Mythology, p. 42.
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- 22 Eliade, Myth and Reality, p. 90.
- 23 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, IX:195-196.
- 24 Ibid., IX:52.
- 25 Ibid., IX:198.
- 26 Ibid., IX:189.
- 27 Ibid., IX:190.
- 28 Joseph Campell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 30.
- 29 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, IX:127.
- 30 Ibid., IX:128.
- 31 Lévi, History of Magic, p. 76.
- 32 Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 94.
- 33 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, IX:149.
- 34 Ibid., IX:198.
- 35 Burgisser, Double illusion, p. 23.
- 36 Lévi, Transcendental Magic, p. 267.
- 37 Ibid., p. 41.
- 38 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, IX:44.
- 39 Lévi, History of Magic, pp. 363-364.

- 40 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, IX:202.
- 41 Ibid., IX:116.
- 42 Ibid., IX:23. Villiers was probably remembering Lévi's statement in Transcendental Magic, p. 267: "Men who are masters of themselves become easily masters of others."
- 43 Plutarch, Isis et Osiris, p. 25.
- 44 In Vers dorés we read: "La Volonté évertuée par la foi pouvait subjuguier la Nécessité elle-même, commande à la Nature et opère des miracles. Elle était le principe sur lequel reposait la magie des disciples de Zoroastre." Quoted by Viatte, Sources occultes, I:174.
- 45 Lévi, Transcendental Magic, p. 71.
- 46 Pierre-Simon Ballanche, "Orphée," Oeuvres, 6 vol. (Paris: Bureau de l'Encyclopédie des Connaissances, 1833), VI:89.
- 47 Bays, Orphic Vision
- 48 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, IX:177.
- 49 Lévi, Transcendental Magic, p. 16.
- 50 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, IX:203.
- 51 Ibid., IX:93.
- 52 Ibid., IX:95-96.
- 53 Ibid., IX:101.
- 54 Parts of Renan's L'Avenir de la Science (1890), "Pensées de 1848," had appeared in La Liberté de penser, July 15, 1849.
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- 58 Michel Carrouges, La Mystique du surhomme (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 18.

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- 63 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, IX:207-208.
- 64 Ibid., IX:208-209.
- 65 Ibid., IX:210.
- 66 Ibid., IX:212.
- 67 Denis de Rougemont, "La Personne, l'Ange, et l'Absolu," La Nouvelle Revue Française, 100 (1 avril 1961), p. 593.
- 68 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, IX:212.
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- 71 Denis de Rougemont, Love in the Western World (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 45
- 72 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, IX:
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- 74 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, IX:215.
- 75 Ibid., IX:215.
- 76 de Rougemont, "La Personne, l'Ange, et l'Absolu," p. 599.
- 77 Villiers, Correspondance générale, I:40.

CHAPTER VII

ELËN

In Elën, Villier's first dramatic attempt, the "mage" Samuel, is tempted to abandon his solitary life of contemplation and prayer when he is drugged and seduced by the beautiful but heartless Countess Elën. While under the influence of the drug-induced hallucination, Samuel believes that the woman he has fallen in love with is the incarnation of his ideal. When he awakens and discovers the truth, he again retreats to his mystical exile, aware that he had abandoned the spiritual purpose of his quest.

By means of the opium dream, Samuel confronts a symbolic death and the chaos of his unconscious instincts in order to become aware or illuminated. In his search for sacred union he reenacts a primordial drama -- an initiation to life and the temptations of women.

Jules Michelet, author of La Sorcière, once asked Ballanche to define woman for him. He replied that they were an initiation. Elën could be subtitled "l'initiation manquée," for union with the ideal woman is not possible in life.

No doubt there is a certain dédoublement of Villiers' personality in both the idealistic Samuel and Elën's former betrayed suitor, Andréas de Rosenthal, who speaks of love in these terms: "Mon coeur est mort: je suis de ceux qui ne peuvent aimer qu'une

fois."¹ Villiers, as we know, expressed the same feeling in his early poem, "Zaira." At the writing of Elën, Villiers was deeply involved with the fickle Louise Dyonnet who took advantage of his kind nature as well as of his money. In one of his letters to her, Villiers writes:

Je suis comme mon Andréas de jadis, j'en ai positivement assez de la machine ronde; ...Je vous ai adorée, Louise, et longtemps au milieu d'assommantes souffrances; mais bah! vous avez raison: toute affection profonde doit être sacrifiée pour une nuit passable. Vous m'avez fait faire un rêve maudit, mais après tout vous êtes, il faut, dis-je, que vous soyez une bien charmante femme, ou Catulle et moi ne sommes que deux fameux imbéciles, ce qui n'est pas absolument admissible! Qui sait? Nous vous aimons peut-être par amour propre?²

Samuel, "ce mage de l'Ether," presents his life in terms of suffering and exile. The purity of his soul is a prerequisite to his long initiation in search of the ideal. Is it -- as Villiers says of himself -- that it is by amour-propre that we seek another self in the search for love? Samuel seeks the complimentary soul mate: "Il me faudrait mon égale ou la solitude."³ Referring to Elën, Andréas says, "Je n'éprouvais pas de jalousie, puisque d'autres yeux que les miens ne pouvaient voir en vous celle que je voyais, nul ne saurait vous ravir, pour moi."⁴ Reality being relative, each person only sees what conforms to his particular ideal. As in the Kabbalah, woman is represented as man's anima; a reflection of his soul's aspirations.

Samuel's friend, Goetz, prefers the artificial reflection of the material world to the unsure reflection of the infinite in nature: "Pour moi, je l'avoue humblement, je préfère aux clartés de la lune sur les flots celles des candélabres sur les belles épaules."⁵ Reminiscent of Don Juan in Villiers' early poem, "Hermosa," Goetz proposes seeking the ideal in the image of woman. Samuel, like Villiers himself, feels only the bitterness and solitude of not being able to find either in love or in life the ideal that his mind can imagine.

Et c'est une femme que tu proposes? L'idéal' -Je l'ai cherché longtemps. Sombre et soucieux, j'ai connu la honte de vivre . . . Oui, la souffrance a distrait longtemps mon orgueil solitaire; j'ai profondément douté de l'invisible. -Alors, je me souviens, j'habitais les plages du Nord comme un exilé. L'inquiétude du ciel me travaillait; je ne pouvais découvrir, je le sentais bien, hélas! un idéal digne de moi, que dans les royaumes de la mort.⁶

Here again, as in Isis, death for the idealist represents a symbolic return to the primordial act of creation which the poet reenacts in his attempt to express the inexpressible.

Ce fut une folie si terrible que je me levais au milieu de la nuit, lorsque j'entendais les tempêtes; j'allais en mer, me perdre dans les lames, et, hagard, je m'incarnais dans l'Océan. L'infini, les clameurs du vent, les rochers perdus devenaient le prolongement de moi-même. Mon désespoir se drapait orgueilleusement sous ces vêtements en désordre; cette vie au fond, c'était la mienne; ces grands cris étaient l'expression équivalente des paroles qui dormaient en moi; la voix humaine n'était pas en rapport avec ce qu'elle voudrait parfois exprimer, je me servais, pour me plaindre, de ces poumons sublimes: tout cela criait pour moi!⁷

The romantic conceit of projecting one's emotions on nature is based on the ultimate correspondence of all things -- "l'expression équivalente" which words can only approximate. The dissolution of self and identification with universal being is the ultimate aim of the "mage." Death in this life leads to rebirth and permits the soul to reach a higher level of consciousness. As Lebois has shown, Villiers transposes Görres' thought from La Mystique. While at Solesmes Villiers recommended Görres' book to Baudelaire. Görres' parable of the seed which dies in order to be reborn in a new form closely parallels the dark night of the soul in which the initiate of occult mysteries must pass before becoming a new man.

L'homme supérieur doit s'arracher par une lutte constante et réfléchie aux puissances de l'abîme; mais ce n'est que par la mort du vieil homme que le nouveau peut naître à une vie plus élevée. Aussi des expiations et des lustrations de toute sorte doivent conduire à celle-ci. . . . Ce n'est que lorsque l'homme est affranchi de tout le sensible qu'il devient parfait et qu'il reçoit la communication des mystères.⁸

The symbol of the seed's transformation and rebirth is also echoed in the symbol of the phoenix. Both symbols will reoccur in Villiers' "Claire Lenoir," Eve future, and Axël. For Villiers, as for Görres and for Balzac, the magus can attain a higher sphere of being through the conscious effort of his will:

Il a le mouvement, qui est la volonté de sa foi! . . .
Malheur sur les germes immobiles qui meurent tout entiers!
Ils se sont payés des raisons que leur offrait la Terre:
rien ne prouvait en eux leur immortalité! Qu'ils dorment,
suivant ce qu'ils ont voulu. La mort n'est qu'une fille
de la Nature: il faut résister à la Nature pour surmonter

la Mort; la lutte deviendra la substance des choses espérées.
 Croyons-en la vue des cieus; souvenons-nous de la lumière!
 N'écoutons ni les sens: ils sont de la terre; ni la chair:
 c'est de la nuit. Conservons jusqu'au dernier souffle l'indomp-
 table espérance! Nous passerons dans cette espérance! A travers
 une autre mort, nous nous efforcerons vers un autre soleil!⁸

Villiers could not have helped seeing the similarity between the mystic's faith and Hegel's illusionistic philosophy. According to Vera, in his Introduction à la Philosophie de Hegel: "La mort est cet état, ce moyen par lequel l'être vivant s'affranchit des liens de la nature. La Pensée étant donnée, la mort est donnée par cela même."¹⁰

The magus must struggle to free himself from the materiality of earthly senses in order to attain the hidden reality which only remains in the form of memory: "Souvenons-nous de la lumière." There is one way to attain the ideal which Villiers sought so desperately and that is to believe in it, to think of it; for to think of it, is to create it. Samuel's mission, similar to that of the poet, is to redirect the attention of humanity towards the ideal. "Je suis peut-être une parole; je ne dois tendre qu'à me prononcer, le reste ne me regarde plus."¹¹ His ideal is elevated to an abstraction which language can only represent in terms of images of light and darkness. As in Plato's cave myth, the truth is represented by 'another sun'. Goetz believes that 'science' is the 'torch' that will light his way; confident that he can analyze Samuel's 'sun'. Ironically, Samuel replies that Goetz will be forced to kneel before the unknown -- "les ténèbres." It is this mysterious

undefinable notion of the absolute that Villiers posits as beyond the analysis of modern science.

Goetz is only capable of understanding Samuel's ideal in a limited fashion. For him, "C'est une question de préférence d'idéal qui fait les différences humaines."¹¹ The long philosophical discussion between Samuel, the mystic, and Goetz, the sensualist, precedes the 'temptation', the first test, in Samuel's initiation. It is his 'fall' from 'innocence'.

The dream sequence, in which the drugged Samuel is lured by the dazzling beauty of Elën, reveals an underlying hope that the abstract image of the ideal can be realized in the perfect woman, "une âme soeur."

Elën appears as the proverbial femme fatale, a seductive promise of love incarnated in a consuming temptress in whose clutches the innocent idealist leaves his heart. Typically she is an older woman and refers to Samuel as "un enfant." As in Isis,¹² the apparition of the ideal woman is draped in lunar images of night in contrast to the solar images of the mystic's search for light. "C'est la femme qu'on aime à cause de la Nuit."¹³ Symbol of the hidden erotic desires which she awakens in the men who fall prey to her embrace, she belongs to a long line of fatal archetypes such as Biondella in Cazotte's Le Diable amoureux and Clarimonde in Gautier's La Morte amoureuse. The analogy between Clarimonde and Elën was uppermost in Villiers' mind, for Elën is dedicated to Gautier and the initial epigraph is a quote from La Morte amoureuse. The

recurring images in Villiers' poem, "Elën," reveal the sterility of the passion and the despair of those who love this deathlike beauty. She is evoked in terms of exile, storm, the night, a deserted cemetery, tumultuous ocean waves, wilting flowers and displays a deathly pallor: "Je suis pareille à ces tombeaux abandonnés . . ." She incarnates the mythological dark side of Isis-Lilith: "Ses regards font mourir les enfants. Elle passe et se laisse survivre en ce qu'elle détruit."¹⁴

Although Elën is the idol of passion for the men that become powerless under her spell, she appears incapable of feeling. She is yet another incarnation of the cold Medusa, or the vampire-like women who must forever seek a new victim to satisfy their insatiable desires.

The fateful meeting of Elën and Samuel is described in terms of descent and forgetfulness. Just as the descent to Hades in the Orphic myth is part of the ritual of initiation, Samuel's initiation is a descent in time to the initial uroboric state of the primordial unconscious where the two sexes are fused into one being.

Nous nous sentions gagner par le profond, par le mystérieux Silence; nous nous étions déjà connus peut-être; et quelque chose se touchait au fond de nos destinées: le fluide inexpliqué du Commencement enveloppait notre mémoires de ses vagues foudres; autour de nous le vent froid se plaignait à voix basse dans les branchages deséchés.¹⁵

The dream in which the drugged Samuel visits the underworld with Elën is ushered in with the mythical splendor of a setting

similar to those in Arabian Nights, but the scene is quickly transformed into a "noir paradis." Samuel drifts in a ghostly vision which is likened to Erebus. It is as though Samuel sought in the streams of the underworld the source of life itself by abandoning the mystical contemplation of the divine for the love of a woman. Samuel calls Elën Maria, a name that symbolizes what he seeks in her -- redeeming Virgin. Maria sings the song of his fall from grace.

. . . Je sais un Esprit fatigué d'élévations stériles et d'espoirs fondés sur les Ténèbres. Longtemps son vol puissant fut l'honneur des cieux: dans ses regards dormaient des rêves éternels: les soirs l'adoraient comme leur hôte et leur génie: les couchants, lorsqu'il s'exaltait au sein de leurs profondeurs hantées par les mânes des Dieux, empourpraient le glorieux veilleur de flammes et de merveilles; -- il s'attarda, par une soirée d'orgueil, d'amour et de triomphe: et la nuit foudroya ce mage de l'Ether.¹⁶

For it is with Elën, "la fille de cet Erèbe," that Samuel undergoes his initiation by reenacting the primordial sin -- abandonment of an ideal for his instinctual desires. The immortality he seeks is none other than the immortality of hell. Villiers is aware that the symbolical descent into the ubiquitous water of the underworld is also the descent into the human unconscious, a kind of collective unconscious: "Et ce firmament factice éveillait en moi des souvenirs confus, je m'éveillai pendant que les échos infinis de ce monde intérieur répétaient toujours au loin, bien loin, à travers les siècles: 'L'Immortalité! . . .L'Immortalité! . . .'"¹⁷ There is a complete correspondence between Samuel's soul and this forgotten hell: "Reconnais ton âme dans ce ciel interdit!"¹⁸

The magus is engulfed in the primordial vision of night, water, death and woman. By succumbing to her seductiveness, he foresees his own spiritual death. "Je voulus aborder; mais sa main arrêta la mienne comme je saisisais la barre, et la gouvernail décroché s'engouffra silencieusement dans les eaux sépulcrales."¹⁹ It is the poet's own hallucinatory "Bateau Ivre" where there is no division of time, only a motionless eternity.

Theological overtones are implied in the forbidden aspect of Samuel's passion for Elën. It is perhaps for this reason that Villiers, in order to describe the ecstasy of a night with Elën, is obliged to have this "mage de l'Ether" drugged so that he may experience in a dream state that which he dare not experience in a conscious state. Mario Praz's analysis of the exoticist and the mystic reveals the similarity between the transcendental atmosphere of the mystic and sensual exoticism in literature.

Actually it is a question of starting from the same sensual basis and arriving at opposite points; for, while true mysticism tends to the negation both of expression and of art, exoticism, of its own nature, tends to a sensual and artistic externalization. The first culminates in a world which cannot be described, the second succeeds to such an extent in making itself concrete in an atmosphere remote in time or space (or both) that it gives the artist the illusion of an actual former existence in the atmosphere he loves. . . . But between the mystic who denies the world of the senses and the exoticist who affirms its existence, between the mystic who empties his universe of all material content and the exoticist who invests remote periods and distant countries with the vibration of his own senses and materializes them in his imagination, there is certainly a similarity of purpose; both transfer the fulfillment of their desires to an ideal, a dream world; both in order to bring about the

necessary conditions for the intense realization of their dream, generally resort to stimulants, such as fasts and vigils in the case of the mystic, opium or other narcotics in the case of the exoticist.²⁰

The opium dream permitted Villiers to poetize the initiatory revelation of the unconscious psyche, much as Cazotte envisioned the dream of Biondetta. Villiers' purpose, however, is quite different from the exotic escapism found in the artificial paradises created in romantic literature such as Gautier's Le Club des hachichins. Villiers uses the language of mysticism to elevate Samuel's loss of innocence to a mythological drama.

Elën reveals a dual nature inherent in the archetype of the Great Mother as explained by Erich Neumann. Known to Samuel as Maria, she can be the giver of life, or as an incarnation of the legendary Helen, the fateful purveyor of passion and death. "Helen, like Aphrodite, never ceased to renew the calamitous mixtures of rapture, magic, and destruction that make up the fascination of the Great Mother, who is also a mother of fate and death."²¹ It is her enigmatic nature that creates the paradoxical feelings in Samuel of both adoration and fear. "Selon vous, je ressemble aux pays boréals: J'ai six mois de clartés et six mois de ténèbres?" On the cosmological level, the nocturnal side of woman is symbolized by the moon which is also the symbol of Isis. When Samuel recounts the night he spent with Elën to his friend, Goetz, the latter refers to her as "Astarté la Syrienne."²³ Although a goddess of war, Astarté, in her capacity as goddess of love, is often confused with both Isis and Aphrodite.

Villiers thus brings to mind both the historical and mythological archetypes of women whose erotic seductiveness imprisons men and renders them helpless. Like the Sphinx, her equivocal nature is both fascinating and destructive; her beauty which the idealist confuses for the ideal is also a mirage.

Frileuse, elle voilait, d'un cachemire noir. Son sein,
royal exil de toutes mes pensées! J'admirais cette femme
aux paupières baisées: Sphinx cruel, mauvais rêve, ancien
désespoir.²⁴

The symbolic images that Villiers uses to evoke the dual nature of the feminine ideal closely resemble the notion in the gnostic tradition that the Kabbalists interpreted as the terrible side of Shekhinah. The Shekhinah, the feminine aspect of the divine, had become separated from its original unity with the masculine principle and, consequently, remains in exile as long as demonic powers control her. "L'expression de ton visage ferait penser que le sentiment d'un deuil ancien et inconsolable a voilé ta destinée...ton sourire est pareil à celui des séraphins proscrits, mais, dans leur accablement, toujours fiers de l'Eternité."²⁵

According to the Kabbalists, the cataclysmic schism of the uroboric unity of God was partially explained as a purification of God, as his withdrawal from evil, and is described in terms of "the seed which bursts and dies in order to become wheat."²⁶ As we have already seen, Villiers introduced this same parable recounted by Görres as a preface to the fateful meeting of Elën and Samuel. It

is significant because Samuel's quest for the ideal is comparable to the process of 'tikkun' whereby man attempts to correct the unstable condition of his existence by seeking to re-establish the harmony of the primordial androgynous man. The initial separation and subsequent exile of the feminine principle is reenacted with God's creation of Adam-Kadmon and the breaking of the vessels which, on the human level, occurred when Adam contemplated the last sefiroth, the feminine or Shekhinah, instead of God.

Inevitably, man commits the same sin when he seeks a union with woman for the wrong reasons. Samuel falls in love with Elën because of her external beauty and immediately is under the illusion that her internal beauty must coincide with the exterior. His love is based on the illusion that: "Ayant cette force d'attendre son rêve la moitié de sa jeunesse, sans recevoir du monde une seule ombre sur son front de vierge et conservant sa blancheur de cygne et d'hermine, afin de se donner un jour avec toute son âme, tout son coeur et toute sa beauté."²⁷

The mystic who seeks the reflection of the divine in nature and in woman, and the correspondence of his despair with the embattled storms of nature, finds only disappointment and disparity between his ideal and reality. Believing that Elën was pure and virginal (an obsession with Villiers), Samuel is in reality only her last lover. Like Louise Dyonnet, she is a modern harlot, the product of a self-indulgent society. One might ask as does Nerval in "Artémis": "Es-tu Roi, toi le seul ou le dernier amant?"

Just as Nerval viewed the spiritual symbolism of the ancient mysteries of initiation in terms of a series of obstacles to be overcome in order to obtain perfection and illumination, Villiers sees the disappointments of earthly love as a necessary expiation of desires which still bind the mystic to the world. Samuel, the chivalrous 'martyr of love', participates in the tests and the sacrificial rite of love. Elën represents a power over him as the medieval dame has over her knight. "Une autre fois, ayez soin de me reconnaître; peut-être aurai-je encore cette douce fantaisie de vous soumettre à une épreuve de ce genre. . ." ²⁸ For the love of Elën, Samuel abandons his political role as student leader, sacrifices his mind and forsakes his quest for the ideal. "J'ai vu dans le regard de cette enfant l'oubli de la terre et du ciel! . . . l'idéal." ²⁹ He can be compared to Adam-Kadmon in his seeing only one aspect of the divine. This is the key to Samuel's punishment: "La nuit foudroya ce mage de l'Ether." Night symbolizes his unconscious, and instinctual desires. It is only after the cruel lesson is learned and when he is freed from the domination of instincts that Samuel's redemption is possible.

Incapable of true feeling, Elën stands for the external symbol of beauty rather than as a complete individual. Just like the Sphinx, she is destined to live in perpetual conflict by destroying or being destroyed. Elën perceives her impending death as an end to the conquests of love which she engages in to fight her own boredom.

Samuel will learn her true identity; the dead courtesan is, in fact, Elën and not Maria. His horror is based as much on his having been deceived as on having given into his sensual desires. To capitulate to one's physical nature is to be imprisoned and, ultimately, deceived.

. . . Par toi, je suis tombé jusqu'à la vie. O fiertés perdues! je suis le fantôme de ce que j'étais . . . Ainsi, tu m'as volé mon premier amour! Tu as souillé les premières paroles de ce coeur chaste et tu l'as prostitué de ton souffle sacrilège! Tu m'as déshonoré aux yeux de Dieu! Tu as raillé la dignité de ma conscience impudemment. Tu as souffleté l'idéal sacré, plus noble que le blason des rois, qui veillait dans un précurseur! Tu m'as menti. (Tranquille.) Dors en paix, femme, je te pardonne; c'est à moi d'expier seul un moment de faiblesse.³⁰

In her role as the sphinx-like femme fatale, Elën forces Samuel to another level of consciousness. He is torn from his original state of innocence in which he was incapable of distinguishing between the mystery of "Eros" and the true mystery of "Gnosis." The origin of sin, revealed to him in his descent into his own unconsciousness, through the mystery of Eros, is endemic to the human condition and must be expiated. The expulsion from his illusionary paradise severs the remaining ties which bind him to earthly desires. The true idea! or Gnosis is transcendental and can only be obtained through the spirit and not through the senses.

In a letter from Eugène Lefébure, the Egyptologist, to Stéphane Mallarmé we read:

J'ai lu, aussitôt que je l'ai pu, Elën, que je trouve fort beau et plein de véritables trouvailles. Le rêve de

Samuel surtout est magnifique et digne d'Edgar Poe. J'ai senti revivre en moi, en parcourant ce monde de vertige, le vieux poème de ma jeunesse: poème très beau, car il n'a jamais été écrit. Je le rêvais à peu près comme Villiers l'a fait, avec cette différence que j'aurais représenté l'homme non pas trop pur pour la femme, mais trop grand, et que je l'aurais enfermé dans un désespoir sans issue. Villiers, plus consolant ou plus consolé, laisse à Samuel une expiation possible, "l'exil, la prière, la nuit".³¹

The internal struggle between the search for love and one's spiritual scruples is present in many of Villiers' characters from Samuel to Lord Ewald in Eve future. The spiritual suicide and abandonment of life, evident in the later decadent writers and in Axël's suicide, is not exposed in the youthful Villiers who, as poet-priest, casts himself in the role of eschatological interpreter of life's mysteries. We read in an unpublished text entitled "Idéalisme": "Je suis l'interprète d'un verbe absolu; il est en moi ce que je l'interprète. Je ne suis que la conception que j'ai de l'Esprit du monde."³²

CHAPTER VII FOOTNOTES

- 1 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, VIII:219.
- 2 Villiers, Correspondance générale, I:73.
- 3 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, VIII:224.
- 4 Ibid., p. 213.
- 5 Ibid., p. 225.
- 6 Ibid., p. 224.
- 7 Ibid., pp. 224-225.
- 8 Görres, La Mystique, cited by Lebois, Révélateur du Verbe, p. 52.
- 9 Ibid., p. 226-227.
- 10 A. Véra, Introduction à la Philosophie de Hegel, p. 313, quoted by Drougard, Trois premiers contes, II:104.
- 11 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, VIII:225.
- 12 In Isis we read: "Son front grave avait la beauté de la nuit: c'était la reine du vertige et des ténèbres." Oeuvres complètes, IX:127.
- 13 Ibid., VIII:200.
- 14 Ibid., VIII:202.
- 15 Ibid., VIII:251.
- 16 Ibid., VIII:270.
- 17 Ibid., VIII:269 and 272.
- 18 Ibid., VIII:271.
- 19 Ibid., VIII:269.
- 20 Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony, trans. A. Davidon (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), pp. 200-201.

- 21 Erich Neumann, Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine (New York: Pantheon, 1956), p. 89.
- 22 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, VIII:202.
- 23 Ibid., VIII:274.
- 24 Ibid., VIII:200.
- 25 Ibid., VIII:249.
- 26 Scholem, On The Kabbalah, p. 113.
- 27 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, VIII:275.
- 28 Ibid., VIII:248.
- 29 Ibid., VIII:273.
- 30 Ibid., VIII:280.
- 31 Villiers, Correspondance générale, I:78.
- 32 Villiers, Reliques, ed. P.G. Castex (Paris: José Corti, 1954), p. 32.

CHAPTER VIII

CLAIRE LENOIR

"Claire Lenoir" published in 1867 in the Revue des Lettres et des Arts, represents the first story in a series called Histoires Moroses. As such, it marks a turning point in Villiers' writing. By writing specifically for the Revue which he founded as editor in chief, Villiers began to explore a new genre -- the short story and, in particular, the fantastic tale. For the first time, he could be assured that his work would be published and would have a wider readership than his previous works. With "Claire Lenoir," Villiers appears to turn away from the idealistic reverie which characterized Isis and Elën in order to direct his attention to what might be termed, 'creative militancy'.

Villiers will challenge the very notion of reality. He will utilize occult phenomena to attack the positivism and hedonism of his century. Occult phenomena by its very nature are fantastic. It transgresses the laws of nature as we know them and opens vistas on a level of reality which beckons the reader and the protagonists beyond the material manifestations of life. The rather pretentious motto of his review was "faire penser": his aim -- to shock the reader's complacency. As Drouggard has remarked, "Il paraît donc bien que c'était une véritable croisade spiritualiste que Villiers entreprenait en fondant sa Revue des Lettres et des Arts et en inaugurant sa série d'Histoires Moroses."¹

In "Claire Lenoir" Villiers stages the confrontation of his Hegelian idealism and his fascination with the occult with the adversary, which had become clear in his mind now, the purveyor of 'common sense', Doctor Tribulat Bonhomet, the echo of Homais and Joseph Prudhomme and the harbinger of Jarry's Père Ubu.

The intellectual and often pompous attacks directed against the scientific positivism of his age in Isis and against materialism in Elën finally take on their most effective and biting poignancy with the creation of the character Bonhomet. This larger than life figure was for Villiers the archetype of his century and the incarnation of all that was grotesquely materialistic and anti-ideal. In a letter to Mallarmé, Villiers writes:

Claire Lenoir et Yseult sont des contes terribles écrits d'après l'esthétique d'Edgard (sic) Poe. Et j'ai obtenu de tels succès de fous-rires chez Leconte de Lisle (Ménard se cachait sous les sofas à force de rire, et les autres étaient malades) que j'ai bon espoir. Le fait est que je ferai du bourgeois, si Dieu me prête vie, ce que Voltaire a fait des "cléricaux", Rousseau des gentilshommes et Molière des médecins; Il paraît que j'ai une puissance de grotesque dont je ne me doutais pas. Enfin nous rions un peu. On m'a dit que Daumier les flattait servilement en comparaison. Et naturellement, moi j'ai l'air de les aimer et de les porter aux nues, en les tuant comme des coqs.²

With "Claire Lenoir," Villiers wanted to make his stand. Emotionally, the preceding years had been full of disappointment. There was the stormy affair with Louise Dyonnet, his family's discontent with his life style, and his unsuccessful attempts to have his plays, Elën and Morgane, presented and, finally, his own dissatis-

faction with this last work. Things were not much better by the time the Revue was established. With all funds cut off from his family and forced to live in a horrible, little room adjacent to the Revue's office, Villiers had hopelessly fallen in love with Théophile Gautier's daughter, Estelle. Unable to support even himself, much less a wife, and with his father's refusal to condone such a union, Villiers plunged into his work with unprecedented furor and, ultimately, renounced all hopes of marrying Estelle he describes in a touching letter addressed to her father.

Villiers fully entrenched himself in the literary life of Paris; frequenting the homes of Théophile Gautier, Leconte de Lisle and Augusta Holmes; discovering Poe's stories, thanks to Baudelaire~ corresponding and exchanging ideas with Mallarmé and Flaubert~trying to organize a program on modern esthetics and poetry with Banville, Heredia, Baudelaire, Mendès, Gautier and Leconte de l'Isle; making new acquaintances with writers such as Louis Ménard and the Goncourt brothers; as well as founding and directing the Revue des Lettres et des Arts.³

Villiers by this time had read several of Poe's fantastic tales, and had met certain writers such as Louis Ménard and Verlaine's brother-in-law, Charles De Sivry, who were interested in the occult as well as the medium Daniel Dunglas Home who enjoyed much popularity in the Paris salons evoking spirits. Villiers had also read Eliphas Lévi's Dogme et rituel de la haute magie, which he recommended to

Mallarmé in the same letter in which he spoke of "Claire Lenoir." In "Claire Lenoir" Villiers pits Césaire Lenoir, the occultist and Hegelian, and his wife, Claire, the Christian idealist, against Bonhomet, the self-serving positivist. In some respects it is not hard to imagine this confrontation as a recreation of a "dialogue intérieur" on the level of Villiers' alter ego and id.

Villiers' religious upbringing, his concern with spiritual ideals and Hegel's illusionistic theories, as well as his fascination with the symbolism of occult cosmology are well known, as is his hatred of the bourgeois attitude towards life and art, and that class' almost fatuous faith in science as the 'cure all' to life's miseries. It must be remembered, however, that Villiers viewed science as a kind of Promethean dream of power. For this reason, science both appalled him and fascinated him. For Villiers, science could never be indifferent or divorced from its metaphysical implications. Bonhomet, an exaggerated prefiguration of Edison in Eve future, sees science as an end in itself. "Science, la véritable Science, est inaccessible à la pitié: où en serions-nous sans cela?"⁴ In Villiers' mind, this was both grotesque and satanic. The real conflict in "Claire Lenoir" is between the known and the unknown, the real and the unreal, the seen and the unseen. Is reality illusion or illusion reality? Villiers will attempt to prove both.

"Claire Lenoir" is presented in the form of a case study by Doctor Tribulat Bonhomet who narrates the strange and extraordinary

events witnessed by him involving the Lenoirs, a couple whom he had introduced to each other. From the very beginning, Villiers sets the stage for his satirical irony. Bonhomet, "professeur agrégé de physiologie" and honorable member of several academies amuses himself by acting as a marriage broker. During a sea voyage, Bonhomet befriends a young maritime officer, Sir Henry Clifton, with the idea that he might be able to arrange a marriage for the young man. He learns, however, that the young lieutenant is in love with a married woman. When the young man reveals that she can never see him again because "ses yeux malades ne me reconnaîtraient plus,"⁵ Bonhomet realizes that the woman in question is none other than his friend, Madame Lenoir. Out of curiosity Bonhomet decides to visit the couple upon his return.

During the first evening at the couple's home, the conversation turns from music and literature to philosophy and austere thoughts. Lenoir, the Hegelian, considers man to be condemned to remain in continual error because he is always deceived by his faulty senses and can never 'see' things as they really are. Hegel's illusionism is the philosophical spring-board on which Lenoir launches his belief in a reality beyond our senses, an occult reality where visions can become a material reality. Claire shares her husband's belief that: "L'IDEE est donc la plus haute forme de la Réalité."⁶ For her, the highest ideal is belief in God. Lenoir, however, recalls a concept of Boehme's that without the shadows, light

cannot be known. "Que serait, après tout, votre gloire, sans les Ténèbres? Il est des Ténèbres-méphitiques, qui, incapables de recevoir la Lumière, éteignent les flambeaux."⁷ It is possible that Villiers was inspired by the description of creation in A. Franck's La Kabbale (1843) or by Lévi's Dogme et rituel de la haute magie in which Lévi indicates that God created the darkness to repel the light. The universe was formed from chaos, for when all was light there was light nowhere: no visible form being possibly discernible. Claire, who accepts Christian revelation, believes in a God of light, as well as Hegel's conception that God is the highest form of man's ideal thoughts.

Et, quand je pense la notion de Dieu, quand mon esprit réfléchit cette notion, j'en pénètre réellement l'essence, selon ma pensée; je participe, enfin, de la nature même de Dieu, selon le degré qu'il révèle de sa notion en moi, Dieu étant l'être même et l'idéal de toutes pensées.⁸

Together both Claire and her husband oppose Bonhomet's insipid belief in "common sense" and scientific positivism. According to Bonhomet, man created God and vice versa; man's soul is a secretion of the brain; the ideal is a sickness of the organism and, as such, does not exist. To prove Bonhomet wrong, Lenoir advances his belief in "la Science-noire," whereby the intangible can be made manifest. In particular, he cites occult phenomena such as spiritism, magnetism, metempsychoses and tales of vampires and horror in which the dead can manifest their astral body by sheer force of will.

As the drama unfurls, we realize that Lenoir surmises that Claire had been unfaithful and that his tales of vindictiveness are a premonition of what is to ensue. Within a few days, Lenoir succumbs to an illness and dies. His death hastened by Bonhomet's strange and experimental attempts to cure him.

A year later, news comes to Bonhomet that Sir Henry Clifton was savagely killed by a Polynesian pirate who was part of a mysterious and bloodthirsty band of South Sea scavengers called Ottysors. As fate would have it, Bonhomet meets up with Claire who foretells her impending death that is to be caused by her husband through "her eyes." When she does indeed die at the precise time she said she would, Bonhomet decides to 'scientifically' investigate the image of death on the pupils of her eyes. To his horror and surprise, he finds the vision of death has left a material image of an Ottysor resembling Lenoir with the bloody head of Sir Henry Clifton grasped in his hands.

By offering 'proof' of a reality beyond Bonhomet's senses, Villiers negates the boundaries of time and space that limit the positivist and makes a mockery of his complacency. Bonhomet announces in the preface to his memorandum that the experience overwhelmed him to the point that "...J'en suis venu, moi, le docteur Bonhomet, professeur de diagnôse, à douter de ma propre existence - et même de choses beaucoup plus certaines encore à mes yeux . . ." ⁹ True to his spirit, however, we are not sure the lesson really penetrated because in the very same breath the burlesque reappears:

Je maintiens mes opinions sur Voltaire!...Je ne me repens pas!...Je me lave indifféremment les mains d'avoir parachévé cette catastrophe épouvantable! - Et je me pique d'être encore l'une des plus belles âmes échappées des mains du Très-Haut. Tous les hommes vraiment modernes, tous les esprits qui se sentent "dans le mouvement" me comprendront.¹⁰

It is hard to imagine that Villiers or his audience took this story of the Ottysor seriously, or that it proved some sort of existence of life after death. More important than convincing the reader of the existence of an astral body, as occultists referred to it, Villiers draws attention to the meanings beyond the events described. As such, the reader is called upon to participate in a kind of 'metadrama'.

Car, en admettant, même, que les faits suivants soient radicalement faux, la seule idée de leur simple possibilité est tout aussi terrible que le pourrait être leur authenticité démontrée et reconnue. -- Une fois pensé, d'ailleurs, qu' est-ce qui n'arrive pas un peu, dans le mystérieux Univers?¹¹

According to Todorov, the fantastic has no reality except in language. "The supernatural is born of language, it is both its consequence and its proof: not only do the devil and vampires exist only in words, but language alone enables us to conceive what is absent: the supernatural. The supernatural thereby becomes a symbol of language."¹² Villiers obviously struggled to keep his story within the realm of the plausible, trying to strike a balance between his desire to satirize the ridiculous grotesqueness of some of his contemporaries and to evoke the fantastic in such a way that it

would awaken their metaphysical being.

The satirical caricature of the "savant," representative of the age of positivism and progress, was inspired not only by the fictional characters of Homais and Prudhomme but also by several of Villiers' contemporaries, such as Renan or Littré. Robert du Pontavice believed that Villiers had the occasion to meet the perfect living example of Tribulat Bonhomet while visiting Pontavice's uncle at the Hôtel d'Orléans between 1859 and 1862 where a certain Dr. C^{xxx} lived. Pontavice describes him as follows:

...C'était au demeurant une nature très charitable, un excellent homme et un savant des plus distingués; mais sa figure sombre, une certaine façon de s'expliquer à la fois hétéroclite et pompeuse, son positivisme, son dédaigneux mépris pour toute manifestation artistique, l'étrange configuration de ses chapeaux et de ses longues redingotes, exaltèrent l'imagination du poète. Dès lors, sans s'en douter, le brave docteur C^{xxx} devint une sorte de mannequin sur l'ossature duquel Villiers accrochait chaque jour tous les sophismes retors, toutes les fantaisies bizarres, toutes les manies terribles ou grotesques qui font du savant Tribulat Bonhomet un type unique dans la littérature moderne.¹³

Castex and Bellefroid present striking evidence that Pontavice's uncle, Hyacinthe, espoused the very same positivist thinking as Bonhomet and was far from being the fervent Hegelian his nephew contends he was. Hyacinthe's verses adamantly proclaim the supremacy of science, progress and reason over dreams, philosophy and spiritual pursuits.

Ne serait-il pas temps
Que l'Homme usant enfin de sa propre énergie,
Pour remède à ses maux abdiquât la magie,
Les Christs et les Satans?¹⁴

The strange events in "Claire Lenoir" appear principally for the purpose of illustrating Villiers' illusionist theories. Consequently, much of the suspense inherent in the fantastic, is maintained with difficulty. Villiers attempts to firmly plant Bonhomet's extraordinary experience within acceptable limits of reality. He makes mention of François Broussais, a physician from Brittany, who applied his theories of physiological medicine to mental illness and whose best work was l'Histoire des phlegmasies ou inflammations chroniques -- a work that was sure to impress someone like Bonhomet. Villiers also makes reference to images on the eyes of dead animals and introduces occult and parapsychological phenomena with which his contemporaries were familiar, such as the little girl who died at the age of seven (the age of reason) and whose body bears the traces of wounds inflicted on that of her father who died before her birth. As Raitt has pointed out, Villiers hesitated whether or not to make Lenoir a practitioner of occult science. Ultimately, Villiers decided that the occult was a necessary element in the intrigue, probably because only a concrete manifestation of the fantastic could make an impression on a character such as Bonhomet. As A.M. Schmidt has remarked, "Or Villiers, lorsqu'il rapporte quelque anecdote étrange, suggère presque toujours une explication plausible des faits qu'ils vient de révéler."¹⁵ By choosing a pragmatic positivist with the aid of his instruments as a witness to the entire fantastic episode, the fantastic appears to have some sort of scientific plausibility. By portraying Bonhomet as a caricature of the narrow

mind and buffoon-like "faux savant," the mysterious aura of the fantastic is lost at times because of the recurring satirical irony.

There are many aspects of "Claire Lenoir" which do reveal a conscious effort on Villiers' part to create a tale of the fantastic in the tradition of Poe. As with many of Poe's stories, everything in "Claire Lenoir" seems calculated for the final effect. True to his scientific nature, Bonhomet attempts to verify, to classify and, by implication, to control that which his "common sense" refuses to accept. The final scene in which Bonhomet attempts to examine Claire's eyes for proof of invisible forces and of life after death is a carefully orchestrated fugue of images. By sketching Bonhomet's attempts to position her body with a realism that borders on the sacrilegious, Villiers creates a crescendo of shock in which the macabre realism and the incursion of the fantastic are ironically juxtaposed. Usually, the reader identifies with the narrator of the fantastic tale, experiencing his hesitation and doubt. Bonhomet's reasoning is acceptable because it fits known laws of nature. Complete identification with Bonhomet is impossible, however, because of his bloated self-aggrandisement and the comic effects that Villiers evokes.

Villiers, nevertheless, manages to capture some of the mysterious "ambiance" that is characteristic of Poe's tales of the extraordinary. It is an atmosphere dominated by philosophical discussions, mysterious premonitions and fantastic events - all of which serve to illustrate the power and determination of will. In "Ligeia," the

heroine overcomes death for love and to revenge her rival. In "Claire Lenoir," Lenoir also overcomes death to take revenge.

Poe rarely relied on the extraordinary inventions of the marvelous, such as supernatural beings, magic or witchcraft, except in his satirical stories. Marcel Schneider characterizes Poe's use of the fantastic as being "intérieur, simple, naturel, allant de soi, vraisemblable."¹⁶ One might add that Villiers shared Poe's tendency to evoke the fantastic on a subjective basis as well. The temperament of Poe's and Villiers' characters can be described as nervous, fatigued or uneasy. As such, they appear more susceptible to premonitions, incursions of the fantastic, hallucinations or visions. The reader is, therefore, afforded a possible logical explanation of the extraordinary events that the characters witness. This is particularly the case in several of Villiers' stories such as "l'Intersigne," "Véra," and even "Claire Lenoir" in which Bonhomet describes himself as extremely nervous, afraid and suffering from an hereditary sickness.

. . . Je suis forcé de l'avouer, -- je suis sujet à un mal héréditaire qui bafoue, depuis longtemps, les efforts de ma raison et de ma volonté! Il consiste en une Appréhension, une ANXIÉTÉ sans motif précis, une AFFRÉ, en un mot, qui me prend comme une crise, me fait savourer toute l'amertume d'une inquiétude brusque et infernale, -- et cela, le plus souvent, à propos de futilités dérisoires!¹⁷

Villiers shares Poe's curiosity for the psychological effects vis à vis the characters who witness the extraordinary events, as well as the way in which their personalities are affected by certain neurological, spiritual, metaphysical or scientific obsessions. Both

Poe and Villiers utilized recent scientific or parapsychological discoveries to bolster the actuality and the plausibility of their fantastic tales. Once the scientific fantastic is postulated as being real, reality itself becomes fantastic. Todorov describes science fiction as a genre in which the reader ends by acknowledging its "naturalness." The rules of nature are stated only to be transgressed. "The transgression of the laws of nature made us even more powerfully aware of them."¹⁸

The fantastic makes us aware of a reality where nothing is what it appears to be. Throughout the entire story, Villiers emphasizes the frailty of human perception and the limitations of our knowledge about others and about reality. Claire was not always the pious Christian, having committed the sin of adultery. Bonhomet is a master of duplicity, a "faux savant," and prides himself in deceiving others. In fact, Bonhomet's attitude is full of bad faith and fraught with misconception. His assessment of himself can be summed up: "Bref, je fus charmant." While Claire, who is blind, intuitively knows his true nature; for she has the gift of inner vision.

The principal aim of Villiers' fantastic tale is to prove that visions as well as thoughts are real. One of the principal occult themes which he utilizes to illustrate this point is the concept of a dual reality which is reflected on the human plane as a duality in each human being. The dual nature of man is explained in occult terms by Césaire Lenoir who believes man is double, the interior

being revealing one's true nature whether man or animal. In the deepest recesses of his being, Lenoir admits to concealing a "vampire velu" within him. Although the manifestation of Lenoir's occult being foreshadows the theory of the unconscious id in modern terms, it was considered to be one aspect of man's nature by Eliphas Lévi for whom every human being had an external or visible aspect and an internal or astral aspect. According to Lévi, man's astral body could manifest itself in dreams, in visions and even after the death of the visible body. "Claire Lenoir" was surely inspired by Lévi's reference to an incident in which the disincarnated astral soul of a man wrought vengeance on his wife after his death. It was Paracelsus, the renaissance physician and alchemist, as Bettina Knapp reminds us, who advanced the idea that each person had a kind of invisible double, a disincarnated spirit, that belonged to the astral sphere, of which the manifest or visible world was but a reflection.¹⁹

Lévi tells us that such manifestations of the astral body occur by the concentration of energy in the form of astral light or universal magnetism which Paracelsus had discovered before Mesmer.²⁰ The material manifestation of the astral or sideral image on Claire's eyes is explained by Villiers as "un fluide vivant" -- the very same terms which Lévi uses to refer to astral light or magnetism.

Balzac, Hugo and other romantic writers utilized Swedenborg's conception of the hierarchy of existence to explain man's moral or immoral tendencies as a lower or higher sphere of being. Lavater's

description of the correspondence between the traits of animals and man's moral characteristics also served to point out that man's exterior countenance reflects the inner man. When Lenoir's astral body takes the form of a vampire, it is the materialization of his inner vengeance. As Drougard has indicated, Villiers most likely had consulted Lavater's "La Physiognomonie ou l'art de connaître les hommes d'après les traits de leur physionomie, leurs rapports avec les divers animaux, leurs penchants, etc." which had appeared in an abridged edition in 1845. Villiers was also familiar with Hugo's Les Misérables and several of his poems in which ample reference is made to the correspondence between animal traits and human virtues and vices. Villiers, however, developed the idea of man's dual nature further than Hugo.

Se souvenant très à propos des ressemblances animales souvent remarquées par les physiologistes, il nous les présente, en effet, comme l'apparition, par transparence, de ce corps interne tramé par nos actes mêmes et que la mort nous contraindra d'incorporer.²¹

We are reminded that Levi tells us that man's sidereal body conforms to his thoughts which modify, in the long run, the material characteristics of that body. In death, the schism between subject and object and between the inner and outer man is obliterated in Axël so that the superior being can manifest itself. In "Claire Lenoir," death permits Lenoir's inner evil to manifest itself in its material form.

C'est alors que les visions commencent à être un peu plus réelles! que dis-je? à être les seules choses méritant le titre de réalité. La Mort, c'est l'Impersonnel;

c'est la réalité de ce qui maintenant n'est que vision. Il est certain, pour moi, que nos actions y deviennent un second corps et que le Passé se réaffirme dans la Mort comme de la chair.²²

Villiers' use of occult phenomena to create the fantastic and to illustrate his illusionist ideas are closely allied with an occult conception of the universe. Occult thought springs from the concept that reality as we know it corresponds to a hidden reality. The incursion of the fantastic gives Bonhomet as well as the reader a glimpse of that hidden reality. Although Villiers was familiar with Lévi's Dogme et rituel de la haute magie, his knowledge of the occultist's work appears rather cursory in "Claire Lenoir." Villiers did, however, glean three essential ideas from Lévi to explain the manifestation of the fantastic: the concept of the astral body, as already discussed, the microcosm viewed as a reflection of the macrocosm, and reality as a symbolic manifestation of ideas and words.

One of the primary premises of occult thought that our world below is a reflection of what is above, or the macrocosm, receives striking illustration in Lévi's book with the depiction of the sabbatic goat to which Villiers also refers. Bonhomet, in speaking of Lenoir, reveals that:

Le vieux scélérat croyait fermement . . . aux signes de l'Esotérisme sacerdotal formulant la réprobation . . . Il avait, dans sa chambre, le Pentagramme d'or vierge et les attributs propices aux évocations noires et aux pactes. Il concevait le bouc baphométrique, emblème prêté, comme on sait, aux anciens Templiers; il commentait couramment les clavicules de Salomon et il croyait au corps sidéral enfermé en un chacun.²³

Drougard has already shown that Villiers used practically the same wording as Lévi to describe the sabbatic goat (le bouc baphométrique).²⁴ Lévi describes the symbolic meaning of the image which represents an androgynous being with one arm raised towards heaven, the other pointed towards earth, symbolizing the Hermetic axiom "that which is above is like that which is below." The goat's forehead bears the sign of the Pentagram, which is a sign of the microcosm and a symbol of astral light. The lighted torch which is placed between the goat's horns is a symbol of intelligence and the magical light of universal equilibrium. The sabbatic goat, thus, represents the principle of universal analogy and the dual, but complementary, nature of all things -- good and evil, heaven and earth, masculine and feminine, the body and the soul. Is it not possible to see in the name 'Bonhomet', the antithesis of the word "baphomet?" For Bonhomet's view of the world is purely uni-dimensional: nothing exists except that which is material manifest to man.

According to Lévi, the visible is the manifestation of the invisible; everything is symbolic. Behind every word is an idea and behind every form is a "veiled word." "All forms correspond to ideas, and there is no idea which has not its proper and peculiar form."²⁵ As such, both the fantastic and the occult symbolize the power of the word as well as the power of poetic creation.

It was the creative power of suggestion inherent in the occult

that captured Villiers' imagination and not the careful study of Lévi or the other occult writers whose names are flaunted before the reader's eyes. In fact, it is doubtful that Villiers had but a superficial awareness of the occultists' works that he mentions in the chapter entitled "Spiritisme." Bonhomet tells us that Césaire Lenoir was enthusiastic about Eliphas Lévi, Raymond Lulle, Mesmer, Guillaume Postel, "the kind monk of black magic," abbé Trithème, the astrologer, Auréole Théophraste Bombaste, otherwise referred to as "le divin Paracelse," Swedenborg and Reynaud. This rather strange conglomeration of astrologers, mystics and occult philosophers starting from the Renaissance and including Villiers' contemporaries (Reynaud and Lévi) are all referred to as "les anciens" by Villiers. All the writers except Reynaud are mentioned throughout Lévi's book, and it is unlikely that Villiers had but a cursory knowledge of their works. He does refer to Paracelsus in a letter to Mallarmé in which he asks when his "Traité des pierres précieuses" will appear and to Paracelsus' idea of the "pierre philosophale" in Axël. "Claire Lenoir" certainly owes much more to Lévi and Hegel than to the random references to the other occultists. However, Jean Reynaud's Terre et Ciel, which appeared in 1854, appears to have impressed Villiers as it had Hugo and Baudelaire. Reynaud's style and philosophical discussion is both clear and well developed and seems to have served as a format for the discussions in "Claire Lenoir." Although the expression "Enfer d'épuration," which Villiers attributes to Reynaud does not actually appear in Reynaud's work, the discussion

between the Philosopher and the Theologian in Terre et Ciel does revolve around the notion of atoning for one's sins. In Reynaud's book, the Philosopher refutes the Theologian's notion of an eternal hell, favoring the concept of purgatory. "Claire Lenoir" reflects Reynaud's view of life as a hell where we are damned from the start by original sin. Claire readily accepts her blindness as punishment for having committed the sin of adultery and is prepared to face the terrifying judgement in death. Villiers' world, although fraught with sin, finds hope in the Christian belief in redemption. The belief in forces of good, however, implies the belief in forces of evil as well.

Villiers never really doubted the existence of occult phenomena and seemed to delight in the fact that positivists and scientists would have to admit its existence. It appears that Villiers had also visited spiritists and had himself hypnotized. In the 1867 edition of "Claire Lenoir," Villiers mentions the spiritist, Hume, but was probably referring to the medium Daniel Dunglas Home whom he had occasion to meet at Nina de Villard's salon. Home was a friend of Alexandre Dumas, whom Villiers knew and who was instrumental in getting Villiers' play, La Révolte, presented in 1870. In the later edition of Tribulat Bonhomet, Villiers replaced Home's name with that of William Crookes whose scientific writings on psychic experiences had become more well known than Home's.²⁶ Mesmer's discovery of animal magnetism as well as the spiritual evocations by spiritist's were accepted by many who were avid to prove the existence of life

after death and by Christians who accepted such phenomena as proof of the existence of the soul. It was not until the 1880's, when Villiers reaffirmed his faith, that he felt that a true Christian would see in such evocations the work of the devil. In an article, Les Expériences du Dr. Crookes, published in 1884, Villiers says:

Le chrétien, quoi que puissent lui "écrire" d'apocryphes ou réels fantômes, est prémuni à tout jamais. L'Art d'évoquer les morts en vingt-cinq leçons n'a aucune prise sur lui...Les révélations du Transformisme ne lui semblent que des tentations misérables...Tout ce dont l'impression n'augmente pas, en nos âmes, l'amour de Dieu, le détachement de l'univers, l'union substantielle avec Jésus-Christ - tout cela vient du Mal, émane de l'Enfer nécessairement, absolument, sans autre examen ni compromis oïseux . . . Nous nous en tenons, comme toujours, à la Parole, à l'Esprit seul de l'Évangile: il est, strictement, sans discussions ni réserves, notre unique doctrine. Et quand bien même, par impossible, comme nous en prévient le concile, un Ange de Dieu descendrait du Ciel pour venir nous en enseigner une autre, nous resterions fermes et inébranlables dans notre foi.²⁷

Villiers, nevertheless, does not deny the existence of such phenomena, and will base Eve future on Mesmer's theory of magnetism to create an artificial woman and utilize the theory of resurrecting the dead in "Véra." Although he will attack spiritism for its charlatanism in his later works, the mystical aspects of occultism would always seem acceptable to him and compatible with his idealism and faith. It was mainly due to his friend, Léon Bloy, who criticized his occultism and interest in Hegel and Wagner, that Villiers attempted to reaffirm his childhood faith in his writings towards the end of his life. The apparent discrepancy between his faith and

occultism seemed to appear when he tried to render Axël more orthodox. The changes were never resolved to his satisfaction before his death.

It is evident that Villiers wished to give the impression that he was well versed in occult thought which had captured the imagination of many of his friends and the Parisian society of the times. Although some of his contemporaries such as V.-E. Michelet, Mallarmé and even Catulle Mendès believed Villiers had a far greater knowledge of occultism than modern critics would acknowledge, we must consider that the majority of Villiers' stories, for the most part, require no further amplification of occult imagery. As with much of Mallarmé's writing, it was the suggestive power of esoteric terms that appealed to Villiers, as well as to a public familiar with the psychic experiences of spiritists and magnetizers of the time. In fact, Villiers' understanding of occult thought captured the essential elements exposed by Lévi, the writings of Delaage and the other popular writers of the epoch. Villiers, of course, tainted his understanding of occult thought with Hegel's idealism and attempted to show that neither occultism nor philosophical idealism was incompatible with Catholicism. All three systems are based on a world cosmology, and interpret the relation of the ideal or God and reality by means of analogy and symbols.

In "Claire Lenoir," the hidden reality which confronts Bonhomet conceals a pandeterminism, a world cosmology, whose laws govern causality which the uninitiated or the spiritually blind cannot see.

Bonhomet refuses to believe in a pandeterminism which both Claire, the Christian, and Lenoir, the occultist, accept. Bonhomet belongs to that group whom Claire characterizes as "...Les âmes épaisses et profanatrices, vêtues de hasard et d'apparences, et qui passent, murées, dans le sépulcre de leurs sens mortels."²⁸ The incursion of another level of reality gives Bonhomet a feeling of losing control, dislodges his basic assumptions concerning reality, and plunges him and the reader into a direct confrontation with a new reality that challenges an order based on man alone.

The equilibrium of the universe, as Bonhomet suggests, is set askew by the incursion of the fantastic. It was Lévi's contention that occult phenomena such as magnetism were not fantastic but provided a positive reconciliation of faith and reason. Bonhomet, as narrator and witness, becomes aware, if not totally convinced, of the existence of a supernatural order. The progression of the intrigue is centered upon his growing apprehension that a supernatural order exists. The last chapter significantly entitled, "Le Roi des épouvantes," is a quote from the Jewish prophet, Habacuc, and symbolizes the final scene of confrontation with the invisible. As such, the structure of this tale of the fantastic progresses much like the ritual of initiation which reenacts the passage of the initiate from one state of consciousness to another. Villiers had utilized this structure to symbolize the psychological development of his idealistic heroes. For the spiritually blind Bonhomet, there is no gnosis. The story ends with the revelation of haunting horror and ambiguity.

The confrontation between reality and the fantastic is not unlike the confrontation between a Platonic conception of the world as an illusion and an Aristotelian conception of the world which can be classified and analyzed as Bonhomet attempts to do through science. The fantastic, according to Todorov, is "an experience of limits" which invites transgression of those limits. It is Gourevitch's contention that Bonhomet refuses this transgression and that "le débat n'est pas entre idéalisme et christianisme, il est entre le réalisme matérialiste qui refuse la transgression et les autres systèmes de pensée qui la prônent."²⁹

Bonhomet attempts to discover the correspondence between the visible and the invisible through the aid of his optical instruments. As such, Bonhomet does attempt to transgress the limits of the unknown through science. Chambers correctly points out that science itself is a "technique de voyance" which opens vistas on the unknown. Bonhomet's optical instruments replace the inner vision of the mystic, providing him with the artificial means of "voyance." Bonhomet himself admits this.

Oui, j'ai consacré les fruits mûrs de leurs sueurs séculaires à l'achat des lentilles et des appareils qui mettent à nu les arcanes d'un monde momentanément invisible!...La réalité devient alors visionnaire - et je sens que, le microscope à la main, j'entre de plain-pied dans le domaine des Rêves!"³⁰

Unlike the mystic, Bonhomet's confrontation with the unknown does not provide spiritual revelation and cosmic awareness of the harmony of all things but, rather, a feeling of fear and inadequacy.

In "Claire Lenoir," the occult idea of "le regard" or "la voyance" is raised to a major theme. "Claire Lenoir," with its symbolic title, is based on alternating images of light and darkness, seeing and not seeing. The theme of "voyance" is symbolized by Claire's eyes, veiled by blindness and by her glasses "couleur d'azur." Her blindness is only towards the external world which is adrift in a spiritual void. Similiar to the blind seers of ancient literature, her inner vision permits her to know the true nature of things. The gaze from her eyes is so penetrating that it renders anyone looking at her uneasy. Her eyes remind us of the mysterious eyes of Baudelaire's women and of his cats who reveal the arcane mystery of the infinite. Claire's eyes are masked to the outside world by blindness and by her glasses. Just as the true face of Isis is veiled, the truth must remain masked to a profane world which is alien to those spiritual truths that give Claire inner strength. Symbolically, it is on her death bed that she breaks her glasses. She no longer requires them 'to see'. Bonhomet, on the other hand, is condemned to be ignorant of anything beyond the phenomenological even with his ocular aids. The breaking of the glasses recalls the cosmological event described in the Kabbalist text of Luria. The eyes of Adam-Kadmon, the primordial and archetypal man, are the vessels that refract the light of creation. The breaking of the vessels is caused by the lack of harmony between the masculine and feminine elements in creation, and marks the cataclysmic event in which demonic forces

are forced down to the world. Every further emanation of creation from his eyes is broken and flawed.

It is also significant that Lenoir's vampirism manifests itself through the image on Claire's eyes, the vessels of "voyance" through which she had power to know the ideal and defend herself from his evil. Unlike many of Villiers' energetic and virile feminine characters such as Isis and Sara, Claire is mainly a passive feminine figure, submitting to her husband and to the consequences of her past indiscretion. It is only through her eyes, symbols of faith and the gateway to her consciousness, that Césaire can dominate and reclaim the last vestige of his wife's individual freedom -- her soul. Instead of seeking "tikkun," as the Kabbalists refer to the restoration of primordial man in whom the masculine and feminine principles were one before the breaking of the vessels, Césaire perpetuates his cleavage from his other half and from God.

Villiers appears to provide a rational explanation of psychic intuition by presenting the concepts of philosophical idealism and by positing the possibility of utilizing those psychic powers through occultism. Both systems imply that ideas are or can become real. It should be remembered that Lévi warns the neophyte that the powers of occult science can be used for good, referred to as "la science blanche," or for evil, "la science noire." Lenoir's use of black science for evil purposes implies, if one considers the occult idea of complementary opposites, that good can also be made manifest. Claire's faith can be just as real as Lenoir's evil. "...J'espère et

je suis sûre -- qu'après un instant d'agonie, Dieu ne m'exclura pas de tout pardon."³¹ Occultism and Christian faith appear to reinforce each other and stand opposed to the even greater evil symbolized by Bonhomet's positivistic science.

Quoi qu'on dise, l'occultisme est un idéalisme, puis qu'il admet l'existence de l'âme, sa spiritualité, sa survie, sa suprématie sur la matière, et que les études qu'il fait des manifestations psychiques sont inspirées par les plus hautes préoccupations morales. L'occultisme . . . est un idéalisme pratique, empirique, expérimental.³²

In "Claire Lenoir," Villiers evokes a world where the symbols of sin and evil become manifest. Although Claire's blindness appears to be a punishment for her adultery, her marriage, arranged by Bonhomet, is not exactly a divine union ordained in heaven. Her faith, Villiers leads us to believe, will assure her redemption. However, for Bonhomet, the positivist, the invisible whether in the form of God's grace or Lenoir's vengeance is inconceivable. He must prove to himself that the invisible exists with the aid of his scientific instruments. Even then, he is not sure of what he has 'seen'. Modern science, a symbol of evil, is an enticing dream of power devoid of moral considerations. Rather than dominating nature and conquering the unknown, Villiers views modern science as a Catch-22 situation. "Et la Science, la souriante vieille aux yeux clairs, à la logique un peu trop désintéressée, à la fraternelle embrassade, me ricanait à l'oreille qu'elle n'était, elle aussi, qu'un leurre de l'Inconnu qui nous guette et nous attend."³³

For a society bent on progress at all costs, modern science was a replacement for God. Rather than shedding true enlightenment on the world, Bonhomet's science is referred to as "borrowed light" by Claire. Everything about Bonhomet and his science take on mythic proportions. A symbolic archetype of his century, Bonhomet describes himself as a "Saturnien de la seconde époque." Saturn, according to Desbarrolles' les Mystères de la main which Villiers had read, is the dominant astrological sign of the century. Saturn's dominance is characterized by seriousness, greediness and lack of faith -- all aspects of the modern era of which Bonhomet is the reflection and incarnation. Every aspect of Bonhomet's physiomy corresponds to the most obnoxious and diabolical traits categorized by Lavater and Desbarrolles. Bonhomet is proud to announce that, "La couleur et la qualité de mon poil sont dures comme celles de mes pairs en contemporanéité symbolique."³⁴

Villiers' fascination with the character, Tribulat Bonhomet, did not wane. For over twenty years Villiers continued to create additional episodes in which Bonhomet figures. Certain adventures elucidate the demonic nature of the character, while others remain only as fragments or titles for future stories.

The first hint of Bonhomet's demonic nature first appears in the epigraph to Tribulat Bonhomet: "Je m'appelle Légion." The quote is borrowed from an episode in the New Testament which describes

demonic possession. The selection of the epigraph which characterizes Bonhomet reveals the symbolic and mythical proportions his evil represented to Villiers. Lévi also tells us that "légion," as described in the Gospel represents the evil spirit formed by the magnetic chain of perverse wills. It is a blind force that influences people of inferior instinct.³⁵ It should be remembered that in Villiers' early poem, "Le Chant du Calvaire," he refers to those who crucified Christs as "savants" who dissect Christ, the incarnation of the divine ideal. Bonhomet will also be called "le vivisecteur de l'idéal." He is also the enemy of true light. In a later episode, "Le Tueur de Cygnes," Villiers utilizes the legend of the dying swan who sings his best song just before dying to tempt the grotesque and vile, Bonhomet, into killing this "divine bird." The swan, a symbol of the artist "perdu en un rayon de soleil," represents all that is alien to the very rational and insensitive Dr. Bonhomet. Having heard of the legend, Bonhomet decides to sneak up on the unsuspecting birds and slowly kill them one by one to hear their songs. Dismissing their sublime music as sentimental and outdated, he sadistically wallows in the terror and the agony his mere presence incites. As with Sade, evil is natural. One is reminded of Baudelaire's "Art Romantique" in which he says, "Le mal se fait sans effort, naturellement, par fatalité: le bien est toujours le produit d'un art."³⁶ Only through crime can Bonhomet transcend his own banality by incarnating the satanic executioner of the exiled, martyred and sacred "oiseaux-poètes." Villiers ironically refers to him as the

"Patron of the arts of our era." "Alors, l'âme des cygnes expirants s'exhalait, oublieuse du bon docteur, en un chant d'immortel espoir, de délivrance et d'amour, vers de Cieux inconnus."³⁷ A seeker of sensation, Bonhomet is oblivious of the martyrdom of the swan and the mystery of its song; he is only aware of the "timbre" of their music. Finding pleasure in the simple sensation of sound, Bonhomet, the dilettante, fears losing control of his reason and refuses to be seduced by the mysterious powers of the unknown evoked by the swans. ". . . Cette musique seule, depuis qu'il l'avait entendue, l'aidait à supporter les déceptions de la vie et toute autre ne lui semblait plus que du charivari, du 'Wagner'."³⁸ Villiers' irony is filled with biting contempt, for even Bonhomet finds consolation through art in an otherwise meaningless existence. Just as Balzac and Hoffmann before him, Villiers considered music as an art which could transport man to a mystic awareness of the beyond, it expressed without words the inexpressible. Bonhomet, however, belongs to that group of indifferent who listen, but do not hear.

Tribulat Bonhomet will always figure as one of the most poignant incarnations of the bad conscience of the nineteenth century. Among the anecdotes and aphorisms attributed to this titanic and eternal symbol, resounds Villiers' own indictment of the modern era. "Que celui qui me trouvera exagéré sache bien que moi, Bonhomet, je ne suis autre que lui-même. Je ne rougis que d'une chose: c'est de me voir si banal, si profondément banal."³⁹

With the exploration and development of the evocative powers of the fantastic, the occult, and modern science, "Claire Lenoir" with the creation of the character, Dr. Tribulat Bonhomet, appears as a natural progression in Villiers' writings from the imaginative idealism of Isis and Elën to Edison's apocalyptic science in Eve future.

CHAPTER VIII FOOTNOTES

- 1 Drougard, Trois premiers contes, II:13.
- 2 Villiers, Correspondance générale, I:99.
- 3 The Revue des Lettres et des Arts appeared weekly from October 13, 1867 to March 28, 1868.
- 4 Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Tribulat Bonhomet, ed., P.G. Castex and J.M. Bellefroid (Paris: José Corti, 1967), p. 82.
- 5 Ibid., p. 92.
- 6 Ibid., p. 144.
- 7 Ibid., p. 147.
- 8 Ibid., p. 160.
- 9 Ibid., p. 83.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid., p. 71.
- 12 Tzvetan Todorov, The Fantastic (Cleveland/London: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973), p. 82.
- 13 Robert du Pontavice de Heussey, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam (Paris: Savine, 1893), p. 52.
- 14 Tribulat Bonhomet, p. 15.
- 15 A. M. Schmidt, "Villiers écrivain fantastique?", I La Quinzaine (mars 1966), p. 13.
- 16 Marcel Schneider, La Littérature fantastique en France (Paris: Fayard, 1964), p. 244.
- 17 Tribulat Bonhomet, p. 78.
- 18 Todorov, The Fantastic, p. 173.

- 19 Bettina L. Knapp, Dream and Image (New York: Whitston Publishing Company, 1977), p. 390.
- 20 Lévi, Transcendental Magic, p. 73 and p. 143.
- 21 Drougard, Trois premiers contes, II:116.
- 22 Tribulat Bonhomet, p. 170.
- 23 Ibid., p. 128.
- 24 Emile Drougard, "Villiers de l'Isle-Adam et Eliphas Lévi," Revue belge, 3 (1931):508-509.
- 25 Lévi, Transcendental Magic, p. 66.
- 26 Drougard, Trois premiers contes, II:126.
- 27 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, V:174-176.
- 28 Tribulat Bonhomet, p. 118.
- 29 Jean-Paul Gourevitch, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam: ou l'univers de la transgression (Paris: Pierre Seghers, 1971), p. 53.
- 30 Tribulat Bonhomet, p. 76.
- 31 Ibid., p. 212.
- 32 Van der Meulen, L'Idéalisme de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, p. 163.
- 33 Tribulat Bonhomet, p. 222.
- 34 Ibid., p. 73.
- 35 Lévi, Transcendental Magic, p. 243.
- 36 Baudelaire, Oeuvres complètes, p. 1183.
- 37 Tribulat Bonhomet, p. 44.
- 38 Ibid., p. 39.
- 39 Ibid., p. 249.

CHAPTER IX

EVE FUTURE

. . . The supreme dream of philosophers was to accomplish the work of Prometheus by imitating the work of God--that is to say, by producing a man who should be the child of science, as Adam was child of divine omnipotence. The dream was insensate perhaps, and yet it was sublime.¹

It had long been Villiers' intent to write the great work that would rival Goethe's Faust. The first part of Eve future was published in 1880 in serial form under the title, Eve nouvelle, with the announcement that " . . . le lecteur peut s'attendre à un style et à une froide puissance d'idées qui ne ressemblent positivement à rien du connu."²

Basically the plot evolves as follows: a rich and young English nobleman, Lord Ewald, has fallen in love with the actress, Alicia Clarey, an exquisite beauty whose materialistic banality belies the illusion that her physical beauty suggests. The schism between reality and the ideal has driven Lord Ewald to the verge of suicide. To save his friend's life as well as the rest of humanity from the artifices of modern women, Edison offers the possibility of "une positive, prestigieuse et toujours fidèle illusion,"³ -- a reality more real than the changing, vulgar and deceitful reality of modern life. Edison will thus create the ideal woman, a mechanical personification of Ewald's illusion, by mastering the forces of electricity

and magnetism. Upon his return to England with his ideal automaton, Ewald's ship is caught in a terrible storm. His beloved ideal is lost with the sinking ship.

Science and magnetism become the vehicles by which the incursion of supernatural forces become manifest. The affirmation of a divine pandeterminism is evoked by the theological overtones and spiritual symbolism of the ideal. The spiritual adventure is likened to an initiatory process in which the idealist seeks his feminine ideal in an attempt to re-establish the divine unity of the primordial androgyn. The initiatory process ends in gnosis, an affirmation of his future redemption.

Just how new was this idea of creating an artificial being, one that Villiers considered revolutionary? Villiers' creation of the andréïde, or the female automaton, is a symbolic attempt to create his ideal. Its creation implies a metaphysical option, a spiritual quest for redemption. In this respect, Villiers succeeds in rendering a symbolic incarnation of the ideal that surpasses the cloaked eroticism and demonism which characterized other literary automations. Examples abound in the writings of Gautier and Mérimée of statues coming to life; and there are, of course, the autonomous creations such as Hoffman's automaton, Olympia, in The Sandman, Goethe's Homunculus, and Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. Villiers was already familiar with Gautier's Arria Marcella in which the hero, Octavien, exploring the archaeological ruins of Pompeii sees the city come to life. In his hallucinatory trance the statue of the

beautiful Pompeian, Arria Marcella, becomes real and introduces Octavien to love. In this allegory of the conflict between the Hellenic ideal of beauty and Christian morality,⁴ Gautier relegates the ideal of love and beauty to an imaginary world that can only exist in the exoticism of the past. Villiers' andréïde, contrary to Gautier's implied eroticism, is a forcible attempt to sublimate Eros by substituting for the instinctual (sexual) aspects of the real woman the ideal soul of a being from beyond the grave.

Villiers' "machine à voyance," as he refers to the andréïde, symbolizes the privileged domain of the imagination which also belongs to the poet of Villiers' "l'Elu des Rêves" and to great visionaries such as Salomon. Hoffman's The Sandman is quoted in the epigraph of the second chapter of Eve future: "C'est lui... Ah! dis-je en ouvrant de grands yeux dans l'obscurité: c'est l'Homme-au sable! . . ." ⁵ As Ross Chambers has shown,⁶ Hoffman was the first to speak of the creation of an automaton as an instrument of voyance, a creation of science that could simulate the somnambulistic trance and that would allow the protagonist to penetrate the occult world. By delving into the secrets of the occult, Nathanael, the young man who has fallen in love with Olympia, sees only the illusion he has of her and is, subsequently, punished for his indiscretion by becoming insane. His sin was to seek occult knowledge, the secret of life, represented by the Sandman who, with Professor Spalanzani, created Olympia. While the incursion of the fantastic in Hoffman's tale remains grotesque and diabolical, Villiers alludes

to the metaphysical consequences of man's search to create the perfect representation of an ideal. If both Nathanael and Lord Ewald see only the reflection of their higher self when they gaze in the mirror-like eyes of their beloved automatons, it is only Lord Ewald who becomes a spiritual participant in the resurrection of a soul from beyond the tomb. Edison says to Lord Ewald:

. . . Car si j'ai fourni physiquement ce qu'elle a de terrestre et d'illusoire, une Ame qui m'est inconnue s'est superposée à mon oeuvre et, s'y incorporant à jamais, a réglé, croyez-moi, les moindres détails de ces scènes effrayantes et douces avec un art si subtil qu'il passe, en vérité, l'imagination de l'homme.⁷

Edison's creation is not a simple robot. Villiers was well aware of the limitations of science, or at least, of man's control over it. Transformation of the andréïde from a purely mechanical automaton to a conscious being demands the introduction of a miraculous event beyond Edison's science. Edison has only prepared the vehicle through which the soul of Sowana, the medium, can manifest itself. Perhaps it is for this reason that Villiers utilizes the word andréïde, a feminine transformation of the word "android" which is found in the writings of Eliphas Lévi and in Collin de Plancy's Dictionnaire Infernal. De Plancy writes in his article on Albert le Grand:

. . . Qu'il employa pendant trente ans, toute sa science de magicien et d'astrologue à faire de métaux bien choisis, et sous l'inspection des astres, un automate doué de la parole, qui lui servait d'oracle et résolvait toutes les questions qu'on lui proposait: c'est ce qu'on appelle l'androïde d'Albert le Grand.⁸

We see that the android acts as a medium for occult forces which utilized it to speak. We are also informed that Saint Thomas considered it the work of the devil and destroyed it. Eliphas Lévi explains the creation of the android by galvanic action or, in other words, magnetism.

The real and serious android of the ancients was a secret which they have kept hidden from all eyes, and Mesmer was the first who dared to divulge it. It was the projection of the will of the Magus into another body, organized and served by an elementary spirit; in more modern and intelligible terms, it was a magnetic subject.⁹

The technology that Edison uses to create the andréïde has its basis in the positive scientific advances of the time -- in electricity, the phonograph, magnetism and hypnotism. The laboriously long passages in which Villiers describes the technological means used by Edison furnish a plausible basis for the introduction of the fantastic -- the transference of Sowana's soul to that of the andréïde. These passages also reveal Villiers undeniable interest and even his awe concerning the potential of modern science to realize man's wildest dreams. As Raitt points out, "Il (Villiers) n'a jamais mis en question l'authenticité des phénomènes hypnotiques, non plus que celle des phénomènes de spiritisme."¹⁰

Villiers, as well as many of his contemporaries, considered animal magnetism not only in terms of hypnotism, as the term has come to mean today, but as a type of energy which flowed between people as an electrical fluid does. The followers of Mesmer believed that "animal magnetism" was a natural force which could affect both the

animate and inanimate world. Practitioners of magnetism induced somnambulist trances in an endeavor to simulate the state of "voyance" that mystics experienced naturally. Mesmer himself believed that the same power which attracted iron to magnets kept the planets in their orbits and revealed "une influence mutuelle entre les corps célestes, la terre, et les corps animés."¹¹

Villiers considered electromagnetism as a fluid which flowed between the mesmerist and the consciousness of the subject, thereby creating a union of wills.

-- S'il est indiscutable enfin, qu'une sorte d'obscur magnétisme se dégage même des choses végétales et minérales et peut franchir, -- sans inducteurs, -- obstacles et distances jusqu'à impressionner de leur vertu spéciale un être surpris, outre mesure, qu'entre trois individus d'espèce congénère, mis en relation par un centre commun électromagnétisé, les fluides, en un certain instant, soient devenus corrélatifs au point que le phénomène en question se soit produit?¹²

In an effort to convince the reader of the plausibility of electromagnetic energy passing from one consciousness to another, Villiers prepares the reader for the incursion of the fantastic -- the transference of one soul to another: Edison "venait d'entrevoir très distinctement la présence d'un être d'outre-tombe dans l'Andréïde."¹³ The limits of the time and space are abolished: death is only an illusion. Villiers was not alone in believing mesmerism to be proof of the reality of the invisible. Many Christian transcendentalists also considered it as proof of the existence of the soul, as well as a force which pervades the universe.

Mesmerism was not without its metaphysical implications, and many of its proponents believed they had discovered a power which governed everyone and everything. According to Villiers:

Celui qui, ayant découvert ce fluide nouveau, pourrait en disposer comme des deux autres (electrical and nervous fluid), serait capable d'opérer des prodiges à confondre ceux des yoghis de l'Inde, des bonzes thibétains, des fakirs charmeurs du Coromandel et des derviches de l'Egypte centrale.¹⁴

In this respect, the power of modern science to control the laws of nature is not unlike the power promised to the magus of occult science. In fact, it was Lévi who reiterated the positivist nature of occult magic which he based on the existence of astral light or magnetism. Edison says to Lord Ewald:

Elles ont démontré, vous le savez, que la Science, à la fois ancienne et récente, du Magnétisme humain est une science positive, indiscutable, -- et qu'en un mot la réalité de notre fluide nerveux n'est pas moins évidente que celle du fluide électrique.¹⁵

The magnetic influence of Edison's will on his subject, in this case, a highly sensitive clairvoyant, creates a phenomenon of extra-voyance -- to use Villier's words. The reader is catapulted by quasi-scientific explanations (the scientific academies did not accept Mesmer's theories of magnetism, considering it a psychological phenomenon of suggestibility) to an acceptance of the supernatural. Villiers is echoing the feelings of Lévi and Henri Delaage, as well as other occultists of the time, when he presents magnetism as a means of communicating with unknown and invisible forces.

Hadaly, whom we are told means "ideal" in Iranian, is the soul that speaks to Lord Ewald through the form of the andréïde. She is referred to as the auxiliatrice, for it is through her that man can see past the barriers that separate the world from the ideal. "Je suis, vers toi, l'envoyée de ces régions sans bornes dont l'Homme ne peut entrevoir les pâles frontières qu'entre certains songes et certains sommeils."¹⁶

It appears that the tedious scientific explanations throughout the text are merely an attempt to validate the insights of the poet's imagination -- the power of which had surely been lost for the positivists of his age. It is necessary for the reader to feel convinced or at least entertain the frightening possibility of new laws of nature for the poet's imagination to bear the stamp of reality and the full weight of his irony. Science, although occasionally mysterious, is real and sanctions man's attempt to free himself from the restraints of the external forces of nature and, by implication, the internal dominance of his own instincts. The fantastic, by transgressing the laws of time and space, gave free rein to the erotic suggestiveness in the fantasies of many of the writers of the day such as Gautier. However, with Villiers, we see a sublimation of Eros in the mechanical ideal woman. "Là, les temps se confondent; l'espace n'est plus! les dernières illusions de l'instinct s'évanouissent."¹⁷

The ideal does not exist; it can only be imagined or remembered as a perfect state which existed before our exile. The feeling of

exile, which is an integral part of Villiers' battered visionaries like Samuel, Axel and Lord Ewald, is not alien to the theme of the "Fall" which characterizes the universe in which they live -- a universe where the only metaphysical feelings that remain in the face of the eternal silence are those which are buried in the deepest recesses of our memory. It is this interior memory, according to Swedenborg, which guards the recollections of our lost condition. Lord Ewald similarly addresses the "Grand X des Causes premières."

La jeune amie que tu daignas m'envoyer, jadis, pendant les premières nuits du monde, me paraît aujourd'hui devenue le simulacre de la soeur promise, et je ne reconnais plus assez ton empreinte, en ce qui anime sa forme déserte, pour la traiter en compagne. -- Ah! l'exil s'alourdit, s'il me faut regarder seulement comme un jouet de mes sens d'argile celle dont le charme consolateur et sacré devait réveiller, -- en mes yeux si las de l'aspect d'un ciel vide! -- le souvenir de ce que nous avons perdu. A force de siècles et de misères, le permanent mensonge de cette ombre m'ennuie! rien de plus: et je ne me soucie plus de ramper dans l'Instinct, d'où elle me tente et m'attire, jusqu'à m'efforcer de croire, toujours et en vain, qu'elle est mon amour.¹⁸

Alicia Clarey symbolizes the fallen Eve perpetuating the original sin. She is none other than a manifestation of the bad mother archetype. This female vampire celebrates her sexuality by seducing men to their destruction. We are reminded that Lord Ewald was going to kill himself because of her and that Anderson, the medium's husband, abandoned his wife and committed suicide for this type of woman. Again we see the eternal image of woman leading man away from the divine because of her sexuality. "Non, cet être ne fut

point, pour lui, cette Eve ingénue que l'amour, -- fatal, sans doute! -- mais, enfin, que l'amour égara vers cette Tentation qui, pensait-elle, devait grandir jusqu'à l'état divin son compagnon de paradis!"¹⁹ As Dr. Mendel remarks, "D'une certaine manière, les seules femmes acceptables et qui seront laissées en paix (chez Villiers) ne pourront être que celles mutilées de leur sexualité. La sexualité de la femme, voilà l'ennemie."²⁰ The femme fatale is the antithesis of the transcendence of Eros. Alicia Clarey, a worldly creation of perfect bones and mascara, is capable of feigning the deepest emotions on stage, but is incapable of feeling anything but the most mediocre, superficial desires in real life.

Pour conclure, ce qui déconcerte en elle, c'est le fait de cette presque surhumaine beauté recouvrant de son divin voile ce caractère de modération plate, cet esprit de vulgarisme, cette exclusive et folle considération pour ce que l'Or, la Foi, l'Amour et l'Art ont de purement extérieur, c'est-à-dire de vain et d'illusoire.²¹

There is a hierarchy of values that characterizes the world as Villiers conceives it. God is the highest ideal conceivable for the voyant, that is to say, for the person who through intelligence has intuition of the divine.

Mais, en celui qui la réfléchit, l'Idée-vive de Dieu n'apparaît qu'au degré seul où la foi du voyant peut l'évoquer. Dieu, comme toute pensée, n'est dans l'Homme que selon l'individu. Nul ne sait où commence l'Illusion, ni en quoi consiste la Réalité. Or, Dieu étant la plus sublime conception possible et toute conception n'ayant sa réalité que selon le vouloir et les yeux intellectuels particuliers à chaque vivant, il s'ensuit qu'écarter de ses pensées l'idée d'un Dieu ne signifie pas autre chose que se décapiter gratuitement l'esprit.²²

Villiers is no longer concerned with Feuerbach's²³ interpretation of seeing God as a mirror of one's own illusions. Villiers' illusionism appears justified as his idealists take refuge in a world of their own creation. "Sans l'illusion, tout périt. On ne l'évite pas. L'illusion, c'est la lumière!"²⁴ If we are all prisoners of illusions, it is because we do not see beyond the forms. Reality as well as our ideals are relative.

Donc, n'oubliez plus que nous ne voyons des choses que ce que leur suggèrent nos seuls yeux: nous ne les concevons que d'après ce qu'elles nous laissent entrevoir de leurs entités mystérieuses: nous n'en possédons que ce que nous en pouvons éprouver, chacun selon sa nature! Et, grave écureuil, l'Homme s'agite en vain dans la geôle mouvante de son MOI, sans pouvoir s'évader de l'illusion où le captivent ses sens dérisoires!²⁵

Everything is a symbol. By means of the universal analogy, the world that we know corresponds not only to a higher but also to a lower mode of being. Villiers refers to Swedenborg's theory of correspondences much in the way Baudelaire and Hugo did by incarnating our vices in animal form. Alicia Clarey represents the hostile feminine image as seen in the viper and the vampire, as well as the poisonous upas in the plant world.

Tous les êtres ont leurs correspondances dans un régime inférieur de la nature. Cette correspondance, qui est, en quelque sorte, la figure de leur réalité, les éclaire aux yeux du métaphysicien La correspondance de ces mornes Circés dans le monde végétal (puisque n'étant elles-mêmes, malgré leurs formes humaines, que du monde animal, il faut regarder au-dessous pour préciser leur correspondance), celle-ci n'est autre que l'arbre Upa, dont elles sont, en analogie, comme les myriades de feuilles vénéneuses.²⁶

In his long diatribes Villiers, lashes out with fear and hate against the vampire-like women whom he says are "moins distantes, en REALITE, de l'espèce animale que de la nôtre."²⁷ The excellent analysis of Eve future by Dr. Gérard Mendel in La Révolte contre le père reveals the aggressive nature of Edison's scientific power which usurps and eliminates the sexual and reproductive powers of the hostile mother image. Edison becomes "l'assassin de son animalité triomphante."²⁸

En effet, son agressivité contre la femme, la mère, sa misogynie fondamentale étaient le reflet de sa peur. Sa force était usurpée, puisque le père (Edison) se définit avant tout pour l'Inconscient de l'enfant (Lord Ewald) comme celui qui n'a pas peur de la mère. De plus, il induisait une relation homosexuelle entre lui et son "protégé" -- témoignant de son impuissance hétérosexuelle, et promettant implicitement de remplacer la Mère: "je serai pour toi l'être et l'avoir".²⁹

Edison represents scientific technology, an incarnation of man's individual narcissism, triumphing over the dreaded powers of nature, magic and man's own instincts -- all hostile mother images. The violence against the mother is tempered by attempting to create the andréïde, or good mother image, but he succeeds in only creating a sterile machine. This ideal creation is referred to as the hermaphroditic angel, reminiscent of Balzac's Séraphita rather than Swedenborg's angels. In fact, Swedenborg's angels retain their particular sex and are not hermaphroditic as Villiers maintains. "Vous voyez: c'est un ange! -- ajouta-t-il avec son même ton grave,

-- si, comme l'enseigne notre Théologie, les anges ne sont que feu et lumière! -- N'est-ce pas le baron de Swédenborg qui se permet, même, d'ajouter qu'ils sont hermaphrodites et stériles?"³⁰

Lord Ewald risks abdicating his power and liberty to the shattering onslaught of hostile mother images or to the electro-galvanized phallus of the father of technology (le Papa de Phonographe). The disquieting return of the bad mother image at the end of Eve future, (where the andréïde is engulfed by the stormy sea) implies the ultimate failure of man to be free from these hostile forces. The destruction of the andréïde signals the return of the irrational or the unknown.

For Mallarmé, "Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard," while for Villiers there is a pandeterminism which lurks below the façade of reality as we know it. Although scientific technology seeks to annihilate the irrational and mystery of the unknown, these occult forces reappear triumphant. Even before Freud, Villiers appears to be aware of the power of the subconscious libido. "Certes, en tout homme forment, vituels, tous les salissants désirs que couvent les fumées du sang et de la chair."³¹ Based on the theosophical theory of analogies, one can draw a parallel between the irrational forces in man's subconscious and the irrational or magical forces exterior to him. It is on this dual level that the incursion of irrational forces must be understood. The warring psychic forces are but an internalized primordial drama of cosmic exterior forces.

According to Gourevitch, the elements of the plot of Eve future are very sketchy: "L'accent est mis sur la signification de l'Eve future plus que sur sa vérité. Preuve en est la comparaison sans cesse renouvelée entre l'idéale Hadaly et la réelle Miss Alicia Clarey, au bénéfice exclusif de la première citée."³² Yet, something is happening, for the equilibrium of the laws of nature as we know them is being broken. The emotionally crippled idealist participates in an initiatory drama not unlike those in Isis, Elën and Axël. The quest for personal fulfillment is a pure and ritualistic act.

Serge Hutin's study permits us to grasp the initiatory experience in Eve future in terms of the tantric union popularized by Vintras. Villiers' friend, Léon Bloy, along with Ernest Hello were showing an ardent interest in the Parousie, the end of the world, and Vintras' Oeuvre de Miséricorde, in which God's anger could be appeased by preparing the coming of the Holy Spirit on earth. Lévi and Mallarmé had both denounced the dubious practices of Vintras. Strange accounts of sordid sexual acts were supposed to take place during the ceremonies in Vintras' sanctuary. It is doubtful that Villiers was ever an initiate of a sect of this nature. In Tantrism all passions, including sexual desires, are indulged in order to satisfy the senses as a means to overcome them. Psychologically, this is incompatible with Villiers' life style as well as his idealism. The ideal heroes in his writings sublimate their sexual drives in Platonic relationships. "Ma passion, d'abord ardente pour les

lignes, la voix, le parfum et le charme EXTERIEUR de cette femme (Alicia Clarey), est devenue d'un platonisme absolu. Son être moral m'a glacé les sens à jamais: ils en sont devenus purement contemplatifs."³³ In Villiers' own life, union with his ideal soul mate was never realized. The echoes of Villiers' real thoughts resound in a moving passage in Eve future:

Renonçant donc aux SOI-DISANT REELS attachement de la terre, je me survivrai, sans regrets, en ces êtres immortellement imaginaires que crée le Génie, et je les animerai de mon chant mystérieux. Ce seront mes seules compagnes, mes seules amies, mes uniques soeurs Ainsi, je cacherai ma mélancolie dans la lumière et je m'en irai dans ces régions de l'Idéal où l'insulte des humains n'atteint plus.³⁴

Lord Ewald compares Alicia immediately to a statue, that is to say, a divine or superior being. Her physical traits remind us of classical incarnations of Beauty and, consequently, give her a symbolical significance suggesting the eternal. She is "la Vénus victrix humanisée."³⁵ Although her soul does not correspond to her physical beauty, the evocative possibilities that her beauty suggests provide Lord Ewald with a glimpse of the affinity between reality and his ideal. He sees in the creation of the andréïde an act of redemption for the fallen Eve and for himself.

To this extent, the initiatory experience is a dream of power, an attempt to partake of the master's power, his knowledge and his magic. Edison, the father figure, is as much a Promethean figure as was Isis, the high priestess of magic, for both modern science and

occult magic reaffirm human involvement in life's processes. Edison and his science are the mediators for the young initiate against the irrational. As Serge Hutin remarks, "Au fond, l'Edison de Eve future est une sorte de doublet moderne du Maître Janus d'Axël: là aussi, cette majestueuse figure se révèle à nous comme le Maître (Gourou), l'initiateur d'un jeune disciple."³⁶

Villiers juxtaposes myth with modern science in order to expand the symbolic meaning of his tale. He is aware that the Faust-like figure of Thomas Edison incarnates the scientist of the past as well as of the present -- an eternal archetype. "Il est, ainsi, bien établi que j'interprète une légende moderne au milieu de l'oeuvre d'Art métaphysique dont j'ai conçu l'idée, qu'en un mot le héros de ce livre est, avant tout, le "Sorcier de Menlo Park, etc., -- et non M. l'ingénieur Edison, notre contemporain."³⁷

Just as in the case of Faust and Mephistopheles, Edison and Lord Ewald were destined to meet. The satanic temptation to rival the gods by creating human life in the laboratory had long been the dream of practitioners of the occult arts such as Paracelsus, the Renaissance physician who spoke of the creation of a homunculus. Edison's laboratory evokes all the mystery associated with the alchemists. ". . . Il me semble que je me trouve chez Flamel, Paracelse ou Raymond Lulle, au temps des magistes et des souffleurs du moyen âge."³⁸

It is significant that Villiers called the first chapter of the "Pact," "la magie blanche," with a precept from the Kabbalah: "Prends

garde! En jouant au fantôme, on le devient."³⁹ The precept reveals the power of the imagination to create its own reality which is one of the abiding themes in Villiers' work. This image can also be understood as a metaphor of the "magie évocatoire" of the fictional process itself.

The poetic magic occurs with the evocation of that aspect of transitory reality that suggests the eternal. For Baudelaire this was principally an esthetic task which he described as "modernity." Just as Constantin Guys captured the fleeting glimpses of beauty in his etchings, Baudelaire poetized the phantasmagoric Parisian setting with its broken remnants of human beings who suggest, by their misery, the suffering heroes and heroines of antiquity. For Villiers, the conflict between Lord Ewald's ideal aspirations and the sordid reality which constantly menaces to destroy his ideal is raised to a major theme. The evocation of the eternal is primarily a metaphysical concern. The initial epigraph of Eve future, "Transitorious quaere aeterna," (Transitory creature, seek the eternal) is a quote which Drougard has shown comes from Jean Reynaud, the author of Terre et Ciel. Resting his ideas on the Imitation de Jésus Christ, Reynaud considers this expression to represent our rapport with the eternal. It points to the way in which man can perfect himself by imitation Christ and by seeking the divine essence of life.⁴⁰

Perfectibility, expiation for sins and redemption are the theological justifications for embarking on an adventure that would

otherwise be deemed diabolical. In fact, in the earlier version Lord Lyonnell (Lord Ewald) expresses this very fear. The andréïde implores him to wish for her existence so that she can manifest herself. "...Tu ne mourras pas, mais nous serons comme des Dieux, sachant le bien et le mal."⁴¹ To wish or to imagine a thing, according to Villiers, is tantamount to actually creating the object of desire. Lord Lyonnell is tempted as Adam was by Eve. In the final version, however, it is no longer to rival God that Lord Ewald accepts Edison's proposal to create the andréïde, but rather to follow by analogy the process of creation. Edison attempts to "faire sortir du limon de l'actuelle Science-Humaine un Etre fait à notre image, qui nous sera, par conséquent, ce que Nous sommes à Dieu."⁴² Villiers clearly emphasizes the symbolical meaning of science which Ross Chambers so aptly refers to as "une rêverie de domination du cosmos par l'homme."⁴³ The tone, or rather the justification, echoes Reynaud. Edison and Lord Ewald see in the creation of the ideal woman "une résurrection . . . d'éprouver ce qui est immortel autour de nous, d'en diviniser toutes les sensations."⁴⁴

Just as the artistic act of creation is linked to the creation of an ideal of beauty which incorporates a harmony of form and meaning, so does Lord Ewald attempt to rectify the discordant nature of Alicia Clarey who is "enfermée, par une sorte de châtement occulte, dans le démenti perpétuel de son corps idéal."⁴⁵

The true alchemist considered the transformation of base metals into gold as a symbolic metaphor of the process of purifying the

soul. Lord Ewald will be forced to regenerate the soul of the fallen Eve to complete his union with her. According to the Zohar:

Every form in which the male and female principle is not to be found . . . is not a superior or complete form. The Holy One, blessed be He, does not establish His abode where these two principles are not perfectly united; as we learn from the following words: "He blessed them and called their name (Adam) on the day they were created (Gen. 5:2); for the name of Man can be given only to a man and woman who are united into one being."⁴⁶

All nature being bisexual, the union of male and female principles would imply identity with God. Just as nature is pervaded by hidden energy so, too, man possesses the power to approach the divine. These ideas were common to Lévi and Wronski as well. Both occultists heralded man's Promethean desire to actively pursue the absolute by preparing his own regeneration.

L'Homme est un Créateur toujours en devenir qui doit parvenir à sa propre immortalité en tenant compte de la "Loi de création". -- "Le rôle prométhéen que Wronski attribue à l'humanité lorsqu'il lui reconnaît et lui fixe la tâche de parfaire la Création, est à la base du Messianisme auquel aboutit son système. -- C'est en créant sa propre immortalité que l'homme verra la promesse du Messie s'accomplir. . . . L'humanité doit "opérer une régénération, ou plutôt une véritable création d'elle-même en fixant le but suprême de son existence."⁴⁷

The first step towards regeneration takes the form of an initiatory descent in to the cave-like laboratory. The center of creation is symbolic as well of the soul's journey into the night and descent into itself. Edison says to the neophyte: ". . . Pour trouver l'Idéal il faut d'absord passer par le royaume des taupes."⁴⁸

In this subterranean Eden something is lost as well as found -- for the descent implies the death of the irrational and the lower instincts which the real Alicia Clarey symbolizes. By substituting the real woman with the andréïde (the product of the higher mind), Edison and Lord Ewald hope to destroy "des désirs bas et dégradants."⁴⁹

This fairyland of galvanic electricity is also the place where our illusions can become reality. The "chant des oiseaux" is just another illusion like all the rest. It is an artificial song, the recording of a dead bird. Ideally, the language of the birds represents the sacred language of the gods, understood only by the initiated and transmitted by the Orphic poet. Edison laments the fact that he was not permitted to record the divine word of God. ". . . N'estimait-il, dans la vibration du mot, que cet insaisissable au-delà, dont le magnétisme inspiré de la Foi peut pénétrer un vocable dans l'instant où on le profère."⁵⁰ Certainly, faith would be easier if the proof of God's existence had been recorded scientifically. Just as man's knowledge of the divine is based on his highest ideal that he is capable of imagining, the ideal woman is only a reflection of Ewald's higher self. Similarly, Tullia Fabriana tried to incarnate Wilhelm de Strally's ideal.

C'est volontairement que vous fermez les yeux -- ceux de votre esprit -- que vous étouffez le démenti de votre conscience, pour ne reconnaître en cette maîtresse que le fantôme désiré. . . . (Ewald) vitalise sa propre illusion (qui) n'est que votre désir et qui n'est que votre âme dédoublée en elle."⁵¹

By abolishing all limits that separate him from his double, Ewald can hope to become "one" with his ideal, thereby re-establishing the primordial unity of the androgyn. It is possible to view Ewald's quest which ends with the destruction of the andreïde at sea in two ways: a failure or a promise of a future triumph.

Viewed as a failure, Ewald's attempt to rival God ends in punishment -- destruction of the ideal. However, the ideal, which belongs to the realm of the eternal, is by implication indestructible. As in "l'Annonciateur," we realize that Ewald has not completed his Karmic cycle of expiation.

Pareil à l'enfant qui veut naître avant la gestation nécessaire à sa possibilité, tu avais résolu (sans frémir de l'acte impie et au mépris des sélections de plus en plus sublimes que confèrent les douleurs surmontées), tu avais résolu de devancer ton heure, qui ne sonnait pas.

Mais, me voici, moi! -- Je surviens, de la part des tiens futurs! . . .52

Ewald leaves America (the new world), where he has a glimpse of the future, and is returning to his homeland with his ideal when their ship "Wonderful" is destroyed, taking with it his beloved ideal. True union cannot occur in life. The promise of everlasting life is relegated to the apocalyptic time of the future. His "soeur promise" reveals, "We will see each other in our dreams."

By its very title, Eve future, suggests the symbolic completion of a cycle (through the dimensions of time) whereby primordial time and future time become one.

CHAPTER IX FOOTNOTES

- 1 Lévi, History of Magic, p. 204.
- 2 Jacques-Henry Bornecque, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam: Créateur et Visionnaire (Paris: Nizet, 1974), p. 215.
- 3 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, I:322.
- 4 Bettina Knapp, "The Greek Way Versus Christianity: Two Opposed Outlooks in Théophile Gautier's Arria Marcella," Modern Language Studies, Vol. VI, no.1 (Spring, 1976), pp. 61-73.
- 5 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, I:14.
- 6 Ross Chambers, "De grands yeux dans l'obscurité: regard scientifique et vision occulte," Australian Journal of French Studies, IX (1972):314.
- 7 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, I:418.
- 8 Collin de Plancy, "Albert le Grand," Dictionnaire Infernal (Paris: Chez tous les Libraires, 1845), p. 22.
- 9 Lévi, Transcendental Magic, p. 332.
- 10 Raitt, Mouvement symboliste, p. 201.
- 11 F. A. Mesmer, "Proposition 1," Précis historique des faits relatifs au Magnétisme-Animal (London, 1781), p.83.
- 12 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, I:414.
- 13 Ibid., I:416
- 14 Ibid., I:415.
- 15 Ibid., I:406.
- 16 Ibid., I:383.
- 17 Ibid., I:383.
- 18 Ibid., I:277.
- 19 Ibid., I:218.

- 20 Dr. Gérard Mendel, La Révolte contre le père (Paris: Librairie Payot, 1968). p. 201.
- 21 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, I:86.
- 22 Ibid., I:47-8.
- 23 Feuerbach, Hegel's disciple, pushed Hegel's idealism to its logical conclusion. See Drougard, Trois premiers contes, II:96.
- 24 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, I:259.
- 25 Ibid., I:133.
- 26 Ibid., I:226.
- 27 Ibid., I:220.
- 28 Ibid., I:126.
- 29 Mendel, La Révolte contre le père, p.208.
- 30 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, I:278.
- 31 Ibid., I:218.
- 32 Gourevitch, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, p.64.
- 33 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, I:93.
- 34 Ibid., I:76.
- 35 Ibid., I:59.
- 36 Serge Hutin, "Le Grand Secret de l'Eve Future," Le Symbolisme 2 (jan.-mars 1966), p. 130.
- 37 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, I:6.
- 38 Ibid., I:123.
- 39 Ibid., I:103.
- 40 Jean Reynaud, Terre et Ciel (Paris: Furne & Ce, 1854), p.161.
- 41 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, I:466.
- 42 Ibid., I:127.

- 43 Chambers, "De grands yeux," p. 311.
- 44 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, I:368.
- 45 Ibid., I:62.
- 46 Franck, On The Kabbalah, pp. 128-29.
- 47 Roland de Renéville, "Sciences Maudites et Poètes Maudits," Cahiers d'Hermès (1947), p.170.
- 48 Villiers, Oeuvres complètes, I:177.
- 49 Ibid., I:243.
- 50 Ibid., I:26.
- 51 Ibid., I:136.
- 52 Ibid., I:382-383.

CHAPTER X

AXËL

Axël, Villiers' last major work, represents the culmination of religious, philosophical and moral conflicts which beset the author throughout his life. That Villiers spent almost twenty years, from 1870 to his death, reworking Axël attests to the importance this work had for him. This metaphysical tragedy, as Villiers referred to it, clearly belongs to the realm of the mystical and occult as did his earlier works, Isis and Elën. The major occult themes found in his earlier works reappear with a profound symbolic intensity in Axël. The magus, Maître Janus, guides his young apprentice, Axël, towards the ideal through a process of initiation in which he will detach himself from his terrestrial desires. Axël is, thus, prepared for the ultimate test -- union with the ideal woman. The two predestined lovers, Axël and Sara, thereby complete the cycle establishing the divine "conjunctio" of the primordial male and female principles.

The play as published is divided into four acts: the religious world, the tragic world, the occult world and the world of passion. Each "world" represents a metaphysical option which is opened to the young and idealistic hero, Axël, and the equally beautiful and noble Sara. As such, the structure of the play represents the "rites de passage" of the young lovers in the course of their initiation to life and to death.

In spite of the lack of success his previous plays, such as Elën, Morgan, Le Nouveau Monde and La Révolte had encountered, Villiers' desire to become a great playwright never waned. It was natural that he would return to the dramatic format for a work as important as Axël; for it was a form that most closely lent itself to the cosmic spirit of the works of his mentors: Goethe's Faust and the spectacular mysticism of Wagner's operas. The salient feature which inspired Villiers was their all encompassing world view. Villiers shared Mallarmé's conception of the sacred mission of the artist who, through the power of suggestion and his art, could evoke on a multiplicity of levels the universal metaphysical drama of all creation in "le Grand Oeuvre." Villiers appears to have been as deeply effected by Mallarmé's utilization of the "récit dramatique" in "Hérodiade" as Mallarmé had been by Villiers' Isis and Elën. Axël seems more adapted to the imaginary theater of the reader's mind than to a stage presentation. In fact, Villiers seriously doubted that the long philosophical monologues could effectively be presented on the stage. Villiers probably had both "Hérodiade" and "Igitur" in mind when he began work on Axël. Mallarmé had read his poems to both Villiers and Catulle Mendès in the summer of 1870 on their way back from Tribschen, where they had visited Wagner and had seen several of his operas including, Das Reingold, Tannhäuser and Lohengrin.

Villiers began working on Axël after his return. In keeping with the ceremonial splendor of Wagner's operas, Villiers would create a play in which the ambiance would be enhanced by music and by the poetic incantations of a chorus. The use of the chorus in the opening act which takes place before the altar in the cloister and of the woodmen's song are reminiscent not only of Faust and of Wagner's operas, but of Greek tragedy, medieval liturgies and the Catholic mass. The Latin verses recited by the Archdeacon and by the chorus foretell of Sara's future death and resurrection in the afterlife. Villiers' intention appears to have been to create a ceremonial mystery in which the philosophical and religious conflicts would be enacted in their ritualistic form.

Every element in the play is carefully structured, having its own symbolic intent. The play begins at midnight on Christmas Eve and ends on Easter dawn. The division of time is symbolic of the protagonists' evolution from the awakening of their terrestrial desires to their suicide and refusal to realize those desires.

The opening scene of the "Religious World" is situated in an ancient Flemish monastery where the nuns are preparing for the Christmas eve mass. The Abbess has decided that the orphan in her care, Sara, Princess de Maupers, will take her vows at midnight. By dedicating Sara to their way of life, the Abbess hopes not only to save this curiously intelligent and solitary young woman from the temptations of the world, but also to enrich the convent with Sara's wealth. The Abbess fears that the ancient Rosicrucian manuscripts

that Sara has been reading have filled her with dangerous ideas and that she may have unlocked some of its secrets. The Rosicrucian documents left by Maître Janus concern the legends surrounding her family and those of the Count d'Auërsperg. Members of both families had served in Egypt during the crusades and had adopted the same coat of arms depicting a golden sphinx. In a fragment found in Villiers numerous drafts of Axël, we find reference to the sphinx as "le roi des mirages." In Egyptian mythology Horus, the son of God (Sun) changed himself into the form of the sphinx -- a mythological figure which was half lion and half woman. The lion's head represents the higher nature and is attached to the breast of a woman, representing the unity and development of the lower to the higher spheres of being. In Axël, the sphinx stands as a symbol of the two races arising triumphant over matter.

Despite isolation and forced deprivations imposed by the Abbess, Sara still preserves the indomitable pride and the independent attitude which had always characterized her. The Archdeacon attempts to exorcise the evil influence that the occult ideas of the Rosicrucians may have had on Sara by means of his own verbal magic exhortations during the ceremony. The Archdeacon makes the distinction between the sensual harmony of words which often mask their substantive meanings. Villiers is clearly drawing the attention of his audience towards the evocative powers of words; for Axël is as much a dramatization of verbal alchemy as of the development of the inner human psyche.

The moment of dedication is at hand when the Archdeacon asks Sara if she accepts light, hope and life. Sara's "No" slices through the silent air at the stroke of midnight. Midnight, the hour that should have marked the birth of Sara's eternal soul marks, instead, the end of her religious life. The Abbess, shocked and enraged, launches out to strike her, but her hand is mysteriously immobilized. Sara exhibits, by her act of defiance, the Promethean attributes of the avatars of revolt, the unfailing determination and occult power of the magus as described by Eliphas Lévi, as well as the mysterious power of her prototype, Villiers' Isis. When the Archdeacon tries to lock Sara up as punishment, she seizes an axe and forces him into the prison-like tomb.

Throughout the ceremonial scene reversals in the Catholic liturgy constantly occur. The incantations of the chorus are from the funeral mass and are not in celebration of Christ's birth. Villiers had been a practicing Catholic, at least for part of his life, and was quite aware of the various liturgies. It was during his stay at abbey of Solesmes that Villiers thought of writing Axël. The juxtaposition of the time and the incantations of the chorus underscore Sara's symbolic death and separation from the religious world (she leaves to find the hidden gold). At the same time, the chorus announces the symbolic import of her destiny. The Latin verse sung by the chorus at the moment of Sara's refusal is an image of the Virgin Mary found in the writings of Eliphas Lévi's Dogme et rituel de la haute magie. "The Virgin's foot has crushed the head of the ancient serpent." According to Lévi, this image refers to the redemption of

Satan whose evil aspect is metamorphosed into the serpent and is destroyed by Mary. The Virgin redeems the fallen angel and, by implication, man who has lived in a fallen state from the time of Eve's seduction. Woman is both author of man's downfall as well as the means to his redemption. It is only later as the play progresses that one becomes aware that Sara is, in fact, the participant in a primordial drama, permitting Axël to attain the absolute and, by and through him, attaining that higher sphere of being herself. According to Lévi, the assumption of woman is one of the great mysteries of the Kabbalah. Mary is the personification of Divine Wisdom or the Holy Shekhinah, the light manifested by reflection. "She is the feminine side of the Word made flesh and participates by assumption in all the glories of Jesus Christ."¹

Part two, "The Tragic World," takes place in the solitary, medieval chateau of Axël d'Auërsperg, in the heart of the Black Forest. It is now Easter Eve. Three elderly, Prussian soldiers who formerly served Axël's father are discussing their young master. Axël has spent his youth meditating alone in the fortress tower and studying ancient manuscripts with his teacher of occult science, Maître Janus. Axël's cousin, Commander Kaspar, has learned in the course of his visit that Axël's father had buried an enormous cache of gold entrusted to him by the German government before the impending Napoleonic invasion. Incited by the prospect of innumerable riches and the power his ruthless ambition could wield, the Commander decides to learn the whereabouts of the gold from Axël and then

kill him. When questioned about the gold, Axël becomes incensed; for his cousin's insipid materialism not only represents everything that is anathema to him, but he has also abused his hospitality by unearthing a family secret that Axël wished to forget himself. Unaware of the treasure's location and adamant in his desire to remain untouched by the worldly temptations that Kaspar's materialism represents, Axël provokes him to a duel and kills him. For Axël, however, the profane temptations that the secret represents do not die with his cousin and seem to pass as a disembodied soul to him, his murderer.

In Part Three, "The Occult World," Axël reveals to Janus that the secret which he thought he had mastered is obsessing him. The thought of gold has reawakened his desire to live. He questions the validity of occult mysticism which denies the instincts of life and requires a disciplined and ascetic life of exile in exchange for the promise of divine wisdom -- an ideal which may only be an illusion. Maître Janus reveals to Axël that he will be faced with the supreme test, and urges him to liberate himself from the ephemeral desires that bind him to a temporal world. To be a magus is to identify with the eternal -- to become by words, thoughts and deeds one with "la lumière créée." According to the Kabbalah, God in his original unity with the universe was all and nothing -- a generative and potential world before his unfolding in light. From the beginning Janus knew that Axël, when asked, would refuse to accept Light, Hope and Life just as Sara had.

At the end of Part Three we learn that Sara has found her way to the fortress and that the magus' work will be accomplished -- the supreme confrontation, and the coming together of two races will occur with the meeting of Sara and Axël.

In Part Four, "The World of Passion," Axël descends to the vaulted tombs of his ancestors. Axël has come to realize as he gazes at the tombs which reflect his destiny like a mirror that worldly riches are but a vain dream before death. Sara has also found her way to the tombs. Placing her dagger blade between the eyes of the Death Head on the shield, she forces the walls to slide open, and a blinding array of precious stones and liquid gold cascades around her. Suddenly aware of Axël's presence, she fires her pistols and wounds him. Axël, nevertheless, manages to disarm her; seizes her knife; and is about to strike her when he is overcome by her beauty. His actions and words awaken a similar passion in Sara. Sara offers the supreme temptation to Axël -- together they can consummate all their desires of love, power and wealth. In a striking Baudelairian passage, she evokes the exotic places they could escape to and the sensual pleasure she could provide. Sara reveals the lunar aspects of the great archetypal seductresses, Isis and Helen. "Sais-tu ce que tu refuses! Toutes les faveurs des autres femmes ne valent pas mes cruautés! Je suis la plus sombre des vierges. Je crois me souvenir d'avoir fait tomber des anges. Hélas! des fleurs et des enfants sont morts de mon ombre."² Villiers described Elën in the same manner, and is clearly referring to

Sara's previous life and one of the dual aspects of the Eternal Woman. For Axël, Sara's exotic dream is bathed in a ghastly mortal pallor; for he is aware of its ephemeral nature. In fact, reality can never attain the perfection of the ideal they have just imagined. "Toutes les réalités, demain, que seraient-elles, en comparaison des mirages que nous venons de vivre?"³ Implied, as well, is Baudelaire's idea that art is superior to life.

Axël describes one of the greatest absurdities of life -- the attempt to find eternity in an ephemeral world. Axël's awareness of time foreshadows Proust's revelation.

Ce moment idéal, nous l'avons subi: le voici donc irrévocable, de quelque nom que tu le nommes! Essayer de le revivre, en modelant, chaque jour, à son image, une poussière, toujours décevante, d'apparences extérieures, ne serait que risquer de le dénaturer, d'en amoindrir l'impression divine, de l'anéantir au plus pur de nous-mêmes. Prenons garde de ne pas savoir mourir pendant qu'il en est temps encore.⁴

Time only underscores life's finiteness. The vision of the divine is perceived only in glimpses. It is a privileged moment.

In a shattering indictment of life, Sara and Axël drink poison. It is their nuptial cup of death that contrasts with the noise outside of the marriage of Axël's servant.

La Terre, dis-tu? Qu'a-t-elle donc jamais réalisé, cette goutte de fange glacée, dont l'Heure ne sait que mentir au milieu de ciel? C'est elle, ne le vois-tu pas, qui est devenue l'Illusion! Reconnais-le, Sara : nous avons détruit, dans nos étranges coeurs, l'amour de la vie -- et c'est bien en Réalité que nous sommes devenus nos âmes!

Accepter, désormais, de vivre, ne serait plus qu'un sacrilège envers nous-mêmes. Vivre? les serviteurs feront cela pour nous.⁵

As the two lovers unite and fade into the silence of death with the first rays of Easter dawn, a gold coin falls and rolls towards the tomb, breaking the silence with its hollow ring. The play ends with the rising hubbub of life in the distance as a final ironic counterpoint to their death.

Is this carefully orchestrated suicide an indictment as well of the Christian "Gospel of Life?"⁶ And was Villiers proposing a new cult of worldly abandonment with his protagonists "as new Christs, Messiah's of that new religion."⁷ There is much evidence to support this contention. As Conroy has pointed out, one of Sara's names, Emmanuèle, refers to one of the names given to Christ. The 'x' in Axël stands out as a symbol of the messiah.⁸ The parallel between the major events in Christ's life and the events in the protagonists' also have a certain similarity. Sara's awakening begins at Christmas. Axël is tempted by the Commander "dans son désert" just as Christ was by the devil. Their death occurs on Easter dawn and symbolizes their resurrection to eternal life.

The temptations that both Sara and Axël reject are not, however, Christianity and occultism as has been stated. They have rejected love and gold in the profane and materialistic sense. One becomes aware, however, that these symbols of love and gold have a deeper meaning. The desire and the object of desire become one for Axël

who says, "Ce qui fait la valeur de ce trésor est en nous-mêmes".⁹ We shall see that the gold symbolizes as well the spiritual gold of the alchemist. This tragedy of 'love and gold' recreates and confuses two great mysteries: the mystery of Gnosis and the mystery of Eros.

Axël is an alchemical drama, reenacting by means of public ceremony the transmutation of the inner human psyche. Gold reflects light and is, therefore, a source of illumination -- Gnosis. This, according to Eliphas Lévi, is the aim of the initiate and the alchemist. The "Great Work" is the search for the absolute.

Like all magical mysteries, the secrets of the Great Work have a triple meaning: they are religious, philosophical and natural. Philosophical gold in religion is the Absolute and Supreme Reason; in philosophy, it is truth; in visible nature, it is the sun; in the subterranean and mineral world, it is the purest and most perfect gold.¹⁰

The aim of the ceremony of initiation is to receive illumination, to retrieve "the Lost Word," the creative principle and source of light. When Axël offers to share the gold with Sara, she replies, "Comment rompre un rayon de lumière"?¹¹ The aim of the alchemist is to extract "pure gold" from base metals. The alchemical transmutation also has a psychological meaning: it is a symbolical concretization of the process by which man perfects his inner soul to become "un être de lumière."

Axël asks Janus, without understanding the full significance of his words, if he can transmute metals as Hermès did; use magnets as

Paracelsus had, and resuscitate the dead just as Apollonius de Tyane had done. In short, he wishes to know whether he will be like the magi of the great legends commanding the forces of Logos, Astral Light and Immortal Life. Janus warns him not to utter words whose essence he does not understand. "Quant à ces mots, exhumés du vieux langage hermétique, et que tu prends plaisir à réciter, ils séduisent la jeunesse de ton intelligence par le brillant de leurs sons beaucoup plus que par ce qu'ils signifient."¹² Many have cited this passage to support the contention that Villiers was condemning occultism and exposing its esoteric symbolism as verbal trickery. It should be remembered that both Janus and the Archdeacon utilize words as symbols and warn Axël and Sara, respectively, of the power of their cloaked meanings. Villiers espoused the same symbolist esthetic as Mallarmé, and sought to evoke an inner reality beyond the appearances of the external world. The words of Janus "Je n'instruis pas; j'éveille," echo the symbolists' esthetic of evoking the essence of words on a subliminal level, as opposed to describing things on a purely intellectual level.

By their name and/or actions almost all of the characters in the play are symbolic constructs of spiritual forces. Part One presents Sara's separation from the matriarchal world, symbolized by the convent. Rejection and separation from this world also implies a rejection of nature as created. On the psychological level, it is the revolt against the domination of the instincts.

Sara's name recalls not only the Christian era but all the eras of the Eternal Feminine archetype. "Eve, avant la Loi (Gen.;, II, 22); Sara (qui signifie princesse) durant la Loi de Yahweh et d'Abraham (Gen., XVII, 15); Emmanuèle (Dieu est avec elle) au temps de la Grâce (Matth.;, I, 13). . . selon la dialectique paulinienne."¹³ For Axël, Sara is the personification of his feminine anima and reveal the dual aspects of redeeming virgin and temptress. As temptress, she awakens Axël's instinctual desires and offers him another exile in place of the refuge of his ivory tower. ". . . Je suis cet exil aux inconnues étoiles, que tu cherchais!"¹⁴ Shekhinah, the feminine aspect of the divinity, according to the Kabbalah, symbolizes man's exile from God. As Binah, or intellect, she arouses curiosity and dissatisfaction.¹⁵ Sara will be one of the catalytic agents in Axël's ascent to a higher sphere. The coming together of the male and female principles reenacts on a humane plane the reunion of God with his Shekhinah on the cosmological level. As such, every human act has a mythical impact.

According to Bettina Knapp, "The alchemist's scientific goal of extracting the 'gold,' or 'philosophers' stone,' from base metals requires seven stages of purification: séparation, calcination, sublimation, dissolution, distillation, coagulation, and coction, also expressed as black, white, yellow, red."¹⁶ Sara's separation from the cloister is represented by symbols of death and darkness. It is night, the altar is draped in black purple and the night winds extinguish the candles. For the alchemist, blackness represents

"the putrefaction of matter." In the mineral world, base metals are dissolved or transmuted by mercury (the spirit). It is the first stage in shaping the "pierre brute" or dissolving the lower instincts of man's nature. Sara goes from a passive, or fixed state, to an active state of revolt in much the same way as mercury becomes a liquid, or active agent. "The second stage, whiteness, the state of Luna, or Silver, the 'chaste and immaculate Queen'," as described by Underhill,¹⁷ applies to Sara as well. For the ceremony Sara is dressed in white underneath the funeral cape. It is a symbol of her virginity and of her initiation. Significantly, at the beginning of the ceremony she is covered with a white sheet spotted with gold-shaped tears. She also wears an opal necklace, the stone associated with Isis, goddess of the moon (luna) and of initiations. The opal was thought to have curative powers over the eyes and is, therefore, a symbol of "vision." She is undoubtedly wearing a necklace made of the "noble opal" which is iridescent and which Villiers characterizes as sacred. As Sara leaves the convent, we become aware that she has passed the threshold towards her initiation. As Mariel has pointed out, throughout the first act the incantations of the chorus, the placement of the chorus, and the Abbess going to the altar imply that Villiers was probably alluding to the secret ceremonies practiced by the Mariavites in the Cult of Mary which was composed of a group of Polish mystics under Towianski's leadership.¹⁸ In addition, Soeur Aloyse, the young novitiate who befriends Sara, has been

chosen as "Pénitente-interprête," a role which does not appear in Catholicism, but in certain masonic rituals.¹⁹

It is quite possible that Villiers chose not to shock his audience or commit heresy himself by depicting a scene which appears to illustrate a public refusal of Catholicism. The underlying mysticism of both Catholicism and occultism appears to be quite similar in Villiers' view. Both the Archdeacon and Maître Janus speak of death as the continuation of a higher form of life. A comparison of texts is presented below which illustrates the similarity between faith and the occultist's ideal illusion.

The Archdeacon

Crois et tu vivras; la foi, suivant l'expression de saint Paul, étant la substance même des choses qui doivent être espérées. Par elle tu renaîtras, transfigurée en ton propre cantique, l'âme étant une harmonie, comme le dit, avec inspiration, sainte Hildegarde. (p.61)

Croire, n'est-ce pas se projeter en l'objet de sa croyance et s'y réaliser soi-même? (p.63)
Illusion pour illusion, nous gardons celle de Dieu...(p.64)

Maître Janus

Consacre-toi sur les brasiers d'amour de la Science-auguste pour y mourir, en ascète, de la mort des phénix. (p.198) C'est la sanction de l'Espérable. C'est là le seuil du monde occulte. (p. 205)

Tu n'emporteras, tu ne seras que ta création. Le monde n'aura jamais pour toi, d'autre sens que celui que tu lui attribueras. ...Puisque tu ne sortiras pas de l'illusion que tu te feras de l'universe, choisis la plus divine. (p.203)

Both the occult way and the Christian way hope for the reintegration of man and the Absolute (God) through an ascetic, moral life. But while the Christian hopes to merit God's grace, the occultist seeks actively to become divine himself.

Hé bien, puisque nous ne pouvons devenir que notre pensée unie à la chair occulte de nos actes, pensons et agissons de manière à ce qu'un Dieu puisse devenir en nous! (p. 64)

Tu es ton futur créateur. Tu es un Dieu qui ne feint d'oublier sa toute-essence qu'afin d'en réaliser le rayonnement.
(p. 205)

Whereas the Christian prays that "le Verbe devienne chair," the occultist is the flesh that hopes to coincide with "le Verbe." According to Drougard, the thought that obsessed Villiers throughout his life was ". . . Une fusion possible entre le christianisme et la magie, cet idéal mystérieux d'un saint qui serait en même temps un mage."²⁰ To conceive an ideal or a God that one believed in to the point that one would give up one's life, thereby freeing oneself from the tyranny of death -- "le hasard" and "la nécessité" -- was the glory of both the saint and the magus. For both, to be one with the divine is the ultimate aim: it is a promise of everlasting life on a higher plane. "Les Mages réels, s'ils dédaignent de vivre, -- se dispensent aussi de mourir."²¹

Eliphas Lévi, Villiers' principal source of occult knowledge, emphasized the concomitant mysticism of Catholicism and occultism, and was an abbé himself before becoming interested in occultism. The major ideas expressed by both Maître Janus and the Archdeacon derive primarily from Lévi. To list the number of parallels between

Dogme et rituel de la haute magie and Axël would be exhaustive. Drougard's study, from which we previously quoted, details most of the relevant borrowings of Villiers, and serves to point out that Villiers not only had closely studied Lévi's work, but that he considered occultism as a viable metaphysical option. It was not until Villiers had experienced a renewed religious awareness towards the end of his life that the anti-Catholic impact of Axël's suicide truly concerned him.

Part Two presents the first stage in Axël's initiation. Commander Kaspar plays the same role of catalyst, provoking Axël from a fixed to an active state, as the Archdeacon played for Sara. Axël is also characterized by the Commander as "the Black Hunter." This elementary stage in Axël's transmutation is reflected by the dark forest and the somber medieval fortress in which he lives. Just as the Archdeacon and the Abbess tried to obtain Sara's wealth, the Commander wants to possess Axël's gold. Axël's treasure is also secret and, by implication, recalls the secret tradition of the Rosicrucians which was conserved by the true initiates, the "Maîtres inconnus." Janus tells Axël that the true magi will always remain unknown to the "passants," a word that Villiers often used to refer to the ordinary lot of mankind. The first scene entitled, "Les Veilleurs du souverain secret" allude as well to the 32nd degree of Scottish freemasonry, "le Prince du Royal Secret."

The aim of the ritual of initiation is to attain illumination, and, in so doing, become a magus or "maître". The initiate must

purify himself just as the base metals must be purified to obtain gold. He must experience a symbolic death in which all profane desires die with his attachments to the "real world" (represented by Kaspar's view of the world in Axël). According to Lévi, the ceremonial of initiation is based on an essential law of nature "...That of initiation by effort and of voluntary and toilsome progress." Its purpose is to instruct through experience the "reconstitution of life in the very midst of decomposition and death."²¹ Illumination or knowledge of the divine cannot be taught or imposed by doctrine. Janus tells Axël:

Je n'instruis pas; j'éveille...si tu n'eus pas, sous tes paupières fermées, le regard tout empreint de cette 'Lumière' qui pénètre, reconnaît et réfléchit l'Esprit substantiel des choses, l'esprit d'universalité entre les choses, je ne puis te donner ce regard. Si tes yeux sont vivants, si tes pieds sont libres, observe et avance. Nul n'est initié que par lui-même.²²

The occult way can only show the way towards awareness; illumination only comes from experience. While the religious world represented by the Abbess and Archdeacon stressed suffering and subjugation to purify "passed sins," to use Sara's phrase, it, nevertheless, intended to impose its doctrine by force, as indicated by the title of the first scene, "Forcez-les d'entrer." In contrast to the religious world's condemnation of Sara's pride, the occult way allows man to complete the cycle which starts with God incarnated in man, by demonstrating that man is able to become divine. Janus tells Axël:

Tu es ton futur créateur. Tu es un Dieu qui ne feint d'oublier sa toute-essence qu'afin d'en réaliser le rayonnement. Ce que tu nommes l'univers n'est que le résultat de cette feintise dont tu contiens le secret... Conclus, enfin, qu'il est difficile de redevenir un Dieu.²³

Rosicrucian cosmology is based on man's fall from God. Man, in his original state, was created perfect, the living image of the 'Word'. Man was unable to resist the test of temptation, and fell from divine light into the shadows -- characterized by a veil over his eyes. The process of purification by means of initiation is to restore man's divinity -- to cure his blindness.

It is significant that Axël's name recalls his link to the divine. The 'x' in his name symbolizes the cross. However, the cross was not only a symbol of Christ but was used as a cosmological symbol by the Egyptians and the Hebrews. The conjunction of the cross, as well as the word 'axe' in his name, recall the cosmological rotation of the stars around the sun. The idea of the axis also symbolizes the protagonist's orientation towards the eternal, represented by the 'el' in his name which, in fact, means divinity. Axël is the point of junction, the link, between heaven and earth. The world's axis passes through the center of the earth, and is the center of earth's energy and movement which it derives from the sun. Axël exhibits the demiurgic energy of the masculine and solar aspects of the divinity. Janus, as Axël's guide, can only reveal his potential to him. "Car tu possèdes l'être réel de toutes choses en ta pure volonté, et tu es le dieu que tu peux devenir. -- Oui, tel est le dogme et l'arcane premier du réel Savoir."²⁴

The concept of the hidden name is significant in Egyptian mythology because it indicates the nature of the inner person. In the myth of Isis, as previously mentioned in our study, the secret name of Ra represented his power and essence -- the creator of names. Ra in manifesting himself differentiated himself into different attributes which were the source of creation. The transcendent self and creative source is, thus, represented by the hidden name. In secret societies such as the Rosicrucians, each initiate has a secret name symbolizing the new man who emerges from the spiritual passage achieved by means of the initiation rite.

It is also significant that Villiers chose to name Axël's spiritual guide Janus. Janus, the Roman divinity of beginnings presides over the new hour, the new day, doors and gateways. A god with two faces, he looks to the east and to the west, symbolizing all duality, past and future, mind and matter. The 'East' is the mythical term for the source of heavenly light. The magi, "the Kings of the East," came to preside over Christ's epiphany. In much the same way, Maître Janus will reside over Axël's rebirth. He is the catalyst that will bring Sara (the feminine principle) and Axël (the masculine principle) together. His offering of gold is the spiritual gold of divine knowledge. The gateway over which Janus presides is their initiation. The word "initiation", Bettina Knapp reminds us, means "beginning" as well as "entrance."²⁵

Sara and Axël's initiation and confrontation with death begins in Part Four with their descent to the tombs of Axël's ancestors. We

have discussed the symbolic descent in the initiation ritual in the Chapters on Elen and Eve future, but it is important to recall the psychological implications of the descent into the self for Axël. Two important elements are added in Axël -- the descent is characterized by hidden gold and the tombs of Axël's ancestors. The gold incarnates Axël's instinctual desires; on the material level, it represents glory and power; on the subliminal level, it represents his spiritual desire to sublimate his passions. It is also in the subterranean tomb that Axël will meet Sara and be faced with the test of earthly love and the desire to sublimate his passion for her in a union of death. It is significant that Villiers called the first part of the scene, "L'épreuve par l'or et par l'amour"; for the initiate must face the test in order to be freed from his bonds. As Bürgisser reminds us:

Sublimier serait libérer les forces psychiques qui sont liées à ce désir pour les employer à une destination supérieure; supprimer, cependant, c'est refouler ces forces dans le fond de l'inconscient où elles restent une tentation et un danger permanents et sont d'autant plus redoutables qu'elles agissent, désormais, en dehors du contrôle conscient de l'homme.²⁶

Just as Igitur descends to the ancestral tombs, Axël's treasure is buried with the remnants of his race. He must descend to the source of his being. His ancestors are his link to the past, and represent memory and the collective unconscious, to use Jung's term. For the initiate it is a return to the divine, pre-Adamic state of uroboric unity -- the seed of the potential world.

The full meaning of Janus' words become apparent.

O redescendu des seuils sacrés, l'ancien mortel va ressusciter dans les méconnaissables yeux de l'Initié coupable! C'est bien l'Heure. Elle aussi va venir, celle qui renonça l'idéal Divin pour le secret de l'Or, ...Voici donc en présence la dualité finale des deux races, élues par moi, du fond des âges, pour que soit vaincue, par la simple et virginale Humanité, la double illusion de l'Or et de l'Amour, c'est-à-dire pour que soit fondée, en un point de Devenir, la vertu d'un Signe nouveau.²⁷

The primordial and divine state in Kabbalist cosmology is characterized by the unity of the divinity before its separation into its male and female aspects. In this respect, Axël is the alchemical wedding of these two principles, represented by the 'sign' of the rose and the cross. Sara tells of her flight through the forest where she found a rose which had survived winter at the same time the church bells rang out the birth of "'Enfant Emmanuel." She wears the robe of mourning in honor of the death of the rose which corresponded to her. Axël, the cross, and Sara, the rose, reenact the primordial drama, reuniting in the divine androgynous conjunctio. According to Hutin, "... La Croix (emblème masculin) /_symbolise_/ la divine Energie créatrice qui a fécondé la matrice obscure de la substance primordiale (symbolisée par la Rose, emblème féminin) et a fait passer l'univers à l'existence".²⁸ The rose for the Rosicrucians is the great alchemical symbol of perfection, and represents the initiate's destruction of all terrestrial desires. The Rosicrucian cross is red, symbolizing the blood of Christ and

his perfect knowledge. It is also interpreted to mean everlasting life; for to the Rosicrucians, death is but a transition to a higher form.

Red, the last stage in the alchemical transmutation, is

. . . the colour of Perfection or alchemic gold; a process sometimes called the 'Marriage of Luna and Sol' - the fusion of the human and divine spirit. Under this image is concealed the final secret of the mystic life, that ineffable union of finite and infinite - that loving reception of the inflowing vitality of God - from which comes forth the Magnum Opus, deified or spiritual man.²⁹

On the individual level, Axël's initiation presents the confrontation of the self with the numinous powers of both patriarchal and matriarchal forces. For Axël, as for Villiers, the "paternal treasure" is buried in the maternal earth. To overcome these forces, Axël, the masculine consciousness, must join forces with Sara (his female anima). Just as the roll of the die in "Igitur" was aimed at crushing "le vieux démon de l'impuissance," Axël and Sara will crush the head of the ancient serpent of desire. Sara must love him more than her own life which she must sacrifice in order to be transformed with him. By their mutual sacrifice, Sara and Axël attain illumination or gnosis, and become one with the divine. By sublimating their love, they have also deified Eros. The rising sun of Easter dawn is the commencement of a new cycle. The higher self (sun) ascends to its higher plane, symbolic of their death and resurrection.

Speaking of Axël to V.-E. Michelet, Villiers said, "Axël n'a pas pour théâtre l'espace céleste. C'est un aigle prisonnier dans une cave; mais il s'y démène avec une telle furie, avec un tel fracas d'ailes, que le bruit percera les épaisses voûtes, et l'on entendra au dehors les clameurs de l'aigle blessé."³⁰

Axël was completed for the most part in the early part of 1884 when Villiers gave a public reading of certain parts of the play. The first version of Axël was published in La Jeune France between November 1885 and June 1886. It was around this time that Villiers experienced a renewal of his faith. Perhaps it was through the influence of his friends such as Léon Bloy that Villiers realized the nihilist and anti-Catholic import of his play. Both Huysmans and Rémy de Gourmont claimed that Villiers was reworking Axël at the time of his death in order to condemn the final suicide and render the play more orthodox. Fragments do exist, but Villiers, obviously, found them unsatisfactory and virtually impossible to integrate into the play. One wonders if he found that they would so radically alter the play that they would betray the majority of his philosophical beliefs that he so adamantly defended in his works throughout his life -- principally, his belief in the relativity of all beliefs as illusionary constructs and the right to live and die for the most divine ideal that one could imagine.

If the world is "la chute de Dieu" to quote Baudelaire and the Gnostics, then the supreme act is to reject the world as it exists.

Rather than being a 'tragedy' of renunciation and a gospel of nihilism, Axël is the hymn of the poet and mystic to reinstate the original, divine order of things.

CHAPTER X FOOTNOTES

- 1 Lévi, Transcendental Magic, p. 151, n.1.
- 2 Axël, ed. Pierre Mariel, p. 230.
- 3 Ibid., p. 249.
- 4 Ibid., p. 250.
- 5 Ibid., p. 249.
- 6 Emilie Drougard, "Le Vrai Sens d'Axël," La Grande Revue, 135 (April 1931):276.
- 7 William T. Conroy, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), p. 136.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Axël, ed. Pierre Mariel, p. 253.
- 10 Lévi, Transcendental Magic, p .281.
- 11 Axël, ed. Pierre Mariel, p .226.
- 12 Ibid., p. 196.
- 13 Ibid., p. 261, n.2.
- 14 Ibid., p. 230.
- 15 Knapp, Dream and Image, p. 113.
- 16 Ibid., p. 169.
- 17 Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism (Strand: Methuen, 1962), p. 145.
- 18 Axël, ed. Pierre Mariel, p. 259., n.3.
- 19 Ibid., p. 260, n.7.
- 20 Drougard, "Villiers de l'Isle-Adam et Eliphas Lévi," p. 522.
- 21 Lévi, Transcendental Magic, p. 271.

- 22 Axël, ed. Pierre Mariel, p. 195.
- 23 Ibid., p. 203.
- 24 Ibid., p. 191.
- 25 Knapp, Dream and Image, p. 109.
- 26 Bürgisser, La Double Illusion de l'Or et de l'Amour, p. 61.
- 27 Axël, ed. Pierre Mariel, p. 190.
- 28 Serge Hutin, Les Sociétés Secrètes (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1973), p. 53.
- 29 Underhill, Mysticism, p. 146.
- 30 Quoted by Lebois, Révéléateur du Verbe, p. 222.

CONCLUSION

Villiers' heroes and heroines, imbued with the eternal traits of mythical archetypes, are the defenders of a spiritual idealism against a society promulgating myths of progress and of scientific knowledge to hide the immorality, the injustice and the avarice at its core.

For Villiers, it was a society which had severed its roots and suffered from a greater illusion than the illusion of an ideal. Villiers believed that all was illusion and that reality was the symbolic construct of the mind that saw it. As Janus tells Axël, "Le monde n'aura jamais, pour toi, d'autre sens que celui que tu lui attribueras... Puisque tu ne sortiras pas de l'illusion que tu te feras de l'univers, choisis la plus divine."¹ Villiers attempted to illustrate that the illusion of an ideal was as potent for the poet and for those who had imagination and faith as any concrete manifestation or proof that the Bonhomets of the world might need. Villiers' important insight was that the illusion of an ideal was not a betrayal of psychic integrity but the very essence of it. At the core of man's dilemma, between illusion and reality, resounds the fear of his powerlessness. His compensatory dream of power was an attempt to find an a priori meaning to his existence, thereby rendering his mortality less absurd. Against the forces of life (nature, desires, "le hasard") and the forces of death, Villiers defended the poet's right to construct an ideal that would enable him to escape his

temporal entrapment.

Through his art, Villiers sought to create a sense of man's continuity with the eternal. He becomes the interpreter of the cosmological myths and the hidden message of the universe. Like the magus, the poet understands the arcane relationship of all things -- of man with the divine, of words with their meanings. He is the alchemist of words rendering pure gold from their leadened materiality. Hermes, the alchemist, was also the guardian of myths and the author of the sacred alphabet, the key to the initiation of the logos. It is to the very essence of words and their power that Axël refers to when he addresses the occult forces of the universe.

Forces vives qui assemblez les lois de la Substance, Etres occultes en qui se conçoivent les générations des éléments, des hasards, des phénomènes, -- oh! si vous n'étiez pas impersonnels! Si les termes abstraits, les creux exposants, dont nous voilons vos présences, n'étaient que de vaines syllabes humaines! Et dans la chaîne des contacts infinis, s'il était un point où l'Esprit de l'homme, affranchi de toute médiation, pouvait se trouver en un rapport avec votre essence et s'agréger votre énergie! Pourquoi, pourquoi ne serait-ce donc pas? Que serait un Infini tronqué de cette possibilité -- si probable, si naturelle?₂

Through his symbolic creations of the seekers of the Absolute, Villiers sought to re-establish the harmony and life giving energy of his connection with eternity -- a continuity that was undiminished by personal death, as was Axël's. The poetic task, thus, attempts to transform ordinary life into an artistic vision and to imbue common experience with symbolic significance, even if the symbolic language is nothing more than the incarnations of our

dreams and passions.

Villiers proposes a new form of rationality that is based on deeper psychological processes and, in this respect, he anticipates Freud. For Villiers every thought, word or action constituted a metaphysical choice. Every illusionary construct that incarnated the poet's dream, whether the magus, idealistic and superior hero, or poet-seer, was symbolic of the metaphysical option they had made to become one with their ideal. It did not matter that the Ideal was God, oneness with Being (as in Eastern thought), or Beauty or Truth provided it was the highest ideal imaginable and that it affirmed the existence of an "au-delà."

Villiers posits the existence of "l'au-delà" in two ways. The first is by presenting a psychological revelation to the hero or heroine (the magus, the poet, the idealist or the ideal woman), who by virtue of race, intelligence, purity of purpose, and their innate idealism had the ability to understand the essence of their innermost mode of being. Generally, the hero's story is presented as a quest for Gnosis or Eros and progresses in terms of a ritual of initiation. The Absolute is characterized by its inaccessibility and its hiddenness. It is presented in symbolic terms by contrasting images of light and darkness, seeing and blindness, the veiled and the lifting of the veil. Illusion and reality are constantly being intertwined. By following the spiritual itinerary of the hero as he overcomes the obstacles which threaten his ideals, or which prevent him from becoming one with his ideal, we have the impression

of having had a glimpse of his vision of the Absolute.

The second way in which Villiers posits the existence of the unknown is to expose his characters to the mysterious incursion of invisible forces which they cannot understand or accept because of their lack of spiritual vision. Generally, this experience is presented in the form of the fantastic tale which ends in a vision of horror, ambiguity or frustration for the protagonist such as Bonhomet who is spiritually blind.

Villiers' writings appear at a time when occult symbolism was again becoming one of the principal fountains of renewal for the writer. Occult legends and myths, rich in symbolic imagery, provided Villiers with a poetic language in which to express his metaphysical preoccupations. As Raitt has pointed out, Villiers' interest in occultism would have a profound influence on the new generation of Symbolists who saw him as a link between the Orphic poets of the illuminist period and their concerns with the supernatural. "Mais la contribution essentielle que Villiers apporte au Symbolisme par suite de ses attaches occultistes est impondérable: c'est l'intensification du sens du mystère qui règne dans toute la poésie symboliste."³

The confrontation between the temporality of his experience and his vision of the eternal resulted in a profound sense of anguish. The sense of fatality is only conquered by an affirmation of faith in the power of the idea and of the "word." Only the impassioned creation of the universe reconstructed in "Le Grand Oeuvre" permit-

ted Villiers to triumph over forgetfulness. His heroes are superior because they "remember" their ideal, their divine beginning, and the divine promise of redemption. Their ideal survives in memory. The memory of their past lives, their dissatisfaction with the present and their "hope" for the future beyond their terrestrial existence cause his heroes to seek an apocalyptic time which surpasses the temporal. There is no separation between the past and the present for the heroes in Isis and Axël. Tullia's dream, Samuel's hallucination and Ewald's ideal are all closely linked with the theme of memory and all provide the means to understand the self. In this respect Villiers foreshadows Proust's awareness of time and the creative process. The poet's lost paradise and his exile also imply previous states of being. Dream is just another variation of reality as is death. The dreams of past glory, of future reunions and fusion with the ideal were so many opportunities to salvage the ideal, to redeem oneself from the further separation from the ideal -- the true self. The ritual of initiation implies "le devenir" of the true self. The glimpse of the ideal is a privileged moment and spiritual palingenesis through Gnosis or Eros are so many justifications for relativism in art and for "seeing" correspondences in nature.

Time regains meaning and content because it is linked to the role of the creation of the universe and of man. Every act is an opportunity for redemption, while determinism or "necessity" implies only repetition and perpetuation of original sin. As such, the

creative force of the artist, like the fire Prometheus steals from the gods, is an action which is legitimized; for it is not to usurp God but to show humanity the way to salvation. Villiers intuitively apprehends true reality not as a series of meaningless and heterogeneous events, but as a world linked to sacred time. Ideal time permitted him to escape the menacing onslaught of his temporal existence. He describes this disillusioning awareness of time as a trait characteristic of the inhabitants of his native Brittany.

Bientôt l'espérance devient platonique, le dévouement, plutôt verbal qu' effectif, quelque bonne que soit la volonté dont on se vante: l'habitude s'aggrave, dans les âmes, de ne pressentir les retours que toujours au futur, dans le vent d'on ne sait quelles miraculeuses aurores! -- Et ce futur finit par ne pouvoir jamais être que de l'amer présent qui se perpétue.⁴

The ideal was a valid illusion. For what we think is true is sometimes more important than what is really true. For all of life's illusions, however, Villiers' idealism and his occultism represented the search for an authentic reflection.

FOOTNOTES TO CONCLUSION

- 1 Axël, ed., Pierre Mariel, p. 203.
- 2 Ibid., p.207.
- 3 Raitt, Mouvement symboliste, p. 216.
- 4 Villiers, "L'Avertissement," Oeuvres complètes, XI:221.

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