

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

THE GREAT WAR: IMAGES OF REALITY IN THE FRENCH NOVEL

BEING A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

BY

ANDREW BOLTON SWALLOW B.A.(HONS); M.A.

MARCH 1989



For my parents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the preparation of this thesis I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the following people for their valued assistance: Professor G. Chesters and Dr. A. Mount (University of Hull); Dr. P. Kingston (Coventry Polytechnic); Professor P. Ginestier (formerly of the University of Hull); Professor D. Johnson (University College London); Dr. N. Addinall (University College of Swansea); Dr. M. Attack (University of Leeds); Dr. A. Pugh (University of Durham); Dr. J. Roach (University of Aberdeen); Geraldine Murphy (University of Edinburgh); M. L. Bird (Dorset Institute of Higher Education); Dr. G. M. Bayliss (Keeper of the Department of Printed Books: Imperial War Museum); G. Riley (The British Library Document Supply Centre, Boston Spa, West Yorkshire); B. Gilman (Brynmor Jones Library, University of Hull); S. Tynan (Department of French, University of Hull); N. Robert (Standford Middle School, London).

Summary of Thesis Submitted for Ph.D. Degree

by

Andrew Bolton Swallow, M.A.,

on

The Great War: Image and Reality in the French Novel

War destroys the sensibility of the mind yet paradoxically it can heighten emotion and perception. Although the Great War for Civilization destroyed the youth of an entire generation, although it irrevocably scarred the face of modern French history, its repercussions were, nevertheless, deeply lodged in the country's subsequent literary output. A link emerged between war and literature formerly unknown, as many established writers became involved in the fighting and civilians temporarily transformed into soldiers gave vent to their feelings in a secondary war of words. This thesis investigates the merging of the real with the imaginary, the threading together of historical fact and literary technique. The Introduction places emphasis upon the final weeks of peace leading up to the outbreak of hostilities and the portrayal of these events in the French novel. Each chapter then deals with different aspects of trench warfare on the Western Front. In Chapter I, I consider the innocence and naïvety with which men went to war, their failure to take the situation seriously, their curiosity, their refusal to fear. The traditional heroic and patriotic spirit that has romanticized war in the past, however, is completely destroyed in Chapters II and III, as a different picture is painted by those who gained first-hand experience of the horrors of the Front. In Chapter IV the telling effects of these horrors upon the wretched mortals who, day after day, month after month, endured the most inhuman existence imaginable, are assessed, and the themes of death, depersonalization and dehumanization closely examined. The absurdity of war, both in the trenches and on the "home front", is dealt with in

Chapters V and VI. Chapter VII focuses attention on the utter folly of a situation where nobody wanted to fight, to be killed, and yet where no-one dared to refuse the wishes of the politicians and commanding officers who continued to accelerate the "war effort" despite rising casualties. Chapter VI adopts a different viewpoint as shared by those who remained behind. The total breakdown in communication and understanding between soldiers and civilians is clearly depicted and the wedge driven between the two, strongly emphasized. The final chapter paints quite a different picture of war, revealing the more positive, more enjoyable, more humorous aspects of life in the trenches. The Great War was not the war to end all wars, as had been hoped, indeed, it began a new pattern of fighting more devastating, more frightening than ever before. In conclusion, I pose the question whether 1918 brought final victory or merely a temporary cease fire, an anti-climax; attention is drawn to a possible fascinating comparison between the literature of the First World War and that of the Second World War, and to the recent revival in interest in the Great War which involvement in the Second World War has inevitably brought about. Nowadays, perhaps more than at any other time during the past 40 years, is the message of the "war novel" appropriate and meaningful. It failed to prevent the outbreak of hostilities in 1939; will it succeed in maintaining world peace in the future?

THE GREAT WAR: IMAGES OF REALITY IN THE FRENCH NOVEL

CONTENTS

<u>PREFACE</u>		i-vi
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>		1
<u>Chapter I</u>	<u>The problems of narrating the First World War</u>	1
	a) A historical discourse: an introduction	1
	b) A historical synthesis: the major events of the 1914-18 war	6
	c) Representing history and the novel	24
<u>SECTION I - THE PRE-WAR CLIMATE</u>		38
<u>Chapter II</u>	<u>The generation of 1912-14</u>	40
	a) A historical viewpoint	40
	b) A literary viewpoint	47
<u>Chapter III</u>	<u>The summer of 1914</u>	55
	a) A historical reconstruction	55
	b) Letters, memoirs, diaries	69
<u>Chapter IV</u>	<u>The eve of war: the novelist's view</u>	77
	a) Barbusse: <u>Clarté</u> An early disabused response	78
	b) Chevallier: <u>La Peur</u> An illusory double time focus	88
	c) Martin du Gard: <u>L'Eté 1914</u> A 1930's anti-militarist view	100
	d) Romain: <u>Le Drapeau Noir</u> Integrating the <u>Prélude à Verdun</u> historical and the fictional	138
<u>SECTION II - 1914-18 TRENCH WARFARE AND MILITARY OBSESSION</u>		149
<u>Chapter V</u>	<u>The physical horrors: consequence and defiance</u>	149
	a) A historical reconstruction of the physical horrors of trench warfare	149
	b) A historical reconstruction of the consequences and of the defiance of such conditions	163
	c) Physical horrors: letters, memoirs, diaries	184
	d) Consequences and defiance: letters, memoirs, diaries	200
<u>Chapter VI</u>	<u>The socialist's stand</u>	212
	a) Barbusse: <u>Le Feu</u>	212
	i) Idealism in revolt	212
	ii) Intellectual protest and prophetic vision	251
	b) Barbusse: <u>Clarté</u>	271
	i) Interpretation and reflection	271
	ii) Towards a revolutionary consciousness	283

<u>Chapter VII</u>	<u>Testimony of an army surgeon</u>	298
a)	Duhamel: <u>Vie des Martyrs 1914-16</u> The pathos of war: an appeal to the emotions	298
b)	Duhamel: <u>Civilisation</u> Towards an aesthetic humanism	312
<u>Chapter VIII</u>	<u>Fulfilling the ambition</u>	336
	Dorgelès: <u>Les Croix de Bois</u>	336
	i) Testimony and compassion	336
	ii) Measured protest	363
<u>Chapter IX</u>	<u>Fulfilling the promise</u>	385
	Chevallier: <u>La Peur</u>	385
	i) An animated account in retrospect	385
	ii) De-glamorizing the myth: a personalized approach	405
<u>SECTION III - The AFTERMATH: REFLECTIONS ON THE ANONYMITY OF WAR AND SOCIETY: TOWARDS A SPIRITUAL REVOLUTION</u>		434
<u>Chapter X</u>	<u>War as a manifestation of the disease of modernity</u>	434
	Drieu la Rochelle: <u>La Comédie de Charleroi</u> An antithetical experience	
<u>Chapter XI</u>	<u>War and the despondency of the human condition</u>	476
	Céline: <u>Voyage au bout de la nuit</u> An exacerbated, imaginative response	
<u>CONCLUSION</u>		489
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>		506

PREFACE

War is essentially destructive. It is associated with the brutalization of the spirit, wholesale destruction and carnage. Paradoxically, a reviviscence of the critical mind, of reflection and analysis can result from the ravages of military combat. In confronting the unimaginable degrees of horror between 1914-18, many soldiers did more than register a hopeless trauma, but, discovered ways of expressing in writing images which enable us to understand more deeply their experience. A unique link emerged between war and literature as for the first time many established writers became involved in the fighting on a large scale and civilians, temporarily transformed into soldiers, gave vent to their feelings in a secondary war of words. This thesis investigates the merging of the real with the imaginary, the threading together of historical fact and literary technique. It addresses the question of the intellectual response of soldier writers while undergoing the horrors of the trenches and of a variety of response after 1918, to the catastrophe of war. It examines the adequacies and inadequacies of fictional techniques for the transcription of war experience. It investigates indirect and direct authorial influence upon war narrative and assesses the merits and demerits of writing with immediacy of experience and concern in an attempt to endow vision with a truth. By analysing the truth of experience and the rhetoric of warfare we shall hope to provide grounds for concluding remarks as to whether narrative can effectively communicate a phenomenon such as war, composed of a compilation of so many disparate events and emotions.

The introductory chapter (Chapter I) examines the problems of narrating the reality of the past, and questions the significance of the "real" in the re-construction of events. In order to appreciate interpretations of the Great War, a historical synthesis of the conflict in Europe is then established. The difficulties of translating "knowing" into "telling" are subsequently discussed, in particular the articulation of the unprecedented and inconceivable.

The major part of the thesis is then divided into three sections. Section one deals with the pre-war climate, with events leading up to the outbreak of war in August 1914 and their literary transcription. The section comprises three chapters. The opening chapter (Chapter II) examines the political climate of pre-war France and the national revival of the early 1900's after the ignominious defeat of 1870. Contemporary presentation of war in literature is reviewed in order to draw later comparisons with works written from 1915 onwards. The following chapter, (Chapter III), focusses on the summer of 1914 and attempts a historical reconstruction of events leading to the outbreak of war. In order to establish as accurate a picture as possible, a selection of the letters, memoirs and diaries of those engulfed in the upheaval is then investigated. Such accounts tend to lack the intellectual analysis of historical works, whilst offering a further perspective on the "truth", if somewhat lacking in objectivity. The ultimate chapter of section one, (Chapter IV), records the eve of war as expressed by the novelist. Attention is centred upon how the author shapes his material in order to arrive at an arrangement of reality, his fundamental aims in writing, his influence upon his medium, and his time of writing. Few novels devote considerable attention to the growing tensions and

ultimate climax of the summer of 1914. Roger Martin du Gard's L'Été 1914 is an exception, and the painstaking portrayal of the build up to war consequently forms the major part of this chapter. Three more authors, however, are also examined. Henri Barbusse's portrayal in Clarté has been chosen for its deliberate half-heartedness and half-mocking tone, and for its proximity to the events that it describes; Gabriel Chevallier's La Peur because it intersperses episodes of supposed "history" with those of personal memory, with the result that the account is neither pure narration nor pure reflection; Jules Romains' Le Drapeau Noir and Prélude à Verdun because they add an extra dimension to the subject matter, integrating the historical with the fictional, by placing true historical figures in direct contact with fictional counterparts.

Section two of the thesis deals with the years 1914-18 and the horrors of trench warfare and the follies of military command. Since most novels written about the war deal with these themes, this section constitutes the largest section of the thesis. The opening chapter (Chapter V) initially offers a historical reconstruction of the carnage and suffering along the western front. As in section one, this is then followed by a further reconstruction based upon the letters and diaries of soldiers who directly experienced life in the trenches and who translated their thoughts into words impulsively without pause for reflection and inspection, and upon later memoirs produced after the end of the hostilities. Chapters VI, VII, VIII and IX investigate the depiction of the suffering and carnage and its consequences in the novel, both during and after the war. Each chapter is devoted to one author. Chapter VI focusses upon Henri Barbusse and Le Feu and Clarté. Barbusse has been chosen, not only

because any study of the Great War would be incomplete without reference to him, but to draw attention to the shaping of his material by his changing political outlook at the time. This manifests itself in constant protest and vehement invective in Le Feu, whilst a more reflective and visionary stance is assumed in Clarté. Georges Duhamel's motives behind his treatment of life at the front lie in direct contrast to those of Barbusse. The basis for his writing is not political but stems from his deep sensitivity to the daily horrors he witnessed in his capacity as an army surgeon. Vie des martyrs and Civilisation have been selected to illustrate a very different kind of protest. Whilst both works appeal to the emotions, there is a very clear progression in the author's feelings and reactions to the experiences he endured at the front. Roland Dorgelès shows similar compassion and, at the same time, a certain degree of protest in Les Croix de Bois. Unlike Barbusse and Duhamel, however, his main motive in writing, by his own admission, was to produce "la réalité recréée". It is because of this desire to be the "witness of his generation" that an analysis of his novel has been included in this section. Very little has been written about La Peur by Gabriel Chevallier. There are three main reasons, however, for its inclusion in this section. Firstly, it is an example of "committed" literature written with hindsight. In his preface to the 1951 edition, Chevallier makes it perfectly clear that his motive for writing the novel was to fulfil a promise made during the heat of battle, to one day tell the truth about his own experiences and those of his colleagues during the hours in the trenches. Secondly, the novel is untraditional, indeed somewhat innovative in its treatment of the theme of fear. Few accounts openly emphasize the

psychological conflict present in the individual during moments of high tension and danger. Furthermore, what is more remarkable, is that Chevallier openly admits his own fear during the hours he spent in the front lines. This is indicative of his determination to destroy the traditional image of battle as a worthy and ennobling experience. Thirdly, the form is quasi diary, quasi novel, giving rise to an illusory double time focus in places, the like of which is unrepresentative of the traditional novel arising from the hostilities.

Section three of the thesis deals with the legacy of the war and offers reflections by two authors upon the aftermath of the years of combat. Few authors, writing within a decade or so after the cessation of hostilities, devote attention to the demoralising effect of the horrors of trench warfare upon contemporary society. The first chapter (Chapter X) examines the war as a manifestation of the disease of modernity and focusses attention upon Drieu la Rochelle's La Comédie de Charleroi. The novel has been chosen partly because of its untypical, untraditional approach, partly because it provides the rare but vital angle through which the war may be viewed as a stage in the more general process of French decline during the early years of the twentieth century. The second chapter, (Chapter XI), considers the reactions of Céline as portrayed in the first hundred pages of Voyage au bout de la nuit. As with La Comédie de Charleroi, the novel is no simple "témoignage de guerre". Unlike Drieu la Rochelle, however, Céline does not concentrate on the appalling destructive capacity of modern mechanized warfare, but on the folly and inhumanity of combat in general, which is representative of the overall degradation and "absurdity" of twentieth century society.

The almost unrelentless pessimism and anguish of the novel extends the initial protests of Barbusse, Dorgelès, Duhamel to their very extreme: the ultimate despondency and despair of the human condition. It would seem appropriate to end the analysis of the images of war and reality with a suggestion of the bleakness of the 1930's at the time of Hitler and the rise of Nazism before the outbreak of the Second World War.

The Conclusion of the thesis synthesises the findings of each chapter and attempts to draw together the differences in treatment of subject matter by each author and to reflect upon the images of reality, and how they vary, within their works. In doing so it will attempt to suggest further avenues of study.

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

The problems of narrating the First World War

a) A historical discourse: an introduction

"Papa, explique-moi donc à quoi sert l'histoire", demands Bloch's son in Apologie pour l'histoire ou métier d'historien.¹ Roland Barthes in his article "Le discours de l'histoire"² asserts that there are no facts in themselves, that it is always necessary to begin by introducing a meaning in order that there can be a fact. From the moment that language is involved, the fact can only be defined in a tautological fashion: what is noted derives from the notable, but the notable is only what is worthy of recollection, worthy of being noted. Historians collate and relate facts with a similar purpose of establishing positive meaning and filling the vacuum of pure, meaningless series, but the discourse used, in its essence a form of "imaginary elaboration" (if we can take the "imaginary" to be the language through which the original facts are "filled out"), differs from historian to historian, as too does their perception of what merits remembrance. Let us consider three short passages from twentieth-century history books which deal with the same 'event', reactions to the outbreak of war in 1914.

La date du 4 août marque un des grands moments de l'histoire de France. Les Chambres entendent un message du président de la République qui proclame "l'union sacrée", et Viviani, dans un vibrant appel où il salue "la France immortelle", "tous les partis confondus

-
1. M. Bloch, Paris, Armand Colin, 1949 p. ix
 2. Social Science Information 1967

dans la religion de la Patrie", jure: "Nous sommes sans reproche, nous serons sans peur ... la France, attaquée, entend retrouver l'Alsace-Lorraine qui lui tient à coeur.³

... une fois les dés jetés, le pays entier avait flambé d'enthousiasme. Sur tous les wagons de mobilisés, l'inscription à la craie: "Trains de plaisir pour Berlin". A chaque départ, l'explosion inouïe, mille hommes ensemble entonnant "La Marseillaise", à pleine voix, à se faire éclater la gorge, comme des fous. La foule sur le quai acclamait ... Les quatre mille trois cents trains de soldats parcourant la France étaient pavoisés de drapeaux et de fleurs, les paysans levaient les bras en voyant ces fêtes noires et multicolores traverser la campagne. Les trains entraient dans les gares comme de longs cris de joie, aussitôt acclamés, assaillis, embrassés, comblés de cadeaux de fleurs, de saucissons, de baisers, de verres de vin. Au moindre arrêt des foules surgissaient: "Vive la France, vive l'Armée!" Des jeunes gens criaient: "A bientôt", les mobilisés répondaient: "On sera rentrés dans deux mois?" Des femmes tendaient leur enfant en offrande, un peuple entier était hors de lui-même.⁴

Les Français avaient été surpris, et beaucoup moins enthousiastes qu'il n'a été trop souvent dit, quand l'ordre de mobilisation les avaient atteints le 1er août 1914, après une crise internationale aussi brève que subite. Dans l'ensemble les mobilisés étaient pourtant partis avec fermeté, convaincus que le gouvernement français n'était pour rien dans le déclenchement du conflit et qu'il était nécessaire de résister à une agression injustifiée ...

Ce fut donc la totalité ou presque des Français qui, sans pour autant renoncer à leurs antagonismes politiques ou spirituels, adhèrent à la Défense nationale, attitude qu'on allait bientôt appeler l'Union sacrée.⁵

We can start to discriminate between these three historical extracts. The first concentrates on political reactions to the declaration of hostilities. War is seen within the context of French historical tradition, "un des grands moments de l'histoire de France", part of the great battles that France has fought. There is a strong distortion in the time scale of events, in the speed of Viviani's acceptance of the conflict, in order to create an atmosphere of complete jingoism, a façade of bellicosity and self-

3. G. Lefebvre, C. Pouthas, M. Baumont Histoire de la France Tome II Paris, Hachette 1950, p. 405

4. G. Blonde, La Marne, Paris, Presses de la Cité, 1962, pp. 6-7

5. J. J. Becker Les Français dans la Grande Guerre, Paris, Editions Robert Laffont, 1980, pp. 9-10

confidence. For Blond, there is a deterministic concept, "... une fois les dés jetés", the French people no longer seem in control of their own destiny. The historian, who is meant to be depicting, seems to be interpreting in a blatant and extreme fashion. The extract abounds with colourful and emotional language, adjectives that not only create audio-visual effects, but exaggerate the dramatisation of departure. Becker's opening sentence suggests a degree of sobriety absent in Lefebvre and Blond, with qualifiers "Dans l'ensemble" and "la totalité ou presque", implying a more accurate rendering of "fact". Nevertheless, the tone is reminiscent of an attempt to regain a lost psyche, of a quest for a former pristine identity ... "partis avec fermeté, convaincus que le gouvernement français n'était pour rien dans le déclenchement du conflit et qu'il était nécessaire de résister à une agression injustifiée..." The reader is left to distill out of this verbiage a form of conciseness and "authenticity".

As Hayden White points out:-

... even in the simplest prose discourse, and even in one in which the object of representation is intended to be nothing but fact, the use of language itself projects a level of secondary meaning below or behind the phenomena being "described". This secondary meaning exists quite apart from both the "facts" themselves and any explicit arguments that might be offered in the extra descriptive, more purely analytical or interpretative, level of the text...

This conception of the historical discourse permits us to consider the specific story as an image of the events about which the story is told...⁶

We may conclude that there is not one single, privileged way of signifying the reality of the past and little possibility of a

6. Tropics of Discourse, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1978, p. 110

single, ideal account, in which all the areas of difference would be removed. Stephen Bann writes:

... no one can be reproached for trying to discover a unitary truth. But it is surely foolish to assume that such a standard can be used for assessing and understanding the histories that we actually have in our possession.⁷

In the absence of any precise way of verifying subjective impressions and recollections, historical writing constantly brings the desire for "truth" and "fact" back to the problem of "original" discourse, for, as Anthony Cheal Pugh asserts, "representation, by definition, should be the replication, or the attempted repetition of a logically and chronologically prior entity".⁸ The historian, no more than the novelist, can claim to represent the past as in a mirror, however; the matter of history is essentially fragmentary. We should therefore question the place of the "real" in the restructuring of these fragments. From what we have already discussed, it would seem wise to refute (i) any claims that the historical text is transparent to the action it describes, such a notion of transparency would by-pass the necessary stage of mental representation, (ii) that it tries to insert the "real", indeed it can do no more than signify the real. In other words, as Barthes points out, the real is never more than an unformulated signified, sheltering behind the apparently all-powerful referent.⁹ The situation is characteristic not of reality, but of the "realistic

7. "Analysing the Discourse of History" Renaissance and Modern Studies, vol. XXVII, 1983, p. 75

8. "Defeat, May 1940: Claude Simon, Marc Bloch and the writing of disaster", Forum for Modern Language Studies, vol. XXI No 1, January 1985, p. 62

9. "Le discours de l'histoire" op. cit.

effect". The popularity of documentary literature, news items, the realistic novel, historical museums, is testimony of the interest of our civilisation in realistic effect. History's refusal to assume the real as signified led it, at the point when it attempted to form itself into a genre in the nineteenth century, to institute narration as the privileged signifier of the real. The circle of paradox appears complete and as Barthes concludes, narrative structure, originally developed within the cauldron of fiction, became at once the sign and proof of reality.¹⁰ We must admit, then, that there is no "proper" way to write history, that as with poetry there are no proper meanings beneath the surface of a text, only references to other meanings in other texts and other contexts. There can be no natural or necessary order in narrative, it would seem, when the events it aspires to represent are "multiple, simultaneous, discontinuous and disordered".¹¹ History, according to Pugh, is "simply a matter of memory, a subjective illusion".¹² As with any illusion the important concept is not the real but the intelligible.

It is open to debate whether one historian "gets it right" and the other "gets it wrong", such argument can quite reasonably turn on issues such as the weighing of one source against another, and the overall interpretation which a particular event or series of events receives. In this world, which is so much less than the best of all possible worlds, we have texts which, when examined in detail, appear to have a deep-structured coherence; it is virtually impossible to disentangle one from the other, without reducing the historical text

10. Ibid.

11. A. C. Pugh "Facing the matter of History: Les Géorgiques" in Claude Simon: New Directions (ed. A. B. Duncan), Edinburgh, Scottish Academic Press, 1985 p. 120

12. Ibid. p. 120

to what Bann calls "a kind of bloodless algebra".¹³ We shall not attempt to do this here, but, on the contrary, produce a synthesis of several texts in order to arrive at an acceptable rendering of the major events of the 1914-18 war.

b) A historical synthesis: the major events of the 1914-18 war.

Marc Ferro¹⁴ argues strongly that after 1880 education made great strides in France and that knowledge of the past spread rapidly through society. In particular, Frenchmen learnt that danger came from the east, that ever since the days of Frederick the Great, an anti-Prussian tradition developed into the history of conflict between the two peoples.

The war of 1870, the loss of Alsace-Lorraine, the revanchist appeals of Maurice Barrès¹⁵ and the clarion-call of Déroulède¹⁶ daily reminded Frenchmen that they had "lost two children", that there should be no mercy shown to the murderer. School children learnt this from their earliest years - their first textbooks showed the Prussian eagle swooping down on the gallic cock, ripping out its finest plumage; the people of Paris, starved by blockade, bombardment and war, waiting in icy streets to be fed, reduced, in their misery, to eating rats. These images were fixed in national consciousness, patriotism and education being filled with them.¹⁷

Franco-German rivalry reached into all corners of the globe, (Morocco, the Congo and China), and appeared at all levels, (colonial, commercial, financial). J.-J. Becker talks of "un

13. "Analysing the Discourse of History," op. cit. p. 75

14. The Great War 1914-18, translated by Nicole Stone, London, Routledge & Kegan, 1973, p. 11 (1st published as La Grande Guerre, Paris, Gallimard, 1969)

15. (1862-1923) See: Les Déracinés (1897); L'Appel au Soldat (1900); Leurs Figures (1902); Au service de l'Allemagne (1905); Colette Baudoche (1909); La Colline inspirée (1913)

16. (1846-1914) See: Chants du Soldat (1876); L'Hetman (1877); Le Livre de la Ligue des Patriotes (1887); Nouveaux Chants de Guerre (1883); Poésies Militaires (1896); Refrains Militaires (1889)

17. Ferro op. cit. p. 11

renouveau d'esprit nationaliste" in 1914: Comment les Français sont entrés dans la guerre,¹⁸ and claims that perhaps this saw its most vigorous expression in the work of the Action Française¹⁹ and the "Camelots du Roi", a movement of strong-arm men founded in 1908 and associated with the Action Française, their avowed function to hawk the newspaper in the streets of Paris, acting as agitators and street fighters. Few Frenchmen were able to ignore the existence of the Ligue des Patriotes,²⁰ which, in the early 1880's, had organized over 300 meetings, set up 52 regional committees, distributing 200,000 pamphlets and 250,000 other publications.²¹

18. Paris, Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1977, p. 21

"... Depuis le réveil national, on n'est plus sceptique en France", wrote Anatole France in La révolte des anges, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1914, p. 381. He also speaks of "La grande presse, organe du réveil national ..." (Ibid.)

"Aujourd'hui comme en 1792, aujourd'hui comme au temps des guerres à outrance" qui firent la Commune, notre patriotisme révolutionnaire serait, le cas échéant, le grand ressort et la suprême sauvegarde de la patrie en danger." wrote Gustave Hervé in La Guerre Sociale, 30 July 1914

19. "A la veille de la guerre, elle en était venue à être acceptée comme porte-parole du nationalisme, comme le parti nationaliste par excellence." E. Weber L'Action Française, Paris, Stock, 1964, p. 102

This rightist ultra-patriotic organisation, devoted to the maintenance of French glory and prestige in the post 1870 world, had been founded by Charles Maurras in April 1898. A convinced royalist, Maurras regarded the Ligue des Patriotes, founded by Déroulède in May 1882 (see note 22) and the Ligue de la Patrie Française, founded by Barrès after the 1898 elections, as politically inept and too inconclusive (see H. Tint The Decline of French Patriotism 1870-1940, London, Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1964, pp. 143-161), and, therefore, decided to launch a more incisive and vigorous campaign of his own. In January 1905 the Ligue de l'Action Française was founded to oppose the Republican Regime and work towards Monarchic restoration. In 1908 the bulletin of the Action Française became daily under the direction of Vaugeois with Léon Daudet as editor.

20. Tint points out that the Ligue's first concern was the unity of the nation, but that it was founded against "a background of patriotic forgetfulness and empty bluster". op. cit. p. 40. By 1885, in its determination to uphold the honour of France, the Ligue began to approve of demonstrations that were violent and politically one-sided and objected to the Internationalism of the socialists

21. see H. Tint The Decline of French Patriotism 1870-1940, op. cit. pp. 37-49

La ligue a pour but de développer les forces morales, les forces physiques et les forces économiques de la Nation et de créer un lien fraternel entre tous les Patriotes du Pays.²²

Becker concludes that a nationalist revival in France, prior to the outbreak of war in 1914, spurred on by the writings of Péguy and Psichari and the survey work of Alfred de Tarde, Henri Massis and Etienne Rey,²³ is undeniable, but that such an attitude was representative only of a minority of the population.²⁴ In direct contrast to Ferro, he disagrees with the traditional concept of "revenge and Alsace Lorraine".

En réalité, il est très douteux que l'opinion publique française ait encore été désireuse de revanche. Après que Déroulède se soit éteint au début de 1914, même les nationalistes les plus ardents avaient la conviction qu'il n'était plus possible d'en faire sérieusement, publiquement état.²⁵

The French Socialist party was profoundly pacifist and a powerful body. Its membership had risen from 53,928 at the February Congress 1914 in Nîmes, to 90,725 at the July 1914 Congress in Paris, and its organ, *L'Humanité*, rapidly became the best selling political journal in Paris.²⁶ The July Congress of 1914 was devoted to one

22. P. Déroulède Le Livre de la Ligue des Patriotes, Paris, H. Deloncle, N.D., p. 169

23. See also J. Cruickshank, Variations on Catastrophe, London, Oxford University Press, 1982 chapter 1 "Heroic Enthusiasm: Psichari and Agathon"

24. 1914: Comment les français sont entrés dans la guerre, op. cit. p. 52

25. Ibid. p. 53 see J. M. Mayeur Autonomie et politique en Alsace, Paris, Armand, Colin, 1970 p. 188

"Tous, ou presque, demandent l'autonomie; tous, autant dire, estiment qu'une Alsace-Lorraine autonome doit être le fondement d'un rapprochement franco-allemand, tous préfèrent le maintien de la paix à un conflit qui rouvrirait "la question d'Alsace-Lorraine"

26. Becker op. cit. p. 99

issue, that of organising a national strike as a preventative measure in case of the declaration of war, and subsequently to instruct delegates who would attend the Vienna Congress of the International in August 1914.²⁷

Elle n'était ni une grève insurrectionnelle, ni une grève révolutionnaire ... Elle n'entendait donc pas répondre à une déclaration de guerre, mais essayer de l'empêcher: c'était une grève préventive, elle n'était concevable qu'avant une déclaration de guerre, elle devenait impossible ensuite.²⁸

Socialists remained divided on the matter, however, and the final vote on the motion was 1,690-1,174 in favour with 83 abstentions and 24 absent members.²⁹ Even Jaurès admitted in an article on page 6 of *L'Humanité*, 16th July, 1914, that there was no guarantee of success.

We shall analyse the collapse of the International and the C.G.T. in Chapter II, examining how "un peuple équilibré dans un pacifisme qui n'excluait pas le patriotisme, rejetant tout à la fois les excès du nationalisme et ceux de l'antipatriotisme",³⁰ within days had become inspired by the utopian ideal of fighting a "war to end war", how pacifism and internationalism became fused with individualism and patriotism. Suffice it here to say that whereas

27. As early as 1907 the socialist International's annual congress at Stuttgart had resolved that it was the duty of the working class of all countries to prevent war. Markhoff affirms that this resolution was pronounced at every subsequent congress of the International up to the outbreak of war. (*Opposition to the War in France 1914-18*, Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of the University of Pennsylvania, Ph.D., 1962). In 1911 the C.G.T. (Confédération Générale du Travail) passed a resolution that in the event of a declaration of war, the workers would reply with a general revolutionary strike, and the need for co-operation between the Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière, the unified French Socialist Party, and the German Social-Democrats, was universally recognized as the best means of preventing war.

28. Becker op. cit. p. 112

29. Becker ibid. p. 114

30. Ibid. p. 119

the French military authorities had counted on a 5.13% refusal to be mobilised, there was only a 1.5% refusal,³¹ and that between the 2nd August and the 5th August 1914, 3,781,000 men had answered the call of duty.³² "In France war came and was accepted as a kind of national fate, however deeply a part of the people would have preferred to avoid it". writes Barbara Tuchman.³³

On August 4th 1914 German troops violated Belgian territory and crossed the Meuse, north of Liège. Joffre immediately applied Plan XVII and attacked Alsace-Lorraine. On the 8th August the "7e corps" commanded by General Bonneau took Mulhouse but it was not until the 14th August that serious operations began. "... the third and fourth Armies advanced in hilly and wooded country to be bloodily repulsed by an enemy stronger in numbers, in excellent defensive positions, and much better equipped for the only kind of war possible in the Ardennes and the Meuse," explains Brogan.³⁴ Serious underestimation of the strength of the enemy, inferiority in heavy artillery, breakdown in communications resulted in French defeat everywhere. After the battles of Mons and Charleroi, 21st August, the "3e corps" was in total disorder, the "18e corps" in serious trouble, the fortresses to the north of Namur captured, and the French army had not only failed strategically but its tactical shortcomings had been revealed at a frightful cost. Brogan points out that 300,000 men had

31. M. Ferro op. cit. p. 8

32. This number comprised 800,000 regular soldiers, 2,900,000 reservists and territorials, 84 infantry divisions (47 regulars), 10 cavalry divisions and 980 "75" batteries. see: A. Ducasse, J. Meyer, G. Perreux, *Vie et Mort des Français 1914-18*, Paris, Hachette, 1962, pp. 32-33

33. *August 1914*, London, Macmillan, 1980, p. 116

34. D. W. Brogan *The Development of Modern France*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1940, p. 471

been killed or wounded,³⁵ Horne estimates this figure included 4,778 officers, representing no less than one-tenth of France's total officer strength.³⁶ In less than two weeks the enemy offensive had occupied huge areas of northern France, threatened Paris, and had encountered little resistance. Ferro writes:

Senior officers could not manage their units, troops were not properly trained, units advancing in parallel lacked liaison, discoveries that augured badly for the French army.³⁷

On the 4th September Joffre issued his famous message no. 3948:

... le moment n'est plus de regarder en arrière ... tous les efforts doivent être employés à attaquer et repousser l'ennemi ... toute troupe qui ne pourra plus avancer devra, coûte que coûte, garder le terrain conquis et se faire tuer sur place plutôt que de reculer.³⁸

A new French army (the sixth) re-assembled south of the Aisne and Gallieni, military Governor of Paris, ordered Maunoury to advance. By the evening of the 6th September, the French stood up to the Germans in general engagement. The seventh division was transferred to the battle front in taxis, followed by the 103rd and 104th infantry, five battalions in all, comprising 4,000 soldiers. The German retreat began on the 7th September, and by the 11th, after a final attempt to take Verdun, Moltke had ordered a general withdrawal from Nancy to Vesle. The battle of the Marne came to an end.

35. Ibid. p. 472

36. A. Horne, The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916, London, Penguin Books, 1964 p. 26

37. Op. cit. p. 50

38. Cited by E. Lavissee in Histoire de France Contemporaine, Tome 9 "La Grande Guerre", Paris, Hachette, 1922, p. 108

Dès le 17, le front est consolidé, entre l'Oise et l'Argonne, et il va se maintenir sans grands changements pendant trente mois ...³⁹

The French had lost 300,000 men killed and 600,000 wounded, captured or missing.⁴⁰ Moltke was replaced by Falkenhayn, Minister for War, and after a last movement to outflank each other, (both sides seeking to reach the Channel first), during which furious fighting ensued from 14th September to 17th November,⁴¹ stalemate set in. Lines were reinforced in depth with networks of barbed wire, fronts became immobile.

Ainsi ... les adversaires se trouvent fixés l'un devant l'autre, et, sans qu'aucun l'ait voulu, les forces étant en équilibre, la guerre de siège succède à la guerre de mouvement.⁴²

Little progress was made by either side during the winter months. Brogan emphasises the absurdity of Joffre expecting swift, irresistible blows from infantry stationed in water-logged trenches.⁴³ Joffre himself admitted in a communiqué to the war ministry, 17th March 1915, that little progress had been made during the opening months of the year due to appalling weather conditions:-

39. E. Lavissee, op. cit. p. 123

40. Horne op. cit. p. 27

Ferro (op. cit. pp. 54-5) points out that "The armies were bled white, lacking munitions, and immobilized. At the beginning of the war there were, 1,390 rounds for each 75mm cannon. This had fallen to 695 by the end of the Marne battle and only 10,000 rounds were being manufactured for over 3,500 cannon. On the German side losses had been 40%, in places and since lack of munitions was almost as serious as in the French case, stabilization of the front was understandable."

41. Known as the First Battle of Ypres

42. Lavissee op. cit. p. 140

43. Op. cit. p. 480. 4 months of futile assaults cost the 4th army alone the lives of 100,000 men by Christmas 1914.

... le sol détrempé rend les travaux d'approche et l'établissement des places d'armes longs et pénibles; la brume fréquente entrave les réglages d'artillerie et empêche l'emploi des avions; enfin la pluie continuelle augmente la fatigue des troupes.⁴⁴

Generals counted on numerical superiority, underrated the German defence and indulged in what Ferro calls "the illusion of breakthrough".⁴⁵ In February and March during attacks in Champagne, 50,000 casualties were sustained for the gain of 500 yards; in April 64,000 men were sacrificed in an attack on the St. Mihiel salient which proved a complete failure.⁴⁶ The next two months saw the build up of forces and weapons for a larger attack in Artois, between Lens and Arras, against the German 6th army. The "33e corps" under Pétain enjoyed enormous success at the battle of Arras, Sunday 9th May, but although the enemy line was breached, no reserves were at hand to benefit from the situation and 102,500 soldiers were killed, more than twice as many as the defending troops.⁴⁷ During the summer a German patrol discovered an important French document referring to a combined Artois/Champagne attack planned for September and containing the lessons from attacks earlier in the year. More information was gleaned from deserters and when the French launched their assault on the 25th September after 3 days of artillery barrage, the element of surprise had completely vanished. Troops thrown against the elevated enemy positions were decimated; the French artillery was badly instructed and over 242,999 casualties were sustained in comparison to 141,000 German casualties.⁴⁸ In Artois, the French 10th army and the British forces, operating together, took Loos, advancing more

44. Quoted in Lavissee op. cit. p. 170

45. Op. cit. p. 63

46. See B. Liddell Hart History of the First World War, London, Faber and Faber, 1934, "1915-Deadlock"

47. Horne op. cit. p. 33

48. Horne *ibid.* p. 33

than 3 kilometres; Souchez fell on the 26th September and the Côte de Givenchy on the 28th, where the assault stopped. The Germans were on the defensive almost entirely throughout 1915, yet by the end of the year, France had lost 400,000 men, either killed or captured, (almost as many men as Great Britain was to lose in the course of the whole war and 2/3 of the total losses of the entire British Empire),⁴⁹ and over a million evacuated to the rear, sick or wounded.⁵⁰ Horne writes:

Thus ended 1915, in a complete and bloody stalemate. France had by now lost fifty per cent of her regular officers, killed or disabled, and her dead already approached the total Britain was to lose in the whole of the war. And the only thing it had proved was that this was no way to win a war.⁵¹

At the beginning of 1916, Falkenhayn had no desire to deliver a great battle or to gain a decisive victory, but to destroy the French will to fight. Verdun was seen as the "heart" of France, a point of attack for which, sooner than let go, the French would fight to the end. It proved to be the most hellish of conflicts. "For sheer horror no battle surpasses Verdun. Few equal it". writes Falls.⁵² Verdun was an ancient fortress which even after the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 still accounted as valuable for blocking the valley of the Meuse. Nevertheless the weight and speed of German fire, it was thought, would annihilate French resistance, and on the first day alone, 21st February 1916, a million shells were fired by the German armies.⁵³ With a superiority of 5 to 2, the first and second French

49. Over an approximately equal period of belligerency, about 20 Frenchmen were killed for 1 American. (see Brogan op. cit. p. 482)

50. see Ferro op. cit. p. 64

51. Op. cit. p. 34

52. C. Falls, The First World War, London, Longmans, 1960, p. 156

53. see Ferro, op. cit. p. 76

positions were taken on the 23rd and 24th February; Pétain was summoned to take command, 25th February 1916 and German successes on that day were the last of the advance. For the next six months the French held out with a minimum of troops and guns. At the end of April command of the 2nd army passed to General Nivelle, who, as the Brussilov offensive threatened on the Eastern Front and the preparations for the Somme offensive gave the Germans even greater cause for a swift victory at Verdun, issued the famous order on the 21st June:

Les Allemands lancent sur notre front des attaques furieuses dans l'espoir d'arriver aux portes de Verdun, avant d'être attaqués eux-mêmes par les forces unies des armées alliées; vous ne les laisserez pas passer, mes camarades.⁵⁴

The German plan was based on the thesis that heavy artillery would blast a deep hole in the French lines which infantry would then occupy. Between 21st-26th February French losses amounted to 25,000 men;⁵⁵ by the end of March 89,000 French soldiers had been killed;⁵⁶ between 1st April and the 1st May the total French dead increased to 133,000;⁵⁷ by the end of May it had reached 185,000.⁵⁸ When all attacks were finally stopped on the 27th August, French losses totalled 350,000.⁵⁹ "The soldiers of Verdun had lost the illusions of their youth. They no longer supposed that the war would be won in a single battle..." writes Ferro.⁶⁰ Horne relates how Poincaré was stoned when he arrived to decorate French troops, how on the roadside

54. Quoted in Lavissee op. cit. p. 226

55. Horne op. cit. p. 166

56. Ibid. p. 177

57. Ibid. p. 211

58. Ibid. p. 211

59. Ferro op. cit. p. 78

60. Ibid. p. 78

out of Verdun someone had scrawled "Chemin de l'Abattoir", and how on the 10th December 1916 a whole division bound for the front bleated like sheep, a foretaste of 1917.⁶¹ The proportion of casualties suffered to the numbers engaged was notably higher at Verdun than any other First World War battle, as indeed were the number of dead in relation to the area of the battlefield. Almost 7/10 of the entire French army had been involved. "[It] was the most senseless episode in a war not distinguished for sense anywhere".⁶²

British bombardments on the Somme, which began 24th June 1916, diverted German attention from Verdun. Wastage here made the French share in the battle considerably less than had been planned. 14 divisions instead of 40 divisions took part in the attack on Bapaume, Péronne and Nesle, 1st July 1916. Successes were limited; casualties totalled 100,000⁶³ Enemy defence in depth proved impenetrable. Allied attempts on the 20th July, 3rd September, 20th September, all failed the same way. "... the French behaved with ^{something} like criminal stubbornness, losing heavily for insignificant results.⁶⁴ As 1916 came to an end, it was clear that some kind of cross-roads had been reached and that the appalling waste of lives could not continue. The Somme battle had proved almost useless from the military viewpoint, whilst claiming over a million victims.⁶⁵ Joffre was still in favour of ordering Micheler to resume offensives in greater width and depth. Poincaré and Briand, however, recognized that he had to be replaced. Pétain was deemed to be lacking in offensive

61. Op. cit. p. 318

62. Taylor op. cit. p. 94

63. see Ferro op. cit. p. 80

64. Ibid. p. 81. The French losses totalled 194,451 according to Ferro. Falls also quotes the same figure

65. see Ferro p. 81. In addition to French losses, he puts the British at 419,654 and the Germans at 400,000

spirit. Surprisingly, Nivelle was appointed Supreme Commander, winning favour over Castelnau, Franchet d'Esperey, Sarrail and Foch who were all his seniors and already army commanders. Whereas Joffre had desired that Britain should become more involved, Nivelle was determined that French soldiers alone would make the breakthrough and that the decisive attack would be on the Aisne front between Reims and Soissons. He intended to cover the German lines back to the rearmost position with a blanket of artillery fire and then send forward the infantry, avoiding the long, bloody combats of the past. An immediate attack was postponed due to wet weather, but, as Wolff points out,⁶⁶ the Germans knew in a broad way what was coming and as time passed French Intelligence in turn became alarmingly aware that the Germans knew. French newspapers advertised the whole plan in its general outline; a copy was sent to the British Foreign Office and to all front line officers as low as company level; on 3rd March 1917, a sergeant was captured by the enemy and found to have such a document in his possession; by 6th April 1917, the order of attack of the French Vth army had been captured. Painlevé, the new French War Minister was sceptical of Nivelle's promises of a quick and easy victory and this scepticism was shared by leading officers in the French army. (Pétain, Micheler, Franchet d'Esperey, above all). Despite an offer to resign his command, at the Council of War, 6th April, Nivelle received a vote of confidence by Ministers and Generals, who, above all, desired to avoid another crisis in command. The French advance began 16th April between the Oise and the Montagne de Reims with the aim of taking the Chemin des Dames. "If there had been the slightest question of surprise up to now, it existed no

66. Op. cit. p. 85

longer; a protracted artillery bombardment had alerted the Germans, once and for all, so that again the French infantrymen were faced with the bleak prospect of walking forward almost helplessly against thousands of intact German field and machine-guns". writes Wolff.⁶⁷ In the first days alone 40,000 French were killed.⁶⁸ By the beginning of May Nivelle had been removed from command to be replaced by Pétain, "the apostle of caution",⁶⁹ but as Brogan points out, "the combatant spirit of the French Army seemed to be broken".⁷⁰ In three years of fighting, seventeen million men had been killed, wounded or taken prisoner. Of the 3,600,000 men under arms 1914 in the French army, only 964,000 now survived, 2,636,000 had been killed, wounded, made prisoners, or reported missing. Although the gap had been partially filled by the anticipated call-up of the younger classes, Ferro estimates the effective strength of the army at 3,114,000 by the beginning of May 1917.⁷¹ Clearly, the unanimity of the national will to resistance in 1914 was, if not destroyed, severely weakened, and the news of the Russian Revolution of March, with its promises of peace, reinforced political and social forces ready to argue that a negotiated "peace without victory" was not treasonable action. Lavissee claims that as early as February 1917 Nivelle had written to the war ministry:-

67. Ibid. pp. 91-2

68. see Ferro op. cit. p. 83. Lavissee puts the dead between the 16th and 25th April at 32,000 with 5,000 prisoners and 80,000 wounded. op. cit. p. 256

69. see Falls op. cit. p. 260. "The mutinies that followed convinced Pétain that there must be no more futile offensives, that indeed France must concentrate on the "defensive"

70. Op. cit. p. 487

71. Op. cit. p. 127

Depuis plus d'un an, des tracts, brochures, journaux pacifistes parviennent aux Armées. Il en sévit maintenant une véritable épidémie.⁷²

Mutinous behaviour occurred throughout the month of May. Revolt broke out amongst the 21st Division of Colonial Infantry on 3rd May, followed by rebellion in the 120th Infantry Regiment. Within a week mutinies had spread to sixteen army corps.⁷³ Soldiers protested against the dreadful losses suffered, the incompetence of commanding officers; the hardships of trench warfare whilst civilians made and spent money in a way unknown to a frugal country before 1914; the often wretched accommodation provided behind the lines; irregular leave; propaganda against which the Government seemed to take no steps. Nevertheless, Brogan emphasizes that apart from refusing to obey orders, there was little positive violence.⁷⁴ Pétain immediately decided to cease all costly offensives as a prelude to the restoration of discipline. The food, lodging, leave and allowances of the troops were improved. He toured the whole line, talking to all ranks, appealing to honour and patriotism, restoring confidence between officers and men.

Ainsi, par des remèdes plutôt que par des répressions ... le trouble, qui aurait pu devenir très grave, disparut. L'ennemi n'en

72. Op. cit. p. 256

73. see Wolff op. cit. pp. 96-6

74. Op. cit. p. 498. See also Lavissee op. cit. p. 257 "Souvent ils se bornent à déclarer qu'ils se défendront si les Allemands attaquent, mais qu'ils ne veulent plus d'offensive nouvelle. En général, ils restent respectueux de leurs officiers..." Wolff writes: "In general the mutinies took place only when the troops were ordered back into the front lines. Their views were expressed in such statements as: "We'll defend the trenches, but we won't attack;" and "We are not so stupid as to march against undamaged machine-guns". p. 94

eut pas connaissance sur-le-champ. Au milieu de juin, l'armée française était remise en main.⁷⁵

The scope of the punishment is not easy to assess. Ferro claims that 3,427 sentences were decreed, following the mutinies, 554 soldiers being condemned to death and 49 actually executed.⁷⁶ Wolff places the number executed at 23 but adds that over 250 mutineers were marched to a quiet sector and annihilated by their own artillery.⁷⁷ Lavissee argues about 20 were shot for desertion and insubordination.⁷⁸

The Army rapidly recovered but was unprepared for participation in a major offensive during the remaining months of 1917. After the British success of 7th June at Messines, the 1st army (6 divisions) joined with the 5th British army occupying a seven kilometres front along the Yser canal between Noordschoote and Boesinghe under General Anthoine. From the 16th July to the 16th August, 1,902,807 shells were fired by French artillery along the Flanders front with little active combat. On the Verdun front the 2nd army under General Guillaumat was involved in a series of dour struggles whilst the 6th army fought at the battle of Malmaison between the 23rd and 26th October.⁷⁹ Deprived of major French aid, the British, anxious to divert German strength from Russia, subjected their troops to a far worse ordeal than the French infantry had experienced under Nivelle and only surpassed by Verdun in duration and severity - the struggle

75. Lavissee op. cit. p. 257

76. Op. cit. p. 184

77. Op. cit. p. 96. Liddell Hart quotes the same number.

78. Op. cit. p. 257. Brogan agrees that "punishment was comparatively little used..." p. 498

79. Lavissee ibid. p. 263

of Passchendaele, where Falls estimates 240,000 British soldiers were killed between 31st July and 10th November 1917.⁸⁰

By early 1918 the French and British armies' capacity for offensive warfare had been seriously put in doubt. In France Pétain's defensive ideas were challenged by Foch. Clemenceau condemned his reluctance to aid the British at the beginning of the great German advance near Saint-Quentin, 21st March 1918, as cowardly. The British 5th Army was forced to prepare for a general retreat to the Channel ports and as Paris looked threatened, arrangements were made for the government to retire to Tours. At Doullens, 26th March, Clemenceau, Milner, Poincaré, Haig and Pétain met, which resulted in Foch being given the responsibility of co-ordinating the actions of the Allied armies along the western front. By the end of March, although the first great offensives had been parried, German troops had gained 40 miles within two weeks and 164,881 soldiers, 8,840 officers had been lost within 10 days.⁸¹ On 3rd April Foch became strategic director of operations with the three national Commanders-in-Chief to be under his orders; on 14th April he was made Commander-in-Chief of all armies along the western front. The second phase of the German advance began on 9th April at the Battle of the Lys; Messines was recaptured 10th April and Armentières taken, 11th April. The second corps of the French cavalry under General Robillot was sent north to fill the "gap", followed by a further five infantry divisions commanded by General de Mitry, and, finally, the 10th Army. By the end of April the enemy advance had gained a further twelve miles and a third German blow was launched,

⁸⁰. Op. cit. p. 284

⁸¹. Lavissee op. cit. p. 278

this time directed against the French in Champagne. On the 27th May Reims and the Sixth French Army fell under attack, the 11th corps was annihilated and the enemy crossed the Aisne. On the 29th May Soissons fell and by the evening of the 30th May German forces occupied the hills overlooking the Marne, an advance of 55 kilometres with over 45,000 prisoners taken. The Supreme War Council met at Versailles on the 1st June and agreed the landing of 170,000 American troops during the month of June and a further 140,000 in July. By June 8th, however, 700,000 Americans had landed in France. This presence together with the dynamic leadership of General Mangin re-established the crumbling French line and stalled Ludendorff's offensive. On the 14th July the 10th Army counter attacked and forced the German troops, gradually, into a general retreat. Ferro believes that the second battle of the Marne was effectively the turning point of the entire war.⁸²

Ce fut une éclatante victoire. Le 19 au soir, toute la vaste zone de plateaux entre la forêt de Villers-Cotterets et Soissons était conquise. L'ennemi laissait aux mains de la 10e armée 15,000 prisonniers, dont 2 colonels avec leurs états-majors au complet, et 300 canons.⁸³

By 1st August 1918 13,800,000 men had served in the German army since the beginning of the war, 8,027,000 had been expended, 5,484,500 remained in active service.⁸⁴ Lavissee calculates that from the decisive action in March to the French counter offensive in July, Germany had used 265 divisions of troops in action. He concludes:

82. Op. cit. p. 216

83. Lavissee op. cit. pp. 301-2

84. Ibid. p. 303

L'armée allemande est donc arrivée, à la fin de juillet, à un état d'usure extrême. Elle n'a plus dans ses dépôts que de très faibles ressources pour alimenter la bataille; les attelages font défaut et leur absence va paralyser l'artillerie de campagne. Ludendorff, qui tait ces misères, parle longuement de l'indiscipline.⁸⁵

8,000 prisoners and 100 cannons were taken by allied forces on the 20th August following a massive infantry and tank attack of 30 divisions in the region of Amiens. By mid-September the entire western front was in movement. The 12th September witnessed the first American attack without aid on the Saint-Mihiel salient. The attack's objective was to relieve the Paris-Avrincourt railway. On the first day of the attack more than 6,000 prisoners were taken.⁸⁶ In four days the salient was liquidated. In September Cambrai and Lille were liberated; there were more successes for the American army on the 27th September along the Meuse; Dixmude was taken, Messines re-captured, Bulgaria surrendered. Ferro points out that defeatism had reached the German High Command as early as 8th August, but that by the end of September it demanded the immediate conclusion of an armistice and the despatch of a peace-note to President Wilson.⁸⁷ After a final assault to remove the enemy from the Meuse on 19th October and an ultimate Italian attack on the 23rd October which resulted in a general Austrian retreat, an armistice was signed with Austria on the 4th November 1918. By the 5th November the 1st 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 7th and 18th German Armies were retreating over a front of more than 200 kilometres. Revolution broke out in Berlin on 7th November and the Emperor abdicated. At 9.30 a.m. on 8th November

85. Ibid. p. 305

86. Ibid. pp. 305-6

87. Op. cit. p. 218

German delegates met allied representatives in Foch's railway coach in the forest of Aigue between Compiègne and Soissons. Conditions of surrender were dictated and the enemy given 72 hours to come to a decision. At 5.00 a.m. on 11th November the Armistice was signed, to come into effect at 11.00 a.m. Germany accepted the evacuation of all occupied territory, the repatriation of prisoners, the delivery of 5,000 guns, 30,000 machine guns, the evacuation of the left bank of the Rhine by the Germany army, the prohibition of the destruction of any railways or roads, the restoration of devastated areas, the restitution of objects stolen in wartime, of 5,000 locomotives and 15,000 wagons, and the surrender of the war fleet.⁸⁸

Ferro estimates that between 1914-18 France mobilised 8.41 million troops; 1.35 million men were killed, 3.5 million wounded. 60% of those mobilised were, therefore, either killed or wounded. 700,000 houses, 20,000 factories, 50,000 kilometres of road and railway were destroyed in France, 3 million hectares of the country's land devastated, its cereal production falling by 40% and industrial production by 50%.⁸⁹

c) Representing history and the novel

Let us now raise the question of narrative and reflect on the problem of how to translate knowing into telling. Holger Klein considers the novel to be the most suitable literary form in which to give expression to the facts and conditions of war. In the First World War in Fiction, he writes:

88. see Ferro *ibid.* p. 221

89. *Ibid.* p. 227. In comparison, he states that Germany mobilized 13 million men, suffered 1.6 million dead and 4 million wounded; that 41% of those mobilized were therefore, either killed or wounded. Lavissee estimates French mobilization at 8,410,000 dead at 1,383,000 and wounded 2,800,000. He gives the figure of 1,822,545 corresponding German dead. *op. cit.* p. 334. See also the tables in J. J. Becker Les Français dans la Grande Guerre, pp. 315-17

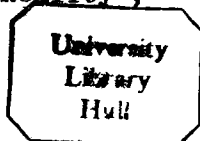
... prose narrative, taking over in part the tradition of the great epics, is especially suited to the full re-creation of historical events and states of society. Moreover, as prose is the most frequently read genre of the modern era, this is the medium in which the war had its widest impact on the reading public.⁹⁰

According to Hayden White,⁹¹ so natural is the impulse to narrate and so inevitable is the form of the narrative for any report of the way things really happened, that narrativity can only pose a problem in a culture in which it is absent. Between our experience of the world and our desire to describe that experience in language, it is prose narrative that acts as a bridge and substitutes meaning for the straightforward copy of the events recounted. White believes that it is insufficient for any historical event to be merely recorded in the order of its original occurrence. History disposes itself to the percipient eye as a series of "stories" waiting to be told, waiting to be narrated. The one great advantage that the chronicle has over the annal is its "greater narrative coherency".⁹² Without narrative, argues White, there are too many loose ends and no plot in the offing

90. London, Macmillan Press, 1976 p. 4. See also R. Pomeau "Guerre et Roman dans l'Entre-Deux-Guerres", Revue des Sciences Humaines, Fasc. 109, 1963, p. 77. J. Norton Cru points out that 7,500 titles subsequently arose from the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71 and that the novel was predominant. (Témoins, Paris, Les Etincelles, 1929, p. 47). Between 1889-1912 Capitaine Danrit, (pseudonym of Colonel Driant) produced more than twenty novels dealing with war and the output of Maurice Barrès during the same period was considerable. (Les Déracinés 1897, L'Appel au Soldat 1900, Leurs Figures 1902, Au Service de l'Allemagne 1905, Colette Baudouche 1909, La Colline Inspirée 1913). See L. Riegel Guerre et Littérature, Paris, Editions Klincksieck, 1978, chapter II "La Mission de Propagation de la foi patriotique dans le peuple par le roman".

91. "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality", Critical Inquiry, Autumn 1980, pp. 5-27

92. White ibid. p. 20



and this is not only frustrating, but disturbing, to the modern reader's story expectations as well as his/her desire for specific information. The historian's account remains something less than a proper history when he has failed to give to reality the form of a story, where there is no narrative, there is no history.

Historical narration without analysis is trivial, historical analysis without narration is incomplete.⁹³

Harry Levin echoes this chain of thought in The Gates of Horn, where he claims that literature, in particular the novel, makes use of the most expressive medium, and has "come closest to the real thing".⁹⁴ However, he considers it a fallacy to equate art with society, to assume a one-to-one correspondence between a book and its subject-matter, to accept the literature of an age as a complete and exact replica of the age itself:

One way or another, literature is bound to tell the truth more or less; but it has told the whole truth very seldom, and nothing but the truth hardly ever; some things are bound to be left out, and others to be modified, in the telling.⁹⁵

It is hardly necessary for us to remind ourselves that a "realistic" narrative, whatever the pretensions of the writer, cannot be a literal copy of reality. It is a made object (from the latin fictio-ionis, the novel, by definition, is a fictitious prose narrative), and is based therefore on selection and is subject to at

93. Quoted from Peter Gay, Style in History (New York, 1974 p. 189), Ibid. p. 10

94. New York, Oxford University Press, 1963

95. Ibid. p. 17. See J. Rockwell, Fact in Fiction, London Routledge and Kegan, 1974. "It is mere idleness to scold the writer for writing what he must write, and idiocy to want everything written down into a porridge of "correct" attitudes". p. 21

least minimal shaping. No novel can present total reality, it is both too full and too sparse. Therefore, we must be satisfied with a selection and arrangement of reality. In selecting aspects of life, war, the writer automatically imposes some form of order upon events, even if he claims to be portraying the very chaos of experience. His aim is to re-arrange facts in a manner which is more exact, perhaps, than reality, and with a view to bring out, more convincingly than mere contingencies have done, certain aspects which seem to him worth emphasizing. As White points out in *Tropics of Discourse*,⁹⁶

... the only important history is what the individual remembers and ... the individual remembers only what he wills to remember.⁹⁷

Such selection (and consequent rejection) in the composition of novels, constitutes a subjective or fictional element in the work. No account of any event can ever be entirely objective even though the presentation of reality clearly implies objectivity.

... the novel is in practice a kind of sustained lie which the reader provisionally accepts while remaining aware that the writer is necessarily selecting and re-ordering in the service of a controlled illusion. Add that the writer is obviously limited to his own experience, knowledge, perception, or capacity for empathy and it is clear that the novel cannot finally be other than the expression in projection of an individual subjectivity.⁹⁸

96. Baltimore & London, John Hopkins University Press, 1978

97. Ibid. p. 39. See S. Heath *The Nouveau Roman - A Study in the practice of writing*, London, Elek Books Ltd., 1972. "... the idea of an account introduces a notion of selection ..." p. 20

98. Cecil Jenkins "Realism and the Novel Form", in *The Monster in the Mirror-Studies in Nineteenth Century Realism*, (ed. D. A. Williams), Oxford University Press, 1978. See also Hayden White "The historical past, therefore is, like our various personal pasts, at best a myth, justifying our gamble on a specific future, and at worst a lie, a retrospective rationalization of what we have in fact become through our choices". *Tropics of Discourse*, op. cit. p. 39

At the same time, because novelists aim at giving to their novels as much aesthetic force and unity as possible, they must, in order to be successful, produce something which from an artistic stand-point is superior to the record of events as found in diaries, memoirs, recollections. The novelist is not merely receptive and reproductive. He must be active and creative.⁹⁹ Observation alone cannot penetrate to the inner truth. It reveals a field of objects incompletely perceived. The "inner truth" of these events is the "shape" which the novelist gives to them. Claude Lévi-Strauss suggests that the formal coherency of any historical narrative consists solely of a "fraudulent outline" imposed by the writer upon a body of materials.¹⁰⁰ The latter transforms events from the chronological arrangement into a hypotactically arranged structure of occurrences, the contents of which are as much invented as found. The narrative therefore mediates between the events reported in it on the one side and the plot structures conventionally used to endow unfamiliar events and situations with meanings on the other. This use of constructive imagination may condense events, facts, bringing out the most important, the most relevant. Inherent in this representation, the novelist's "explanation" substitutes meaning for the straightforward copy of events recounted. The value of fashioning a framework arises out of the desire to have real events display the coherence and fullness of an image of life that is, however, and can only be imaginary. In other words, this fashioning

99. See Hayden White, *Metahistory*, Baltimore & London, John Hopkins University Press, 1973. "... events are only partially visible in the world of the senses; the rest has to be added by intuition, inference and guesswork". p. 179

100. "Ouverture to *Le Cru et le cuit*", in *Structuralism* ed. Jacques Ehrmann, New York, 1966 pp. 47-48. Quoted in *Tropics of Discourse* op. cit. Chapter II, "Interpretation in History"

is a distortion of the whole factual field of which the narrative purports to be a representation, as is the case in all model-building.

... the whole hub of the problem is to present ... data with minimal distortion arising either from subjective impulse or from artistic overelaboration, so that they do mirror reality as clearly as possible and do, almost literally, speak for themselves.¹⁰¹

Nevertheless, the essence of resemblance is difference. The idea of imitation implies distortion. The image that corresponded perfectly with reality would no longer be an image; it remains an image by virtue of its difference from that which it resembles. Life has infinite variety but art has limited resources. The metaphor of the mirror held up to nature, the idea that literature reflects life, is perhaps somewhat naïve, in seeing art as the simple servant of nature. Individuals may have "experiences" and indeed, gain experience from them, but as Pugh¹⁰² points out, when narrated or described, and read, the signs employed become part of a far more complex system of references and they will always "differ" from their "originals", the effects they produce, being deferred, can never be made to match their source. Pugh concludes that there can never be a natural or necessary order in narrative when the events it aspires to represent are "multiple, simultaneous, discontinuous and disordered", and that any order that it produces is therefore a falsification of

101. G. J. Becker, *Realism in Modern Literature*, New York, Frederick Ungar, 1980, p. 93. See H. Levin. *The Gates of Horn* "Criticism in assuming that art invariably reflects and forgetting that it frequently distorts, wafts us into a looking-glass world, more logical than likely". op. cit. p. 20

102. "Facing the matter of History: Les Géorgiques", in *Claude Simon: New Directions* (ed. A. B. Duncan), Edinburgh, Scottish Academic Press, 1985, p. 117

lived time.¹⁰³ The novel, instead of reflecting life, we might better say, refracts it. If one accepts the arguments above, we can arrive at a definition of the novel as a fictitious prose narrative portraying characters and actions representative of real life.

The fictional world cannot possibly capture or cover the whole of reality but, skilfully designed and carefully structured, it can provide a paradigm of the conditions and circumstances, laws and relationships which are deemed to prevail in the "real" world.¹⁰⁴

The novelist, then, takes the facts and puts them together to make a whole and display an "ordered world", through a variety of "tropological" strategies. A writer's medium, however, is often inadequate to the emotions he wishes to portray. Fussel acknowledges that one of the cruxes of First World War literature is the collision between events and the language available, or thought appropriate, to describe them.¹⁰⁵

Logically, one supposes, there's no reason why a language devised by man should be inadequate to describe any of man's works. The difficulty was in admitting that the war had been made by men and was being continued ad infinitum by them.¹⁰⁶

Some novelists insist on searching for the correct technical terminology adequate to the correct characterisation of their objects of study, others stress the need to use non-technical language, to avoid jargon as a safeguard against deformation of the "facts". The problem of finding an appropriate rhetoric implies the larger

103. Ibid. p. 120

104. D. A. Williams, "The Practice of Realism" in The Monster in the Mirror op. cit. pp. 257-8

105. The Great War and Modern Memory, New York & London, Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 169

106. Ibid. p. 170

question of what style is suitable for history. Ordinary language itself has its own forms of terminological determinism, represented by the figures of speech (metaphor, rhetorical comparison, prose rhythm, assonance, alliteration, allusion, sentence structure ...), without which discourse itself is impossible. When we seek to make sense of the Great War, to portray it as it was, we can never say precisely what we wish to say or mean precisely what we say. Our discourse always tends to slip away from the facts, or the facts always resist the coherency of the image which we are trying to fashion with them. In *Variations on Catastrophe*,¹⁰⁷ John Cruickshank shows how the traditional, accepted rhetoric of warfare was quickly undermined and eventually discredited.

Initially the traditional vocabulary of war - confident, patriotic, proclamatory and morally aggressive - was widely adopted. Indeed, it was the only language readily available to express such matters ... But as the war continued, with its growing recourse to trench fighting and industrialized, mechanized slaughter, fine words and resounding phrases were increasingly called in question.¹⁰⁸

The basic problem was finding ways of articulating experiences which were not only horrific and unprecedented,¹⁰⁹ but inconceivable even to the participants.

107. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1982

108. Ibid. p. 28

109. "What appeared to be without parallel - and what was emphasized by many writers - was the exposure of fragile human flesh to factory-produced metal travelling at high velocity. Appalling wounds and appalling deaths were a daily occurrence". Ibid. p. 32. Fussel takes a slightly different angle. He puts forward the idea that because events were so horrific many civilians refused to listen and accept them as true; many soldiers could not bring themselves to repeat what they had seen. "What listener wants to be torn and shaken when he doesn't have to be? We have made unspeakable mean indescribable: it really means nasty". see P. Fussel, *The Great War and Modern Memory* op. cit. p. 170

The phenomenon of industrialized and total war was one which required time and some detachment for its proper understanding and expression.¹¹⁰

It may be argued that a novelist can never represent the Great War as it was, in writing. Most texts, however "realistic" they purport to be, cannot describe an event such as a barrage, or the putrefaction of the trenches, without either leaving something out of the description or adding something that would be essential or inessential to another writer or reader. Many writers were convinced that nothing they said could rival the truth. There was also the moral problem of using wholesale killing as the subject-matter of an artistic exercise. Many regarded a determined silence as the only response possible, as Cruickshank points out:

On such grounds a sense of moral inappropriateness began to merge into a sense of literary impotence.¹¹¹

Absolute reality can never be put into writing. The novelist may feel a peculiar tension between the words, conventions and ideas that he has inherited from generations of writers and the facts, impressions and experiences that life continues to offer. Strictly speaking, it is almost impossible, as Fussel suggests, to write an account of anything without some literary devices leaking in, to eliminate artifice from art.

110. J. Cruickshank "Critical Approaches to some novels of the Great War", Literature and Society: (Studies in 19th and 20th Century French Literature) 1980 pp. 140-152

111. Variations on Catastrophe, op. cit. p. 36

Probably only a complete illiterate who very seldom heard narrative of any kind could give an "accurate" account of a personal experience.¹¹²

We might conclude that even in the most chaste, discursive prose, texts intended to represent "things as they are" there is a high risk of failure of intention. White claims that every mimetic text can be shown to be distorted and can serve, therefore, as an occasion for yet another description of the same phenomenon, claiming to be more realistic, more "faithful to the facts".¹¹³

There is no criterion by which an "account" may be judged adequate to the facts, by which the "style" chosen by the writer may be deemed appropriate or inappropriate to the "account". It follows that there is no single correct view of any object under study but that there are many correct views, each requiring its own style of representation. Narrative, then, does not reproduce the events it describes but rather tells us in what direction to think about the events and charges our thoughts about the events with different emotional valences. It does not image the things it indicates but calls to mind images of the things it indicates.

The historian, by virtue of the fact that he deals with the "real" whilst the novelist deals with "imagined" events, might appear to be doing something fundamentally different from the novelist.¹¹⁴

112. P. Fussel, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, op. cit. p. 173

113. *Tropics of Discourse*, op. cit. p. 5

114. See Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse* op. cit. Chapter V "The Fictions of Factual Representation". "Viewed simply as verbal artifacts histories and novels are indistinguishable from one another". p. 122. White argues that readers of histories and novels can hardly fail to be struck by their similarities and yet traditionally, there has existed opposition between the two. In the early nineteenth century it became conventional to identify truth with fact and to regard the novel, therefore, as the opposite of truth, hence a hindrance to understanding reality rather than a way

Indeed, this is not so. By creating a framework, endowing what originally appears to be problematical with a recognizable, familiar form, using language with all its different implications, the historian and the novelist are both engaged in the construction of a verbal image of "reality".

It does not matter whether the world is conceived to be real or only imagined; the manner of making sense of it is the same.¹¹⁵

It is reasonable to argue that no single novel or history can produce a global, balanced view of society, none can purport to be a capsule of life. When we examine the First World War, there are so many different views according to the memories and experiences of the many different soldier-writers, embracing all aspects of life in times of war, that perhaps the best we can achieve is an illusion of reality and an appearance of objectivity. Nevertheless, what we do have here, is a fusing together of the two "genres"; the soldier, the link with reality and "expérience vécue", the writer, the provider of imagery and "expression projetée". Jean Norton Cru rejects

of apprehending it. History, it was believed, was the sole representation of the actual; fiction, the "possible" or the "imaginable". History was therefore set against fiction as the study of the real versus the study of the imaginable. Few people recognized that the spectrum of genre in novelistic writing paralleled the spectrum of discourse in history. White takes into account the romantic historiography of Michelet; Ranke and realistic historiography; Burckhardt and symbolist historiography; Spengler and modernist historiography. It has been maintained that without employing what are commonly known as fictional techniques e.g. characterization, imagery, historians remained true to the facts in the belief that history would produce a knowledge as certain as anything offered by the physical sciences and as objective as a mathematical exercise. Engaged in a parallel but inverse activity, (i.e. the accretion of reality by facts), such was the claim of the realist/naturalist novelists of the late nineteenth century.

115. Ibid. Chapter III "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" p. 98

invention, imagination, interpretation of any kind, in the desire to create any plausible expression of reality.¹¹⁶ He dismisses works which claim to build an "authentic" picture of the past and yet which can show little evidence of first hand acquired knowledge.

... ce que nous voyons, ce que nous vivons, est; ce qui contredit notre expérience n'est pas ...¹¹⁷

He continues,

Il faut que ceux qui n'ont pas fait la guerre sachent qu'aucune image exacte des opérations ... aucune apologie, aucune critique ... ne peuvent être réalisés sans s'inspirer des témoignages ...¹¹⁸

We must, at the onset, question the narrow-mindedness of this view. The Great War was composed of a constellation of disparate events, not just one battle, one experience. If a soldier-writer confines himself merely to his own experience, there would seem the risk of a rather unbalanced, final picture.

Léon Riegel, on the other hand, advocates the use of imagination, the creation of fictional elements, in pursuit of a fuller "truth".¹¹⁹ He considers invention, important, if not necessary, in the reconstruction of the past.

... les mythes que se fabriquent une époque, une civilisation, une génération ont au moins autant d'intérêt que les dates, les faits saillants, les épisodes de la réalité historique. Ces mythes nous révèlent les aspirations, les passions, les rêves, les souffrances secrètes des hommes à un certain moment du passé.¹²⁰

116. Témoins op. cit.

117. Ibid. p. 14

118. Ibid. p. 19

119. Guerre et Littérature, Paris, Editions Klincksieck, 1978

120. Ibid. p. 8

Riegel applauds creative and imaginative writing believing that it renders a most forceful and vivid impression of the critical moments of history.

Avant même que les canons se fussent tous, les artistes racontaient leur expérience par la plume, le pinceau ou la voix, les uns en "témoins" fidèles et scrupuleux, les autres en "créateurs" imaginatifs. Nous ne pensons pas qu'il y ait là matière à scandale mais, au contraire, un riche sujet d'étude.¹²¹

We shall examine these opposite viewpoints closely. It is our purpose to investigate the historical facts and the literary techniques within chosen novels in order to evaluate to what extent fictional demands of style and form modify a narrative's value as direct witness, and to assess the influence of the author, directly or indirectly, on his medium. We shall attempt to determine the angle of refraction between historical detail and literary illusion and to discover to what extent this distortion might be beneficial. Not all readers are students of history, indeed, many are seekers after survey rather than detail. The "distortive effect" may, therefore, seem more comprehensible than the field in its unprocessed state; the narrative, with the aid of constructive imagination, providing the reader with a guideline as to what, in all likelihood, happened, given the available evidence, and with an introduction to a less gilded representation of history.

121. Ibid. p. 10 See F. Grierson Illusions and Realities of the War, London, John Lane, 1918. "What the great majority of our correspondents lack is power and imagination ... For this reason thousands of people have never yet received an adequate idea of what goes on at the front". p. 97' "The real and only test of adequate writing is whether a writer can rise to the level of the thing he wants to describe ..." p. 98

Schinz makes the distinction between War Novel - in which authors work up documents or personal experiences to make us more deeply aware of the significance of war itself - and the War-Time-Novel - used as a background for some story not necessarily connected with war.¹²² This thesis defends the War Novel. Other genres (drama, poetry) have different structural implications and are different linguistic and semantic vehicles. Each chapter will present a theme, or a number of themes via a selection of authors and novels.

Only works published between 1914-1939 have been analysed.¹²³ After 1939 few novels deal with the Great War as a central theme. After thirty years, inaccuracy in the author's memory, distortion in his "imagination" is very likely. After 1939 inspiration behind the writings of the First World War has almost inevitably been influenced by the events of the Second World War. Such accounts may be notably "coloured" by the 1939-45 conflict. Authors were, at that moment in time, experiencing different feelings, reactions, which might have affected their writing.

122. French Literature of the Great War op. cit.

123. Epilogue by Roger Martin du Gard was published in January 1940 but actually completed in 1939

SECTION I

THE PRE-WAR CLIMATE

In Chapter 1 we demonstrated the danger of assuming that literature can, in some way, accurately reflect society. What is fictional cannot be real. Fiction, as we inferred from the word itself, is something "made" or "made-up", not identical with fact. In this chapter we shall focus attention on events leading up to the outbreak of war during the summer of 1914 and how they were recorded by novelists during the war years, immediately after the armistice and with retrospect during the twenties and thirties, leading up to the outbreak of World War II. We shall attempt to analyse the different facts considered worthy of being noted which will differ from author to author and compare these against historical documentation dealing with the same subject area and secondary material in the form of soldier's diaries, letters, souvenirs, memoirs. We acknowledged in Chapter 1 that there was not one single privileged way of depicting events and the time of writing. We must take all these factors into consideration when we attempt to assess to what extent an illusion of reality is created, and to what extent the element of invention, which we deemed inevitable in order to pursue a fuller truth, and to avoid a limited, possibly unbalanced account, detracts, differs from the actual reality of the situation (as portrayed in historical documentation and secondary source material). The novels which will be analysed in this section are:

Clarté (H. Barbusse);¹ La Peur (G. Chevallier);² L'Eté 1914 (R. Martin du Gard);³ Le Drapeau noir and Prélude à Verdun (J. Romains).⁴

We shall begin our analysis with an examination of the climate of pre-war France and then discuss the above mentioned novels in the given order.

1. Paris, Flammarion, 1919

2. Paris, Stock, (Delamain et Boutelleau), 1930

3. All references in this chapter relating to L'Eté 1914 will be to the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade edition of Roger Martin du Gard's Oeuvres Complètes, Paris, Gallimard, 1955, Vol. II. L'Eté 1914 was originally published in 1936

4. Les Hommes de Bonne Volonté, Vol. XIV, Paris, Flammarion, 1937; Vol. XV, Paris, Flammarion, 1937

CHAPTER II

The generation of 1912-1914

a) A historical viewpoint

R. N. Stromberg⁵ claims that the French national revival of the 1900's after the ignominious defeat of 1870, had enlisted the talents of the most influential men of letters: Charles Péguy, Maurice Barrès, Paul Claudel. He quotes Eugen Weber,⁶ asserting that "Discipline, Heroism, Renaissance, Génie National were the words of the day in France".⁷ There is evidence to suggest that this initial "nationalisme de défense" had become aggressive, even bellicose, in the years leading up to the outbreak of the First World War. In 1912 Etienne Rey wrote:

La substitution récente d'un plan d'offensive au plan de défensive élaboré après la défaite est une marque frappante de ce retour à la confiance, de cette foi renaissante dans la destinée de nos armes.⁸

Agathon's⁹ Les jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui¹⁰ is usually considered as formal proof of national revival amongst French youth before 1914. John Cruickshank describes the work as "an early and non-quantified example of the now familiar opinion poll".¹¹ It is perhaps one of the most well known studies carried out in France between 1912-14

5. "The Intellectuals and the Coming of War in 1914", Journal of European Studies, 3, 1973 p. 113

6. See The Nationalist Revival in France 1905-1914, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1959

7. Stromberg op. cit. p. 113

8. La renaissance de l'orgueil français, Paris, 1912, p. 74. "Les déclamations sur l'horreur de la guerre ont brusquement cessé, et nous avons compris de nouveau sa séculaire grandeur par l'exaltation qu'elle a provoquée dans les âmes". p. 84

9. Joint pseudonym adopted by Henri Massis and Alfred de Tarde

10. Paris, Plon, 1913

11. Variations on Catastrophe, Some French Responses to the Great War, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1982, p. 20

concentrating on the youth of the day and examining the transformation of ideas, feelings and aspirations of the nation's young people aged between eighteen and twenty-five.¹² In spite of the different sections of society interviewed, (La Revue hebdomadaire analysed the replies of young soldiers, intellectuals, doctors, artists, even workmen, clerical workers, whereas Agathon concentrated on the intellectual youth of schools, universities, literary circles), a common image developed. In particular, Agathon found that the new generation rejected the inactivity and pessimism of their fathers. He wrote:

Toute leur action se consuma à chercher la raison et presque l'excuse d'agir.¹³

On the contrary, Agathon claimed the new generation to be optimistic, active, creative and adventurous:

Ils [les intellectuels de 1870] subissaient, les nouveaux venus acceptent. Subir, c'est fuir la responsabilité; accepter, c'est la rechercher tout entière. Subir, c'est se refermer sur soi; accepter, c'est consommer du vouloir et de l'énergie. Nos jeunes gens ont dès l'abord une vue très nette du possible et de l'efficace ... D'un mot, ce qui caractérise leur attitude, c'est le goût de l'action.¹⁴

12. "Le vent est aux enquêtes" see Emile Henriot, A quoi rêvent les jeunes gens, Paris, Champion, 1913, p. 7.

In January 1912 La Revue des Français interviewed a number of parents on the dreams and wishes of their children.

March 1912, La Revue hebdomadaire carried out a similar enquiry, this time asking young people, themselves, to comment on their aspirations and tendencies. Between 1912-1913 Le Gaulois, Le Temps, L'Opinion (Massis & Tarde), Le Temps carried out similar surveys. see P. Bénéton, "La génération de 1912-1914", Revue Française de Science Politique, Vol. 21, 1971, pp. 983-4

13. Les jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui, op. cit. p. 7

14. Ibid. pp. 17-18

This assertion is confirmed by the results of other surveys.^{14a} Similarly, the practical nature of the new generation is emphasized,¹⁵ an interest in aviation and sport,¹⁶ together with a love of order, discipline and a respect for hierarchy.

Elle [la jeunesse] s'affirme douée pour la plus grande et la plus rude tâche, qui est d'organiser ... En toutes matières, c'est le trait de son esprit de faire l'ordre et de la hiérarchie, comme son aînée faisait du désordre et des ruines.¹⁷

The image would be incomplete without mention of "l'esprit patriotique" and "la foi catholique" of the youth of the period. Massis and de Tarde praise the "réveil de l'instinct national",¹⁸ the "passion patriotique ... clairvoyante, volontaire",¹⁹ particularly after "l'éclipse du patriotisme vers 1880".²⁰ The new generation no longer feared war:

La guerre: le mot a repris un soudain prestige... Ces jeunes gens le chargent de toute la beauté dont ils sont épris et dont la vie quotidienne les prive. La guerre est surtout, à leurs yeux, l'occasion des plus nobles vertus humaines, de celles qu'ils mettent le plus haut: l'énergie, la maîtrise, le sacrifice à une cause qui nous dépasse.²¹

At the same time, Agathon insisted on the contribution of youth towards the revival of Roman Catholicism taking place at this period.

14a. In La Revue hebdomadaire no. 29, 20 July 1912, pp. 304-5 Emile Faguet claims the young generation to be "énergique, sainement passionnée, curieuse, chercheuse, inventeuse, et éprise d'action".

Emile Henriot affirms "On se disait volontiers, vers 1890, affaibli, énervé ... Depuis, nos jeunes gens se sont ressaisis. Ils aiment l'énergie, l'action, la force, la robustesse et la virilité ... La jeunesse française s'est refait une santé".

See A quoi rêvent les jeunes gens op. cit. p. 12

15. See Les jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui p. 21

16. See Ibid. pp. 34-5 and p. 113

17. Ibid. p. 117

18. Ibid. p. 28

19. Ibid. p. 40

20. Ibid. p. 23

21. Les jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui op. cit. pp. 31-2

Chapter IV of Les jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui is entitled "Renaissance catholique".

We must now consider to what extent the image of youth at the turn of the century in France, as shown by Massis and de Tarde, is indeed an "accurate" reflection of the times. Bénéton writes:

... l'image de la jeunesse que présentent les conclusions des enquêtes (et en particulier les conclusions d'Agathon) est largement admise par des contemporains comme reflétant la réalité de la jeunesse - que cette réalité corresponde ou non à leurs propres désirs.²²

He quotes Etienne Rey in La Renaissance de l'orgueil français, Gaston Riou in Aux écoutes de la France qui vient, Albert de Mun in L'Echo de Paris, Victor Margueritte in Le Figaro and several others,²³ who favoured the re-birth of idealism and the re-awakening of patriotic ideal which was symbolized by the youth of the times. Maurice Barrès wrote:

La nouvelle génération qui monte s'annonce comme une des meilleures que notre pays a connues. Vive la jeunesse française!²⁴

and Bergon admitted:

L'évolution de la jeunesse actuelle n'apparaît comme une sorte de miracle.²⁵

In 1900 The Generation before the Great War,²⁶ R. Tannenbaum suggests that the widely used school textbook at the turn of the century in France, Le Tour de la France par deux enfants, devoir et

22. Ibid. p. 992

23. Ibid. pp. 995-6

24. Mes Cahiers, 1913-14, Paris, Plon, 1936, p. 66

25. Le Gaulois, 15 June 1912

26. New York, Anchor, 1976, pp.316-7

patrie,²⁷ fostered and encouraged the ideals of patriotism amongst the youth of the day. He claims that by 1905 eight million Frenchmen had read the text.²⁸ Maurice Genevoix, in his preface to L'Oeuvre de Maurice Barrès, supports this view:

Dès l'école maternelle, nous étions nationalistes. La "grande école", où nous entrions à six ans, par faisait une éducation qui nous rendait, vers notre dixième année ... unanimement revanchards. Unanimement, il faut l'entendre au sens le plus large: fils et filles de vigneron, de bourgeois, d'ouvriers, d'artisans ... de rouges, de blancs, de petits rentiers ... tous, sous la halle au blé; dans la poussière du 14 juillet, nous écoutions le sénateur-maire nous parler de l'Alsace-Lorraine... Comment aurions-nous oublié, pour l'avoir contemplée toute l'année, la grande carte murale où les provinces perdues accrochaient une tache violet-parme, bouquet de deuil et de souvenir?²⁹

André Maillet in Sous le fouet du destin, explains how from the age of ten he had yearned to participate in battle and how this ambition was not uncommon amongst his peer group:

Il me semble que ma Patrie n'est pas complète... je ne crains plus les voleurs. J'attends même impatiemment la lutte, la guerre qui doit venir nécessairement, pour me venger, pour NOUS venger.³⁰

Nevertheless, a certain amount of caution is required when assessing the "truthfulness" and "accuracy" of Agathon's findings. Bénétou emphasizes the difficulty in appreciating the representativeness of the enquiry when, by the authors' admission, it was directed only towards a section of youth.³¹ There is good reason to believe that Massis and de Tarde carefully selected the replies to their questions

27. G. Bruno (pseudonym of Mme Alfred Jules Emile Fouillée)

28. Op. cit. p. 33

29. Vol. 6, Paris, Plon, 1966, pp. ix-x

30. Paris, Perrin, 1920, pp. 63-5

31. See "La génération de 1912-1914" op. cit. p. 999 and Les jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui "Peut-être une enquête plus étendue sollicitant tous les jeunes Français des ateliers, des faubourgs et des champs comme ceux qui sortent des collèges, eût-elle donné des résultats différents..." op. cit. p. II

in order to suit their ultimate goal. Emmanuel Berl, writing in 1969, claims to have been one of Agathon's interviewees:

Les auteurs m'ont interrogé, moi aussi. Ma réponse ne leur convenait pas, ils n'en ont donc fait aucun état.³²

Bénéton argues strongly that not only did Massis and de Tarde select rigorously, but also manipulated their data in order to make it correspond to the outcome they desired.³³ He makes a striking comparison between the political opinions of Massis and de Tarde with the political opinions of the generation of 1912-14 according to the results of their enquiry.³⁴ There is a remarkable conformity between the wishes of the interviewers and the results of their labour. The validity of their work is thrown into question even further when, in the introduction to Les jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui,³⁵ they stress the hope that it will encourage young people to join together in order to realise, not only a new community, but a new France. Bénéton argues:

Les enquêteurs ont présenté une jeunesse miraculeuse comme une réalité; une large partie de l'opinion française a cru avoir la jeunesse de ses désirs. N'ont-ils les uns et les autres pris leurs désirs pour la réalité?³⁶

It would appear, that on the eve of war, "un mythe de la jeunesse" "une image déformée de la réalité"³⁷ had established itself. The

32. A contretemps, Paris, Gallimard, 1969, p. 155

See Bénéton op. cit. "... seules sont retenues les réponses des convaincus qui confirment le renouveau de la jeunesse, les autres, celles des sceptiques, ne sont pas citées". p. 999

33. Op. cit. p. 1000 "Il existe enfin ... un contraste fréquent entre les conclusions de l'enquêteur et les résultats de l'enquête..."

34. Ibid. p. 1002

35. Op. cit. p. V.

36. "La génération de 1912-14" op. cit. p. 1003. Bénéton investigates other surveys carried out at the same time as Les jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui and reaches similar conclusions in this article

37. Ibid. p. 1003

sense of a new, distinctive generation is strongly emphasized and, to some extent, this is true. The student population more than quadrupled between the years 1875-1917³⁸ and a national students' union, "l'Union nationale des associations générales d'étudiants de France", was formed in May 1907. Agathon's survey focusses quite strongly upon the student population. Bénéton comments:

Hors le milieu étudiant, il n'est pas de jeunes hommes, il n'est que des hommes jeunes.³⁹

Perhaps most important, however, was the growing political instability of France between 1911-14, and after Agadir, the urgent need to reassure herself of the strength of her youth who would defend the country in case of conflict. Whatever the nature of the myth, the degree of reality, the people of France were quick to respond to this mood of heroic enthusiasm, and the latter grew all the more as a result of this response. R. N. Stromberg writes:

Our whole perspective on World War 1 has, arguably, been thrown out of focus by a refusal to face and examine the fact that in the beginning the war was tremendously popular with just about everyone, including the intellectuals.⁴⁰

André Gide, in his Journal, comments on the difficulty of escaping the mass pressures which drove men to the front,⁴¹ but, in the main, it was not weakness but positive response that drew the population of

38. Ibid. p. 1004

39. Ibid. p. 1005

40. "The Intellectuals and the Coming of War in 1914", Journal of European Studies, 3, 1973, p. 111. See also pp. 109-110

41. 15th August 1914.

"Chacun a peur de rester en retard, d'avoir l'air moins "bon Français" que les autres".

Journal 1889-1939, Pais, Gallimard, 1948, p. 463

France toward the war.⁴² By and large, the impulses to war in August 1914 were the old traditional ones: a relief from mediocrity and dullness, a desire to do something exciting, a desire for spiritual renewal (the war was seen by many as a chance to regenerate a sick culture).⁴³ The traditional presentation of war in literature accentuated this response.

b) A literary viewpoint

Paul Déroulède's patriotic verse was extremely popular before his death in 1914. In Chants du Soldat,⁴⁴ "Le Clairon" tells of the heroism and dedication of a young bugler going forward against the enemy, mortally wounded, yet sounding the charge in spite of his injuries. A similar heroic death befits the old officer of "L'Arrière-Garde", who, upon realizing the threat posed by the Prussian forces as they attack the retreating French army, throws himself down to the ground to fight a successful rearguard action alone:

"Au coeur!" murmura-t-il déjà mort à demi,
Mais avant de tomber, plantant son sabre en terre;
C'est ici, mes enfants, que je veux qu'on m'enterre.
Honte à qui laisserait mon corps à l'ennemi!"

The young warrior of "Le Turco" refuses to leave the ranks for medical attention in spite of the severe cough from which he constantly suffers. His courage and chauvinism are only thwarted by death. In "Bazeille", the old priest gives the French troops confidence to

42. Anatole France tried to join up at the age of 70; Alain enlisted at 46, Barbusse at 41.

43. Stromberg concludes his essay in an interesting manner by comparing the mood which sent idealistic youth off to war in 1914 with the similar drive that impels the present younger generation to protest against war. op. cit. p. 122

44. Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1872

resist the Prussian advance; in "Au docteur Dolbeau" the nationalistic message is again strong. Déroulède's Nouveaux Chants de guerre⁴⁵ continue with the same patriotic spirit. The poem "En avant!" urges the infantry forward, regardless of what lies ahead:-

"En avant! tant pis pour qui tombe,
La mort n'est rien. Vive la tombe,
Quand le Pays en sort vivant.
En avant!"

In "Chanson" the honour of being a soldier is the simple engraving on his tomb of: "Un Soldat". In "Colloque" the capitaine emphasizes the glory of the battlefield to a new conscript, fearful of war, who had desperately wanted to remain in his father's vineyard but who had been drafted into the French army.

"Prends garde, paysan, prends garde!
C'est un honneur que de servir
Le jour où voulant t'affranchir,
Le Pays s'est mis sous ta garde.
Il a cru noblement agir".

The joys of soldiering can be found in "Le Réveil", whilst the officer in "Le Sergent" typifies the professional soldier whose first love is war. In "Epilogue" Déroulède claims that a mother who does not produce a warrior for a son has failed in her maternal duties

"Si, quand viendra le jour que notre honneur réclame,
Il n'est pas là, soldat, marchant sans maugréer,
O' mère, ta tendresse a mal formé cette âme,
S'il ne sait pas mourir, tu n'as pas su créer!"

In Refrains Militaires,⁴⁶ "Au Drapeau" pours scorn on those who desert the cause. No sacrifice is in vain if it be for one's country

45. Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1883

46. Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1889

is the message of "Tués à l'Ennemi". Jacques Bonhomme is quite happy to die knowing that he has given his life for his country:

"Il veut bien mourir, quoiqu'aimant la vie,
Le petit troupier qui n'a que sa peau.
La gloire pourtant lui fait peu d'envie,
Au plus s'il connaît l'honneur du drapeau".⁴⁷

In "Hymne Français"⁴⁸ Déroulède readily pledges his own blood to the cause of France. In "Chanson de Marche"⁴⁹ he reveres the sabre and the horse; imploring God to look kindly on the soldiers who fight relentlessly,⁵⁰ whipping up patriotic sentiment and military fervour,⁵¹ his optimistic faith in the future of France is indisputable:

"Bon jour, bon an Mère France,
- Nouveau temps, nouveau chemin -
Voici venir l'espérance
Reprends ta vieille assurance,
Voici venir l'espérance:
Hier est mort, vive Demain!"⁵²

Charles Péguy, at first an ardent, anti-clerical Socialist, grew to distrust the dedication of men such as Jaurès to socialist causes. After 1905 and the First Moroccan Crisis, he began to move towards nationalism and by 1914 had started to defend his strong nationalist feelings. In Notre Patrie,⁵³ as an ordinary citizen returning to Paris from the country to find the threat of German

47. From the poem "Jacques Bonhomme"

48. Poésies Militaires, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1896

49. Refrain Militaires, op. cit.

50. Ibid. see "Chants de Guerre"

51. Ibid. see "Rappel"

52. Ibid. "Bon Jour, Bon An!"

53. Paris, E. Payen 1905.

Edition used - Oeuvres en Prose 1898-1908, Paris, Gallimard,

invasion imminent, Péguy becomes more vividly aware of what France and her culture mean to him:

On maudit la guerre ouvertement, formellement, officiellement, pour se donner du mérite et de la vertu, pour acquérir de la renommée pacifiste, conduisant à de la gloire humanitaire. Et secrètement, sournoisement, on demande à la guerre, aux militaires, premièrement les apparats des pompes extérieures, deuxièmement les jouissances, les excitations des imaginations intérieures.⁵⁴

In L'Argent Suite⁵⁵ he maintained his patriotic stand.

En temps de guerre il n'y a plus que l'Etat. Et c'est Vive la Nation.⁵⁶

Charles Péguy was killed at Villeroy on 5th September 1914, during the battle of the Marne. Shortly before his death his poem "Eve" was published, containing the "Prière pour nous autres charnels" with its litany-like repetition and variation of the first line "Heureux ceux qui sont morts pour la terre charnelle". Péguy glorifies those who have given their lives for their country; one should not mourn their death but salute their courage.

"Heureux ceux qui sont morts pour des cités charnelles.
Car elles sont le corps de la cité de Dieu.
Heureux ceux qui sont morts pour leur âtre et leur feu,
Et les pauvres honneurs des maisons paternelles".⁵⁷

The patriotic conscience of Maurice Barrès had been roused much earlier by "Boulangisme", a movement started and centred around Général Georges Boulanger who had become minister of war in 1886 and who had by energetic measures, not only reformed the French army, but increased its armaments and strengthened the Franco-German frontier,

54. Oeuvres en Prose 1898-1908, op. cit. p. 835

55. Paris, Cahiers de la Quinzaine, 1913

56. Oeuvres en Prose 1898-1908, op. cit. p. 1187

57. "Eve", Oeuvres Poétiques Complètes, Paris, Gallimard, 1948

winning popular prestige as a man of action, the "général de la revanche".⁵⁸ Barrès believed that national education should encourage the youth of France to serve their country and not to be merely citizens of an abstract humanity for whom France was an administrative fiction. In Les Déracinés, the pupils of Bouteiller's last class before he leaves for Paris shout:

"Vive la France! Vive la République"

Bouteiller reacts:

"La France! la République! Ah! comme ils crient ... On élève les jeunes Français comme s'ils devaient un jour se passer de la patrie".⁵⁹

In L'Appel au Soldat,⁶⁰ mainly devoted to "Boulangisme", a war climate develops during which Boulanger himself propagates the belief that it is better to take the initiative and to fight than to remain in a state of uncertain peace. The theme of patriotism is very profound in the two novels of Alsace-Lorraine, Au service de l'Allemagne⁶¹ and Colette Baudouche⁶² which together form Les Bastions de l'Est. Ehrmann, as a child, has always had the vision of suffering for and stoically supporting France. Born in Colmar, his father speaks about the 1870 campaigns with regret and insists on the

58. A "Boulangiste" movement began at Clermont-Ferrand in 1887 which soon became a national party and revived French morale after the disasters of 1870-1. In 1889 Barrès was elected Boulangist deputy for Nancy.

See H. Tint, The Decline of French Patriotism 1870-90, London, Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1964, pp. 50-69

59. Paris, Felix Juven, 1897. The edition used here is included in L'Oeuvre de Maurice Barrès, Vol. III, Paris, Club de l'Honnête Homme, 1965, p. 33

60. Paris, E. Fasquele, 1900

61. Paris, A. Fayard, 1905

62. Paris, Felix Juven, 1905

speaking of the French language in the home. Nevertheless, Ehrmann is forced to undergo compulsory military service in the German army. Reprimanded by his commanding officers for receiving mail in French and not in German, for condescending to speak in public with a hairdresser in French, for wearing civilian clothing and not the German uniform during leisure hours, Ehrmann's life at the "caserne" becomes intolerable:

"... j'avais l'impression d'être, pieds et poings liés, un otage de la France au plus épais de la populace ennemie".⁶³

Ehrmann completes his military service, refusing to desert or reject his love of France.⁶⁴ Colette Baudouche shows equal devotion to her country. When Frédéric Asmus, a German boarder in her grandmother's house, consults an encyclopaedia and finds an article indicating German influence in Metz well before 1870, he jokes that perhaps Colette is of German origin. She is most offended:

"Je ne sais pas ce qu'ont pensé, il y a mille ans, les gens de Metz, mais je sais bien que je ne peux pas être une Allemande".⁶⁵

Gradually Asmus rejects his German friends, ideals, aspirations and asks Colette to marry him. Colette's intense patriotism forbids her to accept.

63. Au Service de l'Allemagne in L'Oeuvre de Maurice Barrès, Vol. VI, Paris, Club de l'Honnête Homme, 1966, p. 85

64. Barrès's model for Ehrmann was Pierre Bucher, a doctor, who before the Franco-Prussian war had been the head of a spiritual conspiracy in Alsace-Lorraine and who during the fighting had organized the "centre de Réchésy" which provided the French army with important military information. After the armistice, Bucher became adviser to the "Etat français" in Alsace-Lorraine.

65. Colette Baudouche in L'Oeuvre de Maurice Barrès, Vol. VI, Paris, Club de l'Honnête Homme, 1966, p. 195

"... entre elle et M. Asmus, ce n'est pas une question personnelle, mais une question française ..."66

L'Appel des Armes,⁶⁷ published in 1913, Ernest Psichari's militaristic, semi-mystical novel, tells of Sébastien Vincent, an anti-militarist, and his son, Maurice, a schoolteacher who sees it as his vocation to join the army, hence the title of the book. He eventually joins the colonial forces and is sent to Mauritania. Psichari writes of Maurice:

La guerre est divine. Et il s'apercevait que, vraiment, de toutes les choses divines qui nous restent, celle-là est la plus divine, la plus marquée du sceau divin.⁶⁸

The army is described as "la meilleure école qui soit au monde ...",⁶⁹ cannons are "beaux", "précis", "gais", "absolue perfection", "un beau travail métallurgique".⁷⁰ During battles, soldiers envisage that there will be hand to hand combat fighting, glorious battle; daring qualities are praised.

"Heureux les jeunes hommes qui, de nos jours, ont mené la vie frugale, simple et chaste des guerriers".⁷¹

The perception of war in French culture before 1914 was of war not simply as inevitable, but as having positive value - a call to sacrifice, to the abandonment of selfishness and materialism, a source of ennoblement for both the individual and society. Generally, there is a strong sense of decorum, the focus is upon the "home" troops and the enemy, when seen, is often slightly out of

66. Ibid. p. 248

67. Paris, G. Oudin

68. Ibid. p. 314

69. Ibid. p. 70

70. Ibid. pp. 130-1

71. Ibid. p. 297

focus. Battle is perceived in large movements than specific actions and it tends to be translated into ideas and causes rather than death and pain.

This is how Léon Riegel sums up French war literature before 1914:

On dépeint une guerre imaginaire, mais facilement transposable dans la réalité, où le décor est de préférence exotique, où les combattants français sont jeunes, idéalistes et baignent dans une atmosphère qui prend une teinte monacale. Les armes employées sont celles du combat individuel, et celui-ci fait appel au courage personnel: on sait que dans ce domaine, le Français est imbattable. Quant à l'idéologie qui sous-tend la psychologie de ces guerriers, elle paraît sous la forme d'une exaltation patriotique frisant la ferveur religieuse. On crée une vérité partielle qui chasse la vérité.⁷²

72. Guerre et Littérature, Paris, Editions Klincksieck, 1978, pp. 149-50.

See M. Ferro The Great War 1914-18, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973, p. 26 "The war men imagined was indeed imaginary".

CHAPTER III

The summer of 1914

a) A historical reconstruction

The composite picture of the French nation, built up from the data and information discussed here, is one of growing enthusiasm for nationalistic and patriotic principles. By the beginning of June 1914 these were beginning to turn bellicose in certain areas.¹ Although Jean Guéhenno acknowledges these tendencies, he makes very clear his belief that the majority of French youth had never anticipated war.² Hammerton echoes such thoughts in his Popular History of the Great War,³ where he asserts that the "bulk of the population ... whether at manufacturing centres or in agricultural districts, was ready to believe still that the storm would pass. With more or less clearness, each imagined for himself the disastrous consequences which such a cataclysm would bring in its train for all those affected ... and the people refused to believe that there could be anywhere responsible heads of states mad enough to provoke such a frightful Armageddon".⁴

Even after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo, 28th June 1914, Ferro points out that there was no inevitability about the spread of war, however he is quick to recognize not only the alliance systems and traditional rivalries, but the antagonism stretching back into the past and forming part of the French collective consciousness. Indeed he believes: "War had

1. See J. J. Becker 1914: Comment les Français sont entrés dans la guerre op. cit. p. 74

2. La Mort des autres, Paris, Grasset, 1958, p. 30

3. London, Fleetway House, n.d.

4. Ibid. p. 121

conquered men's minds before it even broke out".⁵ An article in Le Temps, 9th July 1914 reported:

Une entente politique avec l'Allemagne annulant l'effort de quarante ans et désertant les voies où notre diplomatie a retrouvé la sécurité et la liberté, aucun Français conscient ne saurait y souscrire ...

The "Ligue des Patriotes" at a meeting on the 11th July 1914, resolved to oppose any political financial conspiracy which would attempt to draw nearer France and Germany. On the other hand, Jaurès underlines the need for proletarian unity, regarding International Socialism as the only real hope of saving war. He called upon all socialists to redouble their efforts in order to prevent such a catastrophe. He wrote in L'Humanité, 16th July 1914 (page 6):

J'ai entendu dire qu'il n'était pas une seule force nationale assez organisée pour apporter aux autres la garantie nécessaire? Je le sais. Mais est-ce que nous apporterons ici une vanterie, une recette mécanique? Nous apporterons une direction et nous savons que l'histoire récente nous a déjà réservé des surprises ...

On the whole, however, Jean Guéhenno informs us that the month of July was peaceful.⁶ Interest in Archduke Ferdinand's assassination soon declined and the concept of a major war between France and Germany was viewed as most unlikely.⁷

Dans L'Humanité, ... les débats du congrès du Parti socialiste ont tenu une grande place, et tout particulièrement les problèmes de la guerre. Mais ils ont été abordés de façon académique. Personne parmi les délégués n'imaginait que c'est moins de quinze jours plus tard qu'il faudrait passer de la théorie à la réalité.⁸

5. The Great War, op. cit. p. 25

6. La mort des autres op. cit. p. 30

7. See J. J. Becker, 1914 Comment les Français sont entrés dans la Guerre, p. 126

8. Ibid. p. 125

The departure of the President of the Republic, the President of Council and the Minister for Foreign Affairs on the 15th July for a visit to Russia and Scandinavia, seemed to underline the confidence of the moment; the banking world was stable and the financial domain apparently unconcerned about the political situation. Following the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia on 23rd July, Becker reports that La Semaine financière, in its edition of the 25th July, devoted only a few lines to the ultimatum and drew no particular significance from it.⁹ Indeed, until the 24th July, the Caillaux affair¹⁰ appeared to dominate the French press almost exclusively.¹¹ For the newspapers, it was merely an Austrian-Serbian conflict. The first report in L'Humanité, 24th July, was entitled "La note de l'Autriche à la Serbie a été remise hier soir"; on the 26th July an article appeared under the heading "Le conflit austro-serbe". La Bataille syndicaliste reported on the 23rd July, "La tension austro-serbe; Le Temps, 25th July, "Menace austro-hongroise; Le Petit Dauphinois, 26th July, "Le conflit austro-serbe".

9. Ibid. p. 127

10. On 16th March, 1914, Gaston Calmette, editor of Le Figaro, had printed some old intimate love letters sent by Joseph Caillaux to Henriette, at that time his mistress, but who was to become his second wife. Calmette was a political enemy of Caillaux and Henriette resented the publication of the letters being used for political purposes. She shot and killed Calmette.

11. Le Petit Parisien devoted less than a quarter of the third column on page three to the war crisis, 22nd July 1914.

L'Echo de Paris reported the crisis in half a column on page three, 22nd July 1914.

Even after 24th July the news of the war did not receive major attention by the national press. Up to the 29th July, three days before the general mobilization, the Caillaux trial rivalled war news.

See Becker op. cit. p. 133

En dernière analyse, on peut douter que ce soit le procès de Mme. Caillaux qui ait détourné l'opinion publique de la crise; n'est-ce pas plutôt l'opinion publique qui, en grande partie inconsciente du danger, n'éprouva aucun besoin de se détourner du procès?¹²

A further indication of the confidence of France and of the lack of importance attached to the growing danger in the Balkans was that many of the leaders of the Confédération générale du travail (C.G.T.), which had always threatened to sabotage mobilization in the event of war, were absent from Paris. Léon Jouhaux, secretary general, had left for Brussels on 26th July; Georges Dumoulin, secrétaire général adjoint, was also at the Belgian trade union congress; Georges Yvetot, secrétaire de la Fédération des bourses et du travail, was at Tulle at the congrès de l'union départementale de la Corrèze; Alphonse Merrheim, secrétaire de la Fédération des métallurgistes, in Lorraine; Auguste Savoir, secrétaire de la Fédération de l'alimentation, in the Seine-Inférieure department, and Bartuel, secrétaire de la Fédération des mineurs, in the Saône-et-Loire region.¹³ Consequently the C. G. T. was without direction at a crucial moment. Léon Jouhaux wrote in La Bataille syndicaliste, 26th July 1914:

On croyait écartées toutes les menaces immédiates contre la paix européenne et l'incident surgit inattendu!

Georges Dumoulin wrote:

12. Becker J.-J. 1914 Comment les Français sont entrés dans la Guerre, op. cit. p. 135

13. See Becker. Ibid. p. 190

... la guerre ... semblait une chose tellement inouïe [qu'on avait] peine à croire qu'elle pût jamais éclater.¹⁴

La Bataille syndicaliste, official daily of the C. G. T., reaffirmed the position of the C. G. T., 26th July and urged workers to respond by a revolutionary general strike, immediately if war was declared. Nevertheless, although Jouhaux was in favour of such action, he still remained convinced it was not essential. As a precautionary measure, however, the edition of the 27th July, called for workers to rally for peace before the offices of the Parisian daily newspaper. Le Matin. 8-10,000 workers appeared, denouncing war and singing the "Internationale". In the following day's edition of La Bataille syndicaliste, (28th July), the report of the previous evening's events was positive:-

Dès maintenant, la guerre est impossible. Le peuple ne le permettra pas.

A further protest meeting was planned for the evening of the 29th at "Salles Wagram". The Socialist party was firmly behind the Government, casting responsibility for the so-called crisis on the enemy camp, particularly Austria; however, in their manifesto, written by Jaurès, and published 28th July, the entire capitalist system was deemed blameworthy. The Government's reaction was swift;

14. Carnets de Route, 40 années de vie militaire, Lille, Editions de l'avenir, n.d., p. 65. Similarly, Ferro writes that the only fear of the German socialists was that the Austrian government might place obstacles in the way of the International, preventing it from holding its next congress in Vienna or the Serbians from attending. When the International Bureau was summoned by Camille Huysmans, following the Austrian ultimatum, once convoked, it expressed anxiety, but reckoned that the conflict would be localized, that the situation should not be dramatized.

See The Great War, op. cit. p. 37

at the meeting of the Comité confédéral 28th July, 60 militants under Raoul Lenoir, one of the secretaries of the Fédération des métaux, were arrested and it was rumoured that Massimy, was to round up all workers' leaders and imprison them in concentration camps.

La théorie était dépassée, ils continuaient, certes, de haïr la guerre, mais pas au point de se désolidariser de leur pays.¹⁵

La Bataille syndicaliste (29th July) reported that Poincaré had returned from Russia and that the French cabinet had met and decided to ban the workers' meeting at the "Salles Wagram". Police removed posters publicizing the event and métro stations serving the area were closed. Several thousands of demonstrators, nevertheless, turned up for the meeting and clashed with police. 200 arrests were made before the demonstration finally broke up. Becker estimates that 67 such meetings, marches, were planned, 25 in the city and 42 in the suburbs;¹⁶ in the Provinces, he claims that 36 départements were affected by anti-war protests and in a further 4, marches were forbidden.¹⁷ Protests began slowly, accelerating around the 28th July and culminating 30/31st July, falling dramatically by 1st August, the first day of mobilization. Becker points out that:-

Toutes les actions de protestation contre la guerre présentèrent un fond commun: écrits ou criés, les "Vive la paix" ou "A bas la guerre" servirent de signe de ralliement, suppléés quelquefois par l'ancien slogan: "Guerre à la guerre."¹⁸

15. J.-J. Becker op. cit. p. 198

16. Ibid. p. 181

17. Ibid. pp. 150-6

18. Ibid. p. 167

Becker makes a distinction between socialist and syndicalist protests. The latter tended to be more dynamic, more vigorous. In theory, however, their principles were similar: a) action in order to prevent war; b) propaganda against aggressive nationalism; c) affirmation of the ideal of peace and a desire for fraternity amongst people.¹⁹

... la politique gouvernementale: tolérer ce qui pouvait être simplement porté au bénéfice du désir de paix, empêcher tout ce qui risquait de provoquer une agitation intempestive.²⁰

At the Brussels meeting of the Bureau socialiste international, 29th-30th July, the date for the International Congress in Vienna was moved forward from 23rd August to 9th August; Jaurès affirmed the intention of the French socialists to pressurize the government to curb Russian war moves and to implore the French and German governments to exercise the greatest of influence over Austria. A resolution was passed to carry this out and Jaurès received acclamation from the 5,000 people in the "Cirque royal". Ferro points out the rashness of their optimism; "... members merely hung on events, discussing them but doing nothing. They were reassured by a telegram from Berlin, saying twenty-seven meetings had been held against war ... Members left expecting to meet again at the congress ... Each one went home hoping to avert disaster; but by 1st August general mobilization and the murder of Jaurès were announced ..."²¹

La Bataille syndicaliste, 31st July, reported that large public demonstrations were to be organized all over Paris and in all

19. Ibid. pp. 168-170

20. Ibid. p. 174

21. The Great War op. cit. p. 38

industrial cities of France. The C. G. T. met with Jaurès to plan a mammoth rally to be held in conjunction with the socialists on 9th August. In L'Humanité, the same day, Jaurès's final article appeared speaking of "le Sang-froid nécessaire" and urging the people to remain calm at all costs. 31st July, however, saw a sudden change in the attitude of Gustave Hervé, staunch socialist and editor of La Guerre Sociale. The issue of the 31st strongly disavowed the idea of a general strike and whilst still supporting demonstrations against war, urged Frenchmen to wage war not against the people of Germany and Austria but their militaristic leaders. 31st July also saw the news of Germany's proclamation of "condition of war danger" (Kriegsgefahrzustand). Jaurès still refused to believe that this meant war and led a contingent of socialist deputies to the Foreign ministry urging moderation and the avoidance of war-like actions. Later he went to the offices of L'Humanité to begin drafting the editorial for the following day's edition and went to a nearby restaurant with some of the staff of L'Humanité, where he was assassinated by Raoul Villain, a student of "égyptologie" and a "camelot du roi".

On 1st August 1914 the socialist press of Paris, L'Humanité, Le Bonnet Rouge, La Guerre sociale, appeared bordered in black. 28% of L'Humanité was devoted to the death of Jaurès.²² Becker emphasises that the nation was not passionately angry but deeply affected emotionally. He quotes Ernest Poisson:

22. See Becker op. cit. p. 235

Une foule immense, barrée par les agents, est là pleurant, sanglotant, recueillie ... De tous les coins de Paris, les amis connus, inconnus ... accourent ... Ils restent là, figés ...²³

Jaurès's death was not the main reason for the failure of the opposition to war. The workers' movement had to be totally anti-patriotic and the entire population sympathetic if the vision of halting nationalist policies was to be realised. However, despite a few strikes at Albi, (Jaurès's home town) and at Carnaux, where he had been an active organiser, and a small but violent demonstration in Belleville, which was broken up by the police, the reaction of the working classes was one of resignation to the oncoming war. The Government successfully turned Jaurès's death and funeral into an occasion of patriotic appeals and pleas for unity. Socialists who had advocated a general strike, always assumed that it would be international in scope, but there had been no assurance that their foreign counterparts would emulate such action. However as Ferro points out: "... when the trumpet called, socialists left for war with the rest ... the International sank in a few hours without trace".²⁴ Almost all opposition disappeared within a month; the four most important socialist leaders, Guesde, Sembat, Longuet and Vaillant sent the "Bureau" of the International a message to the effect that "the workers have no thought of aggression, but are sure they are upholding their country's independence against German imperialism, fighting for the rights of peoples to determine their own life ..."²⁵ This severed remaining links between socialists of

23. Bulletin de la Société d'études jaurésiennes, April June, 1964, p. 10 in 1914 Comment les Français sont entrés dans la guerre, p. 240

24. The Great War op. cit. p. 34

25. Ibid. see p. 159

France and Germany, and once it became known that German socialists had voted for war-credits for the Kaiser's army, restoration of links was virtually impossible. In La Guerre sociale, 1st August, Gustave Hervé called on the French nation to carry out its patriotic duty; the Bataille syndicaliste still spoke of peace and workers' demonstrations but when news of mobilization reached the C. G. T. late on the evening of 1st August, none of the threats of a general strike were carried out. Ferro writes: "Socialists, anarchists, militants, revolutionaries, had not kept their faith; like everyone else, they went gaily to war. Resisters, like Péricat in France ... were almost lynched for opposing the tide of bellicosity and the rarity of contemporary accounts of resistance shows its paucity ..."²⁶ Despite a severe denunciation of the French mobilization in the Bataille syndicaliste, 2nd August, despite the desperate pleas for peace made by Vaillant, Sembat, Longuet, Cachin at the socialist meeting at "Salles Wagram", 2nd August, L'Humanité reported, 4th August, that the socialists in the Chamber of Deputies and the C. G. T. would vote for war because France had done everything to preserve peace and was simply a victim of aggression.²⁷

26. Ibid. p. 158. Ferro points out that isolated syndicalists/anarchists grouped around La Voix ouvrière, keeping internationalism alive and staying faithful to pacifist ideals, e.g. Louise Saumonneau, of the socialist women; Charles Merrheim, the first leading figure to oppose the war; Romain Rolland declared his anti-war feelings in his essay "Au-dessus de la mêlée", Journal de Genève, 22nd September, 1914. See p. 160

27. Markhoff offers the following reasons for the sudden volte-face of the French socialist leaders:-

i) Carnet B

This was a list of prominent figures who preached anti-militarism and a refusal to answer mobilization. Several thousand names appeared on the list and these people were to be arrested in order to prevent them from sabotaging France if mobilization procedures were threatened. There were fears that these people might be sent to the front or even executed. Nevertheless, Malvy, who, as Minister of the Interior, had possession of Carnet B, did, in fact,

Nevertheless, Becker dispels any ideas that mobilization took place in an entirely enthusiastic atmosphere:

... nous sommes amenés à constater que la mobilisation ne fut pas mal accueillie, mais qu'elle ne suscita pas cet élan d'enthousiasme si souvent décrit.²⁸

He states that the dominant tone was one of resignation and anguish, even disbelief, especially in rural areas.

... la surprise devant le fait lui-même fut moins importante que la stupeur, c'est-à-dire le rejet par l'esprit de ce qui est incroyable. On se refuse à admettre que la guerre fût encore une chose possible.²⁹

assure the most militant of the anti-militarist agitators, even before the mobilization order was issued, that no such arrests would be made. Allegations that certain leaders acted out of personal fear do not appear, therefore, to be well founded.

ii) France had attempted to preserve peace and was, consequently, the victim of aggression. The war had been precipitated by the autocratic governments of Austria and Germany, therefore participation in the war was a defence of innocent democracy against militants who dominated the Central Powers.

iii) A lack of international approach to the problem. There were no prospects of a joint action by the proletariats of all nations, no international leadership, and an air of suspicion and mistrust developed.

iv) The rapidity of events led to confusion and uncertainty. Rumours harassed diplomacy and a wave of patriotism swept country and party. There was no central voice and the masses became influenced more and more by the emotional outbursts of the nationalistic press.

See "Second International and July Crisis" in Opposition to the war in France 1914-1918, 1962. (Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of the University of Pennsylvania, Ph.D.).

28. 1914: Comment les Français sont entrés dans la guerre op. cit. p. 280.

See also: J.-J. Becker, Les Français dans la Grande Guerre, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1980, p. 9 "Les Français avaient été surpris et beaucoup moins enthousiastes qu'il n'a été trop souvent dit, quand l'ordre de mobilisation les avaient atteints le 1er août 1914 ..."

29. Becker, 1914 Comment les Français sont entrés dans la guerre, p. 271

On the other hand, Becker's research reveals that no specific part of France was violently opposed to mobilization, that indeed only 21% of the population regarded it with reservation, 27% with coolness and 52% positively.³⁰ Despite the variety of responses, three patriotic demonstrations of 8,000 people took place in Paris during the evening of 1st August,³¹ and in the provinces there were also chauvinistic demonstrations.³²

Le jour de la déclaration de guerre, tous les dissentiments ont disparu, les querelles de parti ont cessé, les adversaires politiques réputés hier les plus irréconciliables, se sont rapprochés ...³³

Hervé's article in La Guerre sociale, 30th July, was entitled "Dans l'angoisse et les ténèbres", yet a day later, in the same newspaper, the title was "La patrie en danger" and by 1st August he was taking up an entire page with:-

Défense Nationale d'abord!
Ils ont assassiné Jaurès
Nous n'assassinerons pas la France!

In Le Bonnet rouge, Almereyda concluded his article of the evening edition, 2nd August:-

Socialistes mes frères, reléguons notre Internationale et notre Drapeau Rouge. Notre chant désormais, c'est la Marseillaise et notre drapeau, les Trois Couleurs.

30. Ibid. p. 279

31. Ibid. p. 309

32. Rouen - 3-4,000 people took to the streets; Montpellier - 2,000; Angers - 1,000; Pau - the demonstration lasted all night. Ibid. p. 310

33. Ibid. p. 373. Becker quotes from H. Draussin, Evangile et Liberté 22nd August, 1914

Becker points out that the population of France had to resign itself to mobilization, that, although, in theory, one could refuse, deny allegiance to the country, in practice few did.³⁴ Tradition, the sense of duty, the sincere belief that German aggression had brought about the war and a strong feeling of powerlessness, gradually built up "l'Union Sacrée".³⁵

... le fait essentiel est bien de constater que l'opinion publique qui, à l'annonce de la mobilisation, fut dans sa majorité heurtée par l'idée d'une guerre, quelques heures, quelques jours plus tard, lorsque le moment du départ fut venu pour les mobilisés, accepta beaucoup plus largement le fait du conflit.³⁶

Ferro writes: "The workers of 1914, going off to war, had found a substitute for revolutionary hopes. The most miserable, least conscious of them emerged from their social ghetto, reintegrated owing to the war, demobilized as far as revolution was concerned. Their very existence would be changed, as they had always secretly

35. The term "l'Union Sacrée" originated from a message from President Poincaré to the nation, read out by Viviani, in the "Assemblée Nationale", 4th August 1914. The key passage of the proclamation was reproduced in Le Matin, the following day:- "La France sera héroïquement défendue par tous ses fils, dont rien ne brisera devant l'ennemi l'union sacrée, et qui sont aujourd'hui fraternellement rassemblés dans une même indignation contre l'agresseur et dans une même foi patriotique". By general consent the war was presented to the public as "La guerre sainte de la civilisation contre la Barbarie" (headline in Le Matin, 4th August, 1914) or "La grande croisade des civilisés" (heading in Le Bonnet Rouge, 25th November, 1914). "L'Union sacrée" became a slogan, exhorting people to whatever forms of action a particular individual deemed necessary for the good of his country. "Nous voulons une union sacrée qui ne soit plus une abstention sacrée, mais une sacrée action digne enfin de l'énergie de nos soldats dans les tranchées et de nos ouvriers dans les usines". (H. Bérenger: Paris-Midi, 28th October, 1915).

See C. Slater, Defeatists and their Enemies, London, Oxford University Press, 1981

36. Becker, 1914: Comment les Français sont entrés dans la guerre, op. cit. p. 320

hoped"³⁷ Confidence grew rapidly. At Reparsac, in the Charente region, the population imagined that the French army would have reached Berlin within one month; at Turgon, the people envisaged a war lasting fifteen days to one month, at the maximum.

C'était des pessimistes qui envisageaient une guerre de cinq à six mois.³⁸

Becker points out that most people shared this belief because they did not wish to admit any other possibility that might have more serious repercussions.

Les Français de l'époque n'étaient ni absurdes, ni inconscients. Il leur importait peu d'analyser les techniques militaires, ni de connaître la réalité des choses. Tout simplement ils ne voulaient pas être partis longtemps de chez eux.³⁹

Confidence developed quickly into extreme chauvinism, this, in turn, manifested itself in open violence against German people, their buildings and property. In Lille, the Royal Hotel, a private telephone company, "la maison Miele", had their frontages badly damaged, people were accused of being German and their houses burnt down; in Périgueux, a group of soldiers and a crowd of 5,000 people attacked a clock-maker's shop, a lace shop and a German subject; in Toulouse, shops owned by German people in the rue Saint-Rome were ransacked; in Paris, the most seriously hit of cities, "la Cristallerie de Bohême Appenzedt", the "Brasserie viennoise", "le

37. The Great War, op. cit. p. 7

38. See Becker 1914: Comment les Français sont entrés dans la guerre, op. cit. p. 492 and Becker Les Français dans la Grande Guerre op. cit. p. 9 where war is described as "une courte parenthèse dans l'écoulement normal des jours".

39. Ibid. pp. 496-7

maroquinier Klein", "les chaussures Salamander", the Royal Cafe and establishments bearing the names of Muller, Pschorr, Zimmer, all suffered severe pillaging and destruction, everywhere, particularly in the 11th "arrondissement", where numerous shops were owned by foreigners, scenes of rioting and devastation were common.⁴⁰ More than 500 people were tried by the "conseils de guerre" and 26 judged on the 6th August received prison sentences ranging from 4 months to 2 years.⁴¹ Towards the end of August this wave of intense frustration and bitterness had mellowed into ardent enthusiasm. Archbishop Amette wrote in the Semaine religieuse de Paris, 8th August, 1914:

En face du danger qui menace le pays, toute division cesse parmi ses fils. Tous se lèvent dans un mouvement unanime de fidélité du devoir et de dévouement à la Patrie ⁴²

b) Letters, memoirs, diaries

Having examined the historical perspective of the outbreak of war in 1914, and the events leading up to the outbreak of war, we shall now examine what Schinz refers to as "the most characteristic literary product of the war, and the most trustworthy source of

40. Ibid. pp. 498-500

41. Ibid. pp. 504-5

42. Quoted by Becker. Ibid. p. 417. See J. A. Hammerton, A Popular History of the Great War, London, Fleetway House, n.d.

"Thus, then, during the first days of August, 1914, several millions of Frenchmen responded to the call to arms. Whatever their social position or profession might be ... all went gaily to the depot to resume their rank, put on their uniforms and shoulder their rifles. Several millions of men thus brusquely left their occupations or employments ... all equalised by the same duty of defending the threatened country ... [and] set out for the great adventure. (p. 126).

See also J.-J. Becker, Les Français dans la Grande Guerre, op. cit. p. 9. "... une des clefs du comportement des Français au cours de l'été 1914 fut la conviction à peu près générale que la guerre serait une aventure ..."

information regarding certain aspects of it",⁴³ war letters, memoirs and diaries. It is only fair to point out that Schinz was writing in 1920. It is interesting to contemplate whether he would have held similar views about memoirs written twenty, thirty and even forty years later. However, for the most part, they reveal contemporary information with as little artistic draping as possible. The subjective element of this "genre" of documentation has a power of conviction which later "historical" accounts lack. Cruickshank argues that "authentic testimony", which tends to lack intellectual analysis, is "particularly distinctive and valuable, and, in a certain sense, particularly true".⁴⁴ The immediacy of writing, eliminates, to a certain extent, the "fraudulent outline" present in later works of fiction, which can reduce the level of artificiality and therefore the "illusion" of reality. Whilst one must acknowledge the fact that many soldiers, disillusioned with the lack of civilian understanding or sympathy, or desiring to shield loved ones from the horrors of trench warfare, wrote under a mantle of literary deceit, the self-revelation of the majority betrays rather a genuine wish to be as truthful as possible. Fussell argues that the further written materials move from the form of daily diary, memoir, letter, the closer they approach the figurative and the fictional.⁴⁵ Norton-Cru has similar reservations. He writes

Il n'est certes pas trop tard en 1925 pour écrire des souvenirs de guerre, mais il faut avoir des notes et un désir sincère de faire revivre en soi l'homme de 1914-18. Si c'est l'homme de 1925 qui fait tous les frais, s'il n'a que sa mémoire de 1925 pour y puiser les

43. French Literature of the Great War, London, Appleton & Co., 1920, pp. 62-3

44. Variations on Catastrophe, op. cit. p. 35

45. The Great War and Modern Memory, New York and London, Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 310

faits et les états d'âme, s'il introduit dans son texte ses préoccupations de civil, alors le livre n'est plus un document sur la guerre.⁴⁶

Whilst one might argue that the existence of a temporal gap allows the past to be objectified more intelligibly and the understanding, therefore, between narrator and reader who together look back on it, to be strengthened, one cannot reject the plausibility that letters, memoirs, diaries produced during the war years or just after, reflect more the mood of war itself and less that of the war as seen and judged through the "mirror" of "après-guerre malaise". An examination of a selection of such might therefore provide a further angle from which to analyse the effect of the war upon the novel, and the degree of "truth" it contains.

Ducasse, Meyer, Perreux, all veterans of the Great War, gather together their memories in Vie et Mort des Français 1914-18.⁴⁷ With regards to the events following Sarajevo and leading up to the mobilization, they write:

Après l'attentat de Sarajevo, la fièvre monte de nouveau, et surtout pendant le voyage du Président Poincaré en Russie ... Le 29, [juillet], Poincaré, après un voyage anxieux sur un vaisseau de guerre, est accueilli à la gare du Nord par une immense clameur: "Vive la France!" ... De jeunes enthousiastes défilent sur les boulevards, en criant: "Vive l'Armée! A bas l'Allemagne!"

Le même jour, à Bruxelles, le tribun socialiste Jaurès sent le bureau de la IIe Internationale débordé, désemparé. Le "patriotisme" partout l'emporte sur le "pacifisme".⁴⁸

They describe reaction to mobilization in the same positive and enthusiastic vein:-

46. Témoins, Paris, Les Etincelles, 1929, p. 268

47. Paris, Hachette, 1962

48. Ibid. p. 18

La plupart des jeunes "courent en avant". L'un d'eux avait répondu, deux ans plus tôt, à une enquête d'Henri Massis (Agathon): "Nous souhaitons une action qui nous prenne corps et âme. Cette action, un seul événement nous la permettra: la guerre". Aux Sciences Politiques, à la Faculté de droit, les seuls mots d'Alsace-Lorraine provoquaient des ovations.⁴⁹

In an interview with Frédéric Lefevre, published in Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 23rd November 1929,⁵⁰ Roland Dorgelès seems to confirm this positive reaction to war:

... les hommes de notre âge ont vu éclater la guerre avec une sorte d'exaltation ... il est peu d'intellectuels qui, classant leurs papiers et leurs livres, peut-être pour la dernière fois, n'aient songé avec un farouche orgueil, que leur génération venait d'être élue pour une grande tâche, et que c'était, en somme, sacrifier bien peu de chose qu'un petit bagage d'idées, quand on avait reçu la mission sacrée de défendre des siècles de gloire et de briser les chaînes de peuples asservis ... le premier jour où le canon tonne, nous avons tous aimé la guerre.

He writes in his "Souvenirs et réflexions sur Les Croix de bois" that he was quite content to be removed from the mundane tasks of everyday life by the outbreak of hostilities:

Plus rien ne me retenait; c'était la guerre. Pas de plume: un fusil.⁵¹

He acknowledges that he was never able to forget the scenes of departure and that these naturally found a place very early on in the writing of Les Croix de bois:⁵²

49. Ibid. p. 24

50. "Une Heure avec Roland Dorgelès, p. 7

51. Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 24, November 1928, p. 1

52. Paris, Albin Michel, 1919

Et ayant prêté à Gilbert Demachy ma fameuse musette de moleskine blanche, je l'ai fait partir, comme j'étais parti moi-même, une rose au fusil, enthousiaste et naïf.⁵³

In a letter written in October 1914 and published in 1917, Marcel Estevé scoffs at the remarks of General Lanrezac that deplore his decision to abandon his studies for the "agrégation" in order to join the army.

Il a déploré que je n'aie pas pu faire mon agrégation; s'il savait comme je m'en fiche.⁵⁴

Raymond Jubert expresses a similar determination to enlist and fight, clearly outlining how he imagined the wonderful life of the front line soldier to be, as he reflects on the early days of war in his memoirs Verdun:

J'imaginai le rôle magnifique du fantassin, l'héroïsme en action tous les jours, l'âpre joie du combat, le risque auquel on se prétend supérieur et qu'on veut maîtriser le premier rôle brillant de celui qui lance sa poitrine contre les balles, les charges héroïques, la vie colorée des uniformes dans le champ de la mort et ... de petites scènes où s'exaltent et s'achèvent des vies d'hommes, le sang éclos sous le soleil, la Meuse rouge et charriant des cadavres, et le soir, par milliers, sous la lune qui se lève, les faces blanches des morts qui couvrent le terrain.⁵⁵

To a certain extent, there is a sense of irony, here, which is echoed by Galtier-Boissière in En rase campagne, as he attempts to capture the mood of youth in August 1914:

53. "Souvenirs et réflexions sur Les Croix de bois", op. cit. p. 1. See Les Croix de bois pp. 7-12

54. Lettres d'un combattant (août 1914-juillet 1916) Paris, Hachette, 1917, p. 8. It is interesting to speculate on the motive behind publishing such letters in 1917. Perhaps it was hoped that they would contribute to a stimulation of military and civilian morale which was in serious decline.

55. Paris, Payot, 1918, pp. 169-70

... nous sommes tous satisfaits comme l'homme qui, après un dur apprentissage ou de fastidieuses études, est autorisé à exercer le métier qu'il connaît à fond ... Une singulière ivresse nous pénètre, où se mêlent à l'enthousiasme patriotique le désir de la dépense physique, le goût de l'aventure et la soif du carnage.⁵⁶

In La Fleur au Fusil, he confirms that, after the initial emotional reaction to the declaration of war, the majority of Parisians mobilized were in a state of euphoria and willingly accepted the situation. Extreme nationalism and bellicosity led to violence:-

La foule va parfois jusqu'à la frénésie: elle saccage les dépôts des machines à coudre Singer et ceux des laiteries Maggi, qui d'ailleurs ne sont pas allemandes.

Le 7 août, le 31e R. I. quitte sa caserne des Tourelles et défile sur les boulevards extérieurs:

"A Berlin! ... A bas les Pruscos! ... Rapportez la moustache à Guillaume!"

Sambre et Meuse, Chant du Départ. La musique déferle, de tous ses tambours, de tous ses cuivres. "Les femmes jettent des fleurs à la volée; on les pique au bout du fusil. Tout le long de la colonne, les corsages clairs alternent avec les capotes bleues". Sans paraître se douter de ce qui les attend, les jeunes soldats sourient et bombent le torse.⁵⁷

By the end of the first week of August, according to Ducasse, Meyer and Perreux, few were concerned about the events leading up to the hostilities nor the Sarajevo affair,⁵⁸

Nourrie d'images d'Epinal, de cris de haine et de ferveur, la nation est soulevée d'un immense espoir. En quelques jours, selon le vœu du président Poincaré, "l'Union sacrée" s'établit dans le cœur de presque tous les Français, civils ou militaires.⁵⁹

Etienne Potier, in a letter to his parents, 1st August 1914, writes:

56. Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1917, pp. 10-11

57. Paris, Editions Baudinière, 1928, p. 76

58. Vie et Mort des Français 1914-18, op. cit. p. 27

59. Ibid. p. 26

Comme vos autres fils, je pars à coup sûr pour me battre; je sais que vous pouvez compter qu'à l'exemple des vertus que vous nous avez appris à pratiquer, nous saurons les pratiquer à notre tour.

Merci mille fois de nous avoir élevés dans le sentiment du devoir.⁶⁰

Similar optimism and determination is shown by Lieutenant Joseph Jeannin of the 103rd infantry regiment, in a letter to his brother and sisters, 2nd August 1914:

On ne peut pas présager l'avenir; mais notre cause est juste, puisqu'on nous attaque et j'ai la profonde conviction qu'on peut tout espérer. Pauvre papa, serait-il heureux, s'il voyait l'élan français, lui qui tressaillait à la moindre alerte ...⁶¹

Jeannin describes the patriotism of the French nation:

La population, ici, est admirable de calme et de froide résolution, et c'est un état d'esprit général ... J'ai vu aujourd'hui dans la foule plusieurs faits touchants de patriotisme se produire: un ouvrier arrachant, sur la place des Invalides, une carte d'Etat-Major à un monsieur qu'il supposait être un Allemand, et me l'apportant; un camelot vendait ses journaux, mais les donnait à l'oeil aux officiers et aux soldats, parce qu'il allait partir lui-même pour la frontière; ce ne sont pas des faits isolés; une nation comme la France, animée de ces sentiments, est mûre pour le succès .⁶²

"Le Caporal réserviste", Baptiste Debonne of the 3rd Zouaves, expresses to his parents his delight at the opportunity to defend his country, 3rd August 1914;⁶³ General Plessier, commanding officer of the 88th Infantry Brigade, writes, 17th August 1914:-

60. L'Union des Pères et des Mères dont les fils sont morts pour la Patrie, la Ligue des Chefs de Section et des soldats combattants, (ed), La dernière lettre 1914-18, Paris, Flammarion, 1922, p. 250

61. Ibid. pp. 159-161

62. Ibid. pp. 159-161

63. Ibid. p. 85

... Quoi qu'il en soit, nous voilà en guerre, et quelle guerre! on n'en aura jamais vu de semblable.

Puissions-nous être victorieux! Pour obtenir ce résultat, je sacrifierai tout ce que j'ai de plus cher ...⁶⁴

Conviction of the reasons for fighting and confidence in the outcome is found in R. Meyer's letter of the 20th August 1914, to his parents, brothers and sisters. He writes:-

Nous sommes maintenant à peu de distance de l'ennemi, et il est fort probable qu'aujourd'hui nous aurons le baptême du feu. Je vous assure que je n'ai aucune appréhension. Que voulez-vous, c'est au petit bonheur; j'ai toujours eu l'idée que nous en reviendrons; si le contraire se produit, ma foi, vous pourrez avoir la certitude que nous y sommes allés gaiement, sachant que nous travaillons pour le bien-être de tous ceux qui resteront et qui seront à jamais débarrassés de ce fléau germanique qui empoisonne le monde depuis quarante ans⁶⁵

"Sous-Lieutenant" Ernest-Augustin Bertault of the 132nd Infantry Regiment explains that it is an honour to be able to give his life for such a praiseworthy cause, in a letter dated 22nd September 1914,⁶⁶ whilst soldier Abeille of the 42nd Infantry views the occasion as an opportunity not to be missed:-

Avoir vécu trente-trois ans avec l'angoisse de ne pas voir le jour de gloire tant rêvé, avec l'humiliation de transmettre aux enfants la honte d'être des Français diminués, moins fiers, moins libres que leurs grands-pères, avoir souffert de cela silencieusement, mais profondément, avec toute l'élite de mon pays, et voir soudain resplendir l'aube de la résurrection alors que je suis encore jeune et fort et que mon sang est prêt à jaillir, heureux pour tous les sacrifices ⁶⁷

64. Ibid. p. 247

65. Ibid. pp. 217-8

66. Ibid. p. 35

67. Ibid. p. 12. Letter dated 26th September 1914

CHAPTER IV

The eve of war: the novelist's view

Clearly, just as no single historical account, diary extract, letter, recollection, can produce a balanced view of a moment of history, no single novel can be taken as the record of a capsule of life. What is recorded, as with the historical account or the secondary source, rather depends on the recorder and what he judges as an event or action worthy of being recorded. What is entirely different, however, is the discourse used; how the novelist shapes his material in order to arrive at an arrangement of reality. This will differ from writer to writer. The kind of language chosen will need to be closely analysed. This can, in itself, project a secondary meaning to the finished work. The author might write in an ideological, rhetorical, or emotional manner; his language might be colourful or sober. We must be aware of his chosen medium and judge whether it is appropriate, adequate or inadequate, for the overall description of events leading to the outbreak of hostilities. This will depend on his fundamental aim in writing about the summer of 1914. He may wish to exaggerate or dramatize in order to ensure the captivation of the reader or to enforce a feeling or point of view; he may be content merely to depict and avoid elaboration in order to strive for maximum authenticity. In either instance he may or may not wish to interpret or evaluate, indicate to the reader in what direction he should think about the facts discussed. The influence of the writer himself, directly or indirectly, on his medium, is of extreme importance. The imposing of his own personality will determine the extent to which he selects, re-arranges, constructs in

order to stress certain facts, modify others, or omit completely. The result may be a distortion in the time scale of events, in their significance, even a substitution of meaning; or, a clarification, expansion of facts which might render the account more intelligible to the reader who seeks survey rather than detail, and a less gilded representation of history. Finally, the time of writing of the novel must be taken into account. It may be that an immediate or retrospective response to the outbreak of war, in novel form, affects the language, medium and presence of the author, in a given work, in a variety of ways.

a) Barbusse: CLARTE - An early disabused response

Henri Barbusse was born in 1873. Long before 1914 he had become a convinced socialist, anti-militarist with pacifist leanings. Although politics was not the centre of his early life,¹ he did contribute articles to the review "La Paix par le Droit", published by the "Société française pour l'arbitrage entre les nations", which advocated international arbitration as a substitute for war. In 1914 Barbusse was initially exempted from active service due to ill health. Nevertheless, he was convinced that an absolutist and militarist Germany stood as the most formidable obstacle to peace in the world. He believed passionately that France was the victim of an aggressive Germany, that the war was a social war, directed against militarism and imperialism, and consequently having completed his

1. In 1895 he published a volume of poetry, Pleureuses, which reflected upon the suffering and distress in the world. L'Enfer, (1909), a novel, again pursued the theme of the absurdity of life. A patient dies of cancer and Barbusse talks of cancer destroying society as a whole, a disease which he identifies with nationalism and militarism, propagated in France, at the time, by Barrès and Maurras.

convalescence from tuberculosis in a Swiss sanitarium, Barbusse enlisted as a private at the age of 41. His age and physical condition confined him to the supply services in the rear, but on his own insistence he was sent up the line. In 1915 he saw action as an infantryman and stretcher bearer in Artois and Picardy. A frequent volunteer for dangerous missions, he was twice decorated for bravery under fire and awarded the Croix de Guerre. Despite his age and illness, he refused to leave the trenches but was thrice invalided out with dysentery, the last time in June 1917 bringing his war service to an end. Although he suffered no combat wounds, the war left deep emotional scars in turn which long before 1918 had begun to orientate his thinking back towards pacifism. By the end of 1915 he was becoming increasingly irritated about the supply service to the front, "embusqués", the behaviour of the press and the general glamorisation of reality in the trenches. He saw the best way that he could serve the cause of peace was to express his own sense of moral outrage by depicting, as best he could, the raw reality of life at the front. By the end of 1916, Le Feu, was published. The novel, derived from his own experiences and notes that he had kept of conversations with fellow soldiers, attained popular success, won the Prix Goncourt, and by November 1918 had sold a quarter of a million copies.² Barbusse now saw prolongation of the war as unnecessary and allying himself to the socialist party, was determined not to merely leave it to the politicians to negotiate a lasting peace and decide

2. C. W. Obuchowski believes that the enthusiasm for Le Feu was due to the majority of the population of France feeling nauseated with over positive and optimistic war writing, as well as appreciated by exhausted combatants who finally saw themselves and their lot reflected in a much truer light. See Mars on Trial, Madrid, José Porrúa Turanzas, 1978.

what would be the fate of the world at the end of the conflict. Between 1917-19 he founded two organisations, the Association Républicaine des Anciens Combattants and the Clarté movement. The former claimed that the suffering of the soldiers was symbolic of the misery of sections of society as a whole. Many members later became leading personalities of the French Communist Party.³ Barbusse was still not satisfied, however, and together with Raymond Lefebvre, founded the Clarté group, May 1919, in order to fight against militarism and war, and avoid a repeat of 1914.⁴ To coincide with the event, Barbusse published the novel Clarté, in which he outlined the lessons he himself had learnt 1914-18.

Approximately thirty of the novel's two hundred and ninety pages are devoted to the build up to war, mobilization, declaration of hostilities and departure to the front.⁵ The theme is clearly an incidental rather than an integral part of the entire novel and consequently receives only short treatment in this chapter. What is interesting, however, is the tone which Barbusse uses to describe the outbreak of war. The symbolic title of the work implies that mankind has "seen the light", that he must strive to overcome the threat of militarism and never again succumb to the temptation of war. It is indicative of the artistic command of language used to portray the

3. e. g. Jacques Duclos, Jacques Doriot, André Marty

4. By 1920 Barbusse could count on the support of Romain, Duhamel, Bertrand Russell, H. G. Wells and Stefan Zweig. Nevertheless, by the end of the year, the movement was in decline. It was unable to attract mass audiences and never had more than 5,000 members in France. Its aims were often vague and too naïve to be convincing. Barbusse responded with a new policy, not only of opposition to militarism and war but one of support for the U.S.S.R. and a world revolution. These radical moves towards Communism brought a gradual end to the movement.

5. The edition used and quoted from below is Paris, Flammarion, 1920

build-up to hostilities. The first five chapters introduce the reader to Simon Paulin, the novel's hero; his work as a factory clerk and life in the town of Viviers; his wedding with Marie and his gradual disenchantment with married life. The first mention of militarism comes in chapter six, in a conversation that Paulin has with Marcassin Pétrolus, the village lamp lighter. Pétrolus avows his allegiance to the Ligue des Patriotes:

"Déroulède! s'écrie-t-il. "C't homme-là, c'est mon Dieu, à moi".(p.63)

An adjudant in the army reserves, Pétrolus is proud to have met and spoken with Déroulède and in a fit of patriotic fervour explains to Paulin:

"Ah! il faut que les Alboches disparaissent de la terre, ou bien ce s'ra nous. Ah! moi, en politique, quand on m'en parle, j'leur demande: "Est-ce que vous êtes pour Déroulède, oui ou non?" Ça suffit".(p. 64)

No further reference to militarism or patriotism is made until chapter eight, "Le Crieur", which begins with the announcement of military manoeuvres, September 1913, and the recognition of Viviers as an important centre of operations. Brisbille, the blacksmith, finds the situation a waste of time and effort. He openly criticises the childlike activities of the soldiers as some dig trenches whilst others fill them in. Although an influential military correspondent suggests that war could break out at any moment, Brisbille dismisses the entire episode as folly.

"Guerre ou pas guerre, c'est-i' pas d'la folie! Et t'nez, tenez, r'gardez-moi ça, ces pantalons rouges qui s'voient à des kilomètres. Faut croire que c'est exprès pour faire tuer l'soldat, qu'on l'habille pas en couleur de rien du tout?"(pp. 75-6)

Similar disbelief and lack of understanding is shown by the Prince of Viviers on a hunt in Morteuil forest. Paulin overhears him remark:

"Les grandes manoeuvres, au fond, c'est de la frime. C'est de la guerre de music-hall réglée par des régisseurs. La chasse, c'est meilleur, parce qu'il y a du sang".(p. 78)

The prince's remarks, whilst showing a high degree of insensitivity, have a certain artificial literary charm as the war is described as make-believe and compared to the music-hall shows with the stage-managers representing the generals and politicians directing affairs.

This chapter closes with mention of Joseph Bonéas and his society "La Revanche" which is busy organising patriotic protest marches in the town and the description of one particular demonstration led proudly by Pétrolus. Barbusse comments via Paulin:

"Le quartier est un peu comme toutes les villes, un peu comme toutes les campagnes, un peu comme partout".(p. 86)

This brief observation is not very convincing "... un peu comme ..." is deliberately half-hearted and half-mocking. To what extent the rest of France resembles the small town of Viviers remains in doubt. The repetition of "... un peu comme ..." strengthens the artistry of the sentence whilst seriously weakening its realistic value.

These four incidents shape the build-up of events, in the novel, leading to a war climate which is proclaimed at the beginning of chapter nine, "L'Orage". There is the idea of "revanche", the patriotic spirit of the generation, the refusal to acknowledge the

truth and foresee possible catastrophe, without the detailed political changes and workers' activities of the time. There is no mention of Jaurès' death or the assassination of the Archduke at Sarajevo. Indeed there are few references to historical facts made throughout the novel. Clearly preoccupation with realistic detail is not important to Barbusse during the opening chapters. He is much more anxious to portray the horror of trench warfare, later, and to use his literary techniques to the full to emphasize the inhumanity and absurdity of war. With so little preparation, Benoit's announcement of war, in the opening line of chapter nine, has a profound and startling effect. Crillon, however, can see little truth in the declaration and treats the whole affair as a joke.

"Non ... Je sais bien qu'il y aura la guerre un jour, vu qu'on a toujours refait la guerre depuis que le monde est monde et que, par conséquent, on la refera. Mais maintenant, tout de suite, une grande affaire comme ça? Allons donc! Ce n'est pas vrai. Non".(p. 87)

Barbusse again refuses to go into any historical details. The attempts of the "Internationale" and workers' leaders to avert conflict is not recorded. Indeed not a great deal appears to happen between Benoit's announcement one evening in July, and French mobilization at the beginning of August.

Quelques jours s'écoulèrent, tranquilles, semblables aux jours. Puis la grande nouvelle parut, s'accrut, se ramifia universellement: l'Autriche, la Serbie, l'ultimatum, la Russie. Bientôt l'idée de la guerre fut partout.(p. 87)

The use of punctuation and repetition increases the dramatic effect of these lines. The use of the verbs 'reparaître', 's'accroître' and 'se ramifier' in quick succession is almost symmetrical with the part of the sentence after the colon,

"l'Autriche, la Serbie, l'ultimatum, la Russie". There is a striking contrast between the beginning of the passage where days pass slowly and peacefully, with the injection of pace that the second sentence introduces and the final climax of the third sentence where the idea of war has already spread throughout the whole of France. Barbusse appears much more concerned here with a literary rather than a realistic outcome. Events did not proceed as swiftly or as clearly and orderly as the author would have the reader believe.⁶

The effect that the news has on the people of Viviers is also rather exaggerated. The passage continues:

On la voyait distraire et ralentir les hommes dans l'allée et venue du travail. On la devinait derrière les portes et les fenêtres des maisons.

Un samedi soir, alors que Marie et moi nous ne savions que penser, comme la plupart des Français, et parlions dans le vide, nous entendîmes le tambour de ville qui, dans le quartier, fonctionne comme au village.

- "Ah!" dit-elle.(p. 87)

War is personified. The reiteration of "On la voyait distraire et ralentir ...", "On la devinait derrière ..." builds up an atmosphere of suspense and tension. There is the feeling that war is on everyone's mind and is the sole topic of conversation in every household throughout France. "... comme la plupart des Français ..." is again vague, however. Certainly the dominant tone in 1914 was one of resignation and anguish, even disbelief, especially amongst the agricultural community,⁷ but people were not suddenly rendered insensible, did not suddenly become paralysed or hypnotized with abject fear and apprehension as Barbusse would have us believe. The

6. see Chapter III, "A historical reconstruction", (this thesis)

7. Ibid.

tension in this passage is broken by the dramatic beating of the drum announcing mobilization. Marie's reaction is equally dramatic.

There is no mention of confusion, surprise, anger, panic, nor of strikes, socialist gatherings in the town of Viviers or the surrounding area. Initial reaction to mobilization is curiously unimpassioned:

Aucune autre parole ne sortait des bouches. J'allai d'attroupement en attroupement pour me faire une opinion, mais les gens se retiraient, la face fermée, ou levant automatiquement les bras au ciel.(p. 88)

Barbusse again seems more concerned about the literary rather than the realistic effect when he describes the scene where Paulin informs Marie about his call to arms:

Je pris dans l'armoire à glace et j'ouvris sur ma table mon livret militaire. Serrés l'un contre l'autre, nous contemplâmes chastement le feuillet rouge où était inscrit le jour de mon départ, et nous épelâmes ce qu'il y avait là, comme si nous venions d'apprendre à lire.(p. 88)

The use of the adjective "serrés" and the adverb "chastement" suggests the innocence and vulnerability of not only Paulin and Marie, but of mankind, at the onset of war. The need to spell out the mobilization order and the comparison with someone who has just learned to read, and who is therefore still unsure of the printed word, emphasizes the disbelief and horror of what is actually happening, in a rather contrived and imaginative manner.

The wave of enthusiasm which gradually developed into staunch patriotism and blatant chauvinism, culminating in "l'Union sacrée", is described in the novel, but as the use of "on", and "nous",

becomes more common, it becomes more and more apparent that Barbusse is telling his own story here, not "objectively", but with a somewhat critical and sarcastic tone.

On lut dans les feuilles ... qu'un grand sursaut unanime électrisait la France, et la petite foule que nous étions se sentit prise aussi d'un élan d'enthousiasme et de résolution. On se regardait, les yeux brillants, et on s'approuvait. Moi-même, je m'entendis crier: "Enfin!" Tout notre patriotisme remontait à la surface.(p. 88)

"Les feuilles" provided one version of the war, heavily censored and manipulated in order to assure and encourage the public that all was well. This inflated rhetoric which often misled "official" versions of events was given the name of "bourrage de crâne" by the "poilus" of the front lines who knew much better. Le Crapouillot expressed the following opinion, 30th June 1917:

Ce qui déconcerte le plus les soldats, c'est de voir que l'élite des intellectuels n'a pas su s'élever au-dessus du patriotisme de cinéma et fait chorus avec les vils professionnels du bourrage de crânes ...

Here the exaggeration of "un grand sursaut unanime électrisait la France" emphasizes the influence of such reports.

The French nation never pauses to question or reflect. It seems clear that from his retrospective position in 1919, and the Clarté movement's determination to avoid future aggression in the post-war world, Barbusse's own bitterness, his personal regret, is almost inevitably present in the narrative as he describes the growing enthusiasm of the French people and the move towards a state of war. The exaggerated nature of his description suggests rebuke and anger.

Nous étions tous pacifiques jusqu'à la bêtise. Nous étions de petits saints.

Personne, en France, ne parlait plus de la revanche, personne n'en voulait; personne ne songeait seulement à se préparer à la guerre; nous n'avions tous dans le coeur que des rêves de bonheur universel de progrès, tandis que l'Allemagne a tout machiné dans l'ombre pour se jeter sur nous ...

L'envie de la gloire perçait et on entrevoyait on ne savait quel recommencement de Napoléon.(p. 89)

The hyperbole of the first two sentences is clear. The exaggeration is ironic and the irony directed towards the French. Not everyone in France was an absolute pacifist and certainly not a saint. The repetition of "personne" unmistakably inflates the non-violent, peace-loving image of the French nation, particularly as Viviani was proclaiming "l'Union Sacrée" in the "Assemblée Nationale" as early as 4th August 1914. "... des rêves de bonheur ..." contrasts abruptly with the image of a powerful, somewhat unscrupulous Germany which seems to have manoeuvred by subterfuge, and which is portrayed very much as the aggressor, violating the well-intended French vision of universal progress. The reference to glory and Napoleon mocks traditional French nostalgia towards splendour and military success based on some vague perception ... "on entrevoyait on ne savait quel ..."

Marie comments how magnificent it is to see the country so ready to fight in order to protect the people:

"... on admirait la beauté de l'ordre militaire, et la préparation de la France".(p. 90)

In Clarté this extreme confidence does not manifest itself in any form of violence. There is no pillaging or destruction. Presumption of a short war is clearly present, however. Marie is certain that it will be over by winter,(p. 92) the station-master at

Viviers assures a former "adjudant maître d'armes", who does not wish to be sent to the front, that in two months hostilities will have ceased.(p. 93) By the end of chapter nine "l'Union sacrée" has most certainly established itself. Barbusse describes his departure:-

Tous les trottoirs étaient garnis de monde, à cause de nous. J'éprouvais à cette seconde une exaltation d'émotion et un vrai frisson de gloire.(p. 94)

Historically, Barbusse omits much of the detail leading up to the outbreak of war and French mobilization and quickly deals with the aftermath and reactions of the nation. Realistically, Paulin, Marie, Brisbille, Crillon have little psychology, few feelings and emotions, only an exterior through which Barbusse attempts to express his own thoughts and feelings of August 1914. Perhaps his own bitterness and frustration, so soon after the conflict had ended, prevented him from portraying a more convincing situation within the framework of his novel.

b) Chevallier: La Peur - An illusory double time focus

Gabriel Chevallier, mobilized at the age of nineteen and wounded the following year (1915), returned to the front in 1916 and spent the rest of the war in the infantry. He finished La Peur in 1930 and therefore had considerable time for reflection and retrospection in the years following the armistice. In his preface to the 1951 edition,⁸ he clearly states his intention to write an anti-war novel. His intention is two-fold: a) to tell the truth, as

8. All references below are taken from this edition, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France.

best he can, of the 1914-18 conflict; b) to portray the horror of war in such a fashion that man will never take up arms again.(pp. 12-13)

Ce livre, dans l'esprit de l'auteur, était un cri d'alarme. Il l'est resté.(p. 13)

Chevallier's treatment of the outbreak of war forms only an incidental part of the novel, only sixteen pages out of three hundred and eighty-one are devoted to the early days of August 1914. Consequently, only a small proportion of this chapter will be devoted to it. What is interesting, however, is that unlike Barbusse, the author makes no conscious effort to hide behind his characters, indeed few are present for any length of time in the opening chapter. Chevallier's omnipresence is accentuated by direct comment which can be critical, at times bitter, the culmination perhaps of a decade's retrospection. As Barbusse, Chevallier is often dramatic, occasionally melodramatic, in his search for emotional effect. Behind the melodrama, however, a message is clearly detectable.

La Peur opens with emphasis placed on the innocence and indifference of France to the danger in Europe during the summer of 1914. Chevallier's comparison appeals to the emotions:

Le feu couvait déjà dans les bas-fonds de l'Europe, et la France insouciant, en toilettes claires, en chapeaux de paille et pantalon de flanelle, bouclait ses bagages pour partir en vacances.(p. 17)

France is personified and apparently in carefree mood which contrasts sharply with other parts of Europe already engaged in conflict. The use of the verb "couvrir" is particularly poetic.

There is reference to the nation's preoccupation with the 'Caillaux affair' and to the summer holidays.(p. 17) Neither mention

is made of the crisis in the Balkans, of the Sarajevo assassination, nor any explanation given of the ultimatum announced. The lack of concern of the French nation is apparent but again this is expressed in a rather melodramatic fashion:

Ultimatum ... Ultimatum ... Ultimatum ... Mais la France dit, en regardant les nuages amoncelés vers l'Est: "C'est là-bas que se passera l'orage!"(p. 18)

The repetition of "Ultimatum" heightens the dramatic tension as hostilities draw nearer, and contrasts with the rather casual approach of France which is personified and which believes that the troubles will remain localised in the Balkans. Chevallier uses meteorological imagery to express his point. The rain clouds amassing in the East are clearly representative of the build-up to the Serbian/Austrian conflict, the storm will be the outcome.

Mobilization follows immediately. There is neither indication of the activities of the "Internationale" nor of other socialist movements; no reference is made to the passing of time between the "Ultimatum" and mobilization or between mobilization and the declaration of war. Indeed one is almost led to assume that the words are all synonymous which again adds to the literary and emotional impact:

Sur toutes les mairies, on pose l'affiche.

Les premiers cris: C'est affiché!

La rue se bouscule, la rue se met à courir.

Les cafés se vident, les magasins se vident, les cinémas, les musées, les banques, les églises, les garçonnières, les commissariats se vident. Les maisons entières se vident.

Toute la France accourt. Toute la France est devant l'affiche et lit: Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité - Mobilisation générale. (p. 18)

The opening lines are almost poetic, nine syllables each excluding the mute 'e's, with a break after the fifth syllable, rhyming words in "mairies" and "cris", "l'affiche" and "affiché". The street is personified and the constant repetition of "se vident" adds to the artistic atmosphere, exaggerating the fact that everyone is rushing to see the mobilization order. The repetition of "toute la France" emphasizes this, and Chevallier uses metonymy as the country presents itself and reads the government's poster. The dramatic effect of the passage is completed with the maxim "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité" and what that now means, "Mobilisation générale", if France is to maintain her ideals.

Chevallier makes reference to the astonishment and lack of comprehension on the part of most people, (p. 18) but again his transition from mobilization to actual declaration of war is highly dramatic and extremely rapid.

Toute la France, dressée sur la pointe des pieds pour voir l'affiche, serrée, fraternelle, ruisselante de sueur sous le soleil qui l'étourdit, répète: "La Mobilisation" sans comprendre.

Une voix dans la foule, comme un pétard: C'EST LA GUERRE!

Alors la France se met à tourner, se lance à travers les avenues trop étroites, à travers les villages, à travers les campagnes: la guerre, la guerre, la guerre ...(p. 18)

There is again use of metonymy as France reads the mobilization order, perspiring beneath the sun and repeating "mobilisation" without fully understanding the significance of the word. Chevallier uses further imagery to describe the impact of the explanation offered by a member of the crowd. The word "GUERRE" rings out like a shot and the French nation spirals round as if wounded and then rushes forward in all directions to search for help. The triple

repetition of "à travers" and "la guerre" completes the drama of the situation.

The reaction of the French people is one of instant activity:- bells ring, civil servants join up, ministers gather, workers stop work, shops close. There is almost a feast-like atmosphere to the events and apparently unanimous and immediate support for the war effort.(p. 19)⁹ Chevallier is again, however, searching for emotional effect:

Des femmes pleurent. Est-ce pressentiment d'un malheur? Est-ce les nerfs?(p. 19)

His entrance into the narrative is complete with these two emotive questions. Far from the omniscient author, he continues in similar fashion:

La guerre!
Tout le monde s'y prépare. Tout le monde y va.
Qu'est-ce que la guerre?
Personne n'en sait rien(pp. 19-20)

The dramatic nature of these lines urges the reader on and, whilst not entirely invention (indeed, few people showed reluctance to be mobilized, as Chevallier suggests, and the vast majority had no first hand knowledge of war), it would appear the author is striving for emotional impact rather than a sober rendering of "fact". We have already seen that the dominant tone at the news of mobilization was

9. Les factionnaires devant leurs guérites tricolores présentent les armes. Les maires ceignent leurs écharpes. Les préfets revêtent leurs uniformes ... Les employés de banque, les calicots, les ouvriers, les midinettes, les dactylographes, les concierges eux-mêmes ne peuvent plus tenir en place ... Les militaires prennent une grande importance ... Dans les rues grouillantes, les hommes, les femmes, bras dessus, bras dessous, entament une grande farandole étourdissante, privée de sens, parce que c'est la guerre ...

one of resignation, disbelief, anguish, that it certainly did not take place in an entirely enthusiastic atmosphere, as Chevallier indicates,¹⁰ and to claim that no-one knew what war was really like is not completely accurate. Many professional soldiers had had experience of conflict in the colonies, and as Le Miroir points out:

Les "vieux" ont donné un magnifique exemple en s'engageant, très nombreux, pour la durée de la guerre. Plusieurs firent la campagne de 1870 comme volontaires.¹¹

However, fully aware of the fluctuating economic and political situation in Germany in the 1920's and the emergence of Nazism which seemed synonymous with national regeneration,¹² Chevallier's main

10. see Chapter III, "A historical reconstruction", (this thesis)

11. 12/9/1915. Amongst those mentioned are: "soldat" Bouveret, aged 68; "soldat" Delapierre, aged 63; and "sergent" Lasaigues, aged 62.

12. During the early 1920's the prominent mood in Germany was one of national resentment. This was heightened by the reparations terms for the 1914-18 war which the Allied commission presented in April 1921. (132,000 million gold marks, over 30,000 million dollars). Internally, Germany was undergoing severe inflation. In Bavaria there was overwhelming distrust of the republic. One of the many nationalist groupings was the Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, founded by Anton Drexler - a Munich railwayman. This group soon fell under the dictatorial control of an out-of-work ex-serviceman, Adolf Hitler, who renamed the party, Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, the "Nazis". A characteristic of the party was its Sturm-Abteilung (SA), organized by a Bavarian regular officer, Major Ernst Röhm, a militia to protect speakers at the party's meetings and to provoke political battles with opponents. At a time when the entire German army was supposed not to exceed 100,000, there were some 420,000 armed irregular soldiers in Bavaria alone. In August 1923 there was a serious act of insubordination. The Government wanted to secure French withdrawal from the Ruhr by abandoning passive resistance. Bavarian contingents of the German army under General von Lossow opposed this and virtual rebellion broke out in Bavaria with talks of a march to Berlin. Hitler seized this opportunity to gain more power and persuaded Kahr, the Government commissioner and Bavarian dictator to engage in a joint "coup" with Lossow. Kahr and Lossow eventually backed down and Hitler was arrested and sentenced to 5 years' detention, of which he served 8 months. Nevertheless, his ambition remained to lead a mass movement which would establish an élitist dictatorship on racialist lines and the lesson that he drew from this early failure was that he needed to

concern here, it would seem, is to emphasize what lessons history can teach; to refuse to listen passively to tales of far-away crises, to refuse to be aware only of the successful, reassuring campaigns of the past, but to reflect on the present and contemplate the future.(pp. 20-21) The narrator laments the fact that this did not happen in 1914. One tended to minimise the consequences:

Mais quand on nous cherche, on nous trouve ... Il faut aller à la guerre, le sort en est jeté! On n'a pas peur, on ira! Nous sommes toujours les Français, pas vrai?(p. 21)

act with, not against, the forces of order and poverty, and that he would need to wait until they needed him more than he needed them.

Between 1924-28 economic and political stability appeared to be returning to Germany. The enemies of the Republic still remained however. The Nazis, in particular, were bitter about the Polish treaty of alliance with France (1921) which had extended Poland's frontiers, and also the negotiations that France had conducted with the Habsburg Monarchy, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Yugoslavia which had resulted in increased frontiers and a heavy dependence on French diplomatic patronage. As the stability of the Stresemann years and economic prosperity came to an end in 1929 with the world economic crisis and the collapse of the share prices on the New York Stock exchange which put at risk the short term loans to Germany, production fell, unemployment rose and technical backwardness and intolerable debt put a terrible burden on the peasants, especially when agriculture was in a worse condition than industry. The Nazi message of dislike of the modern industrial society and of cash forming the basis of social relationships within it, now received eager support. In the 1930 elections the party increased its seats from 12 to 107. Hitler had become a figure of international importance. In an atmosphere of social conflict and bitterness, of political extremism and fragmentation, the Nazi party went from strength to strength. The *Sturmabteilungen* numbered 170,000 by the end of 1931 and its members specialized in beating up Jews on their way to synagogue services, picking street-fights with their Communist opposite numbers, the *Rote Frontkämpfer*, and preventing the showing of *Im Westen Nichts Neues*, the celebrated anti-war film. The bolder the Nazis became, the more they were sought after as allies. At an anti-republican rally in Bad Harzburg in 1931, they were joined by the leaders of the *Stahlhelm*, the *Reichslandbund*, the Pan-German League, numerous industrial and financial magnates, and, most significantly of all, Hjalmar Schacht who, a year earlier, had been President of the Reichsbank. The Nazis were rapidly becoming the largest political party in Germany(12a).

12a. see P. G. J. Pulzer "German History from Bismarck to the Present" in Germany (ed. M. Pasley), London, Methuen, 1912 pp. 249-369

At this point there is a pause in the narrative. The reader is allowed time to reflect upon Chevallier's account before receiving the author's own direct feelings. Until now in the novel no central character, no place of action have been introduced. Indeed the opening five pages, (17-21) are more a series of reflections predominantly told in the third person but with some use of "on" and "nous". During the next three pages the first person form is introduced into the narrative which briefly assumes the status of memoir with Chevallier commenting on the events that he recalls:

Les hommes sont bêtes et ignorants. De là vient leur misère. Au lieu de réfléchir, ils croient ce qu'on leur raconte, ce qu'on leur enseigne...

Les hommes sont des moutons. Ce qui rend possibles les armées et les guerres. Ils meurent victimes de leur stupide docilité.(pp. 21-22)

Rhetorical questioning increases the emotional impact of the writing and almost takes the form of propaganda, although the author stresses in the introduction to the 1951 edition that this was not the intention, when writing(p. 14)¹³:

Quand on a vu la guerre comme je viens de la voir, on se demande: "Comment une telle chose est-elle acceptée? Quel tracé de frontières, quel honneur national peut légitimer cela? Comment peut-on grimer en idéal ce qui est banditisme, et le faire admettre?"(p. 22)

The folly of millions of civilized men coming together within the space of one week, and with the sole task of destroying each other, is explained, according to Chevallier, by the traditional concepts of duty and honour,(p. 22) and, to a certain extent, by curiosity. He

13. Reste enfin ceci. Comment ce livre sera-t-il "utilisé", aux fins de quelles propagandes? Je répondrai simplement qu'il existait en dehors des propagandes, qu'il n'a pas été écrit pour en servir aucune.

admits that the reason why he enlisted was due to the latter, and considers himself to be quite representative of the nation as a whole.(p. 23)¹⁴ Chevallier's direct comments disappear, at this stage, and the writing reverts to the third person in order to achieve a greater illusion of objectivity. Frequent use of "on", however, prevents the events from speaking for themselves, and we are constantly aware that the author is in control and manipulating the situation.¹⁵ He stresses the excessive confidence and patriotism of the people of France on hearing of the declaration of war. Again there is a mixture of reflection and literary technique:

En quelques heures, la guerre a tout bouleversé, mis partout cette apparence de désordre qui plaît aux Français. Ils partent sans haine, mais attirés par l'aventure dont on peut tout attendre. Il fait très beau. Vraiment, cette guerre tombe bien au début du mois d'août...

Par-dessus tout régnait une atmosphère qui tenait de la fête foraine, de l'émeute, de la catastrophe et du triomphe, un grand bouleversement qui grisait ... Les hommes cessaient d'être des employés, des fonctionnaires, des salariés, des subordonnés, pour devenir des explorateurs et des conquérants.(p. 23)

The first paragraph is almost entirely reflective, the second in contrast almost entirely imaginative. The atmosphere of Paris is compared firstly with that of a *funfair*, then a riot; there are signs of jubilation and despair, a kind of intoxicating confusion that transforms normal people into superhuman beings. One is tempted, at this stage, to question the novel status of *La Peur*, however, during the closing pages of chapter one the plot begins as

14. Par ma conduite, je m'explique celle de beaucoup d'autres, surtout en France.

15. On la confondit avec la liberté et l'on accepta la discipline en croyant y manquer

On avait changé les trajets quotidiens de la vie.

Chacun faisait confiance à sa destinée, on ne pensait à la mort que pour les autres.

Ibid. p. 23

the narrator, Jean Dartemont, in the company of Fontan, strolls through the town, during the afternoon of the third of August. The use of the first person strengthens the veracity of the account whilst increasing the subjectivity of its content. It would appear that Dartemont represents the author since there is nothing to indicate the contrary and the return to the present tense reminds the reader of the last time that it was used, to express Chevallier's thoughts and recollections. The playing of the "Marseillaise", in a local cafe, emphasizes the patriotism and enthusiasm of the nation as a whole. When one weak-looking individual fails to stand and recognize the anthem, the situation rapidly turns violent.

"Je suis un homme libre, et je refuse de saluer la guerre!" Une voix crie: "Cassez-lui la gueule à ce lâche!" Une bousculade se produit de l'arrière, des cannes se lèvent, des tables sont renversées, des verres brisés. L'attroupement en un instant devient énorme. Ceux des derniers rangs, qui n'ont rien vu, renseignent les nouveaux arrivants: "C'est un espion. Il a crié: Vive l'Allemagne!" L'indignation soulève la foule, la précipite en avant. On entend des bruits de coups sur un corps, des cris de haine et de douleur.(pp. 25-26)

Initial patriotism gradually becomes chauvinism as war supporters affirm their determination to avoid another calamity, such as in 1870:

On entend partout des marches guerrières. Les vieux messieurs regrettent leur jeunesse, les enfants détestent la leur, et les femmes gémissent de n'être que femmes.(p. 27)

Again, however, there is more than a hint of melodrama in these lines. Certainly not all old men, young children and women wanted to take up arms. It would appear that, by exaggerating what really did happen, Chevallier is hoping that society will never make the same mistake again. He admits in his Preface to the 1951 edition that the

tone of the novel, in places, is of extreme insolence,(p. 14) yet makes no excuses for not having modified his views over the years. These remain the same as those he shared as a demobilized soldier, in 1919. He writes:

Quand je pensais, jeune démobilisé de 1919, que la guerre n'était que stupidité et monstruosité, je ne croyais pas voir si clair ni si en avance sur mon temps.(p. 12)

In particular, he questions the whole concept of heroism and points out that the very title of his novel is a challenge to the traditional view of war as an ennobling, redeeming experience.(pp. 9-10) His preoccupation with literary technique, however, in order to recreate the atmosphere of explosiveness and excitability of August 1914 is very apparent. Railway stations are compared to "hearts" into which the blood of the country flows and is re-cycled along the many arteries (railways lines), to the northern and the eastern areas of France.(pp. 28-9)

Chevallier comments:

Les trains partent vers l'aventure et couvrent les campagnes de clameurs, plus joyeuses encore que belliqueuses. A tous les passages à niveau, des cris leur répondent et des mouchoirs s'agitent. On dirait des trains de plaisir, tant les hommes là-dedans sont fous et inconscients.(p. 29)

These incidents, however, are interspersed with episodes of supposedly personal memory.

Nous étions loin de ... Quand on a vu la guerre comme je viens de la voir ... Si nous ne savions pas ...(pp. 20, 22, 25)

It would appear that this illusory double time focus is designed to strengthen the fidelity to fact, nevertheless, it does render the

opening section dealing with the outbreak of war confusing. It is neither pure narration with an omniscient author, nor pure reflection, nor pure memoir. Chevallier is both narrator and author at the same time until the introduction of Dartemont.

Having passed the medical examination for entry into the army, in chapter 2, it is Dartemont who explains how he ran through the town, happy not to be counted amongst those too old to enlist:

Sans m'en douter, j'étais un peu victime de l'état d'esprit général ...

J'annonçai la nouvelle à ma famille, qui la publia aussitôt avec orgueil, ce qui lui valut un tribut d'estime.(p. 33)

Throughout Europe, Chevallier through Dartemont assures the reader that no-one showed any signs of fear but went to war willingly and in proud fashion.

Vingt millions d'hommes, que cinquante millions de femmes ont couverts de fleurs et de baisers, se hâtent vers la gloire, avec des chansons nationales qu'ils chantent à pleins poumons.

Les esprits sont bien dopés. La guerre est en bonne voie. Les hommes d'Etat peuvent être fiers!(p. 29)

With the knowledge that Chevallier had of the war by 1930, this last sentence appears particularly venomous. Already in chapter one, he has attacked the folly of those who supposedly knew better:

Et des millions d'hommes, pour avoir cru ce qu'enseignent les empereurs, les législateurs et les évêques, dans leurs codes, leurs manuels et leurs catéchismes, les historiens dans leurs histoires, les ministres à la tribune, les professeurs dans les collèges et les honnêtes gens dans leurs salons, des millions d'hommes forment des troupes innombrables que des bergers galonnés conduisent vers les abattoirs, au son des musiques.

En quelques jours, la civilisation est anéantie. En quelques jours, les chefs ont fait faillite. Car leur rôle, le seul important, était justement d'éviter cela.

Si nous ne savions pas où nous allions, eux, du moins, auraient dû savoir où ils menaient leurs nations. Un homme a le droit d'être

bête pour son propre compte, mais non pas pour le compte des autres.(pp. 24-5)

In La Peur, Chevallier clearly imposes an order on the events which he describes. His "arrangement" of reality involves selection and the emphasis of certain aspects which gives much more of an aesthetic force to his work than in Barbusse's Clarté. The fashioning of his material in the light of the changing political situation of the 1920's and the explanation offered with hindsight when looking back at the summer of 1914, result in a distortion of the factual field. Norton-Cru would reject this kind of writing, criticising the invention, imagination and interpretation. Riegel, on the other hand, would advocate that this very creative spirit creates a more forceful and vivid impression of the crucial moments of history. Certainly the accent on the euphoric emphasises the over-confidence of the nation as a whole whilst providing the opportunity for authorial criticism, either directly or via the narrator.

c) Martin du Gard: L'Eté 1914 - A 1930's anti-militarist view

David Schalk claims that "the simplest use that a historian can make of a novel is in obtaining background information about the social and intellectual atmosphere of an epoch, information which might be lacking or not so well presented in a historical text".¹⁶ He goes on to affirm that the documentary quality, which no historian would question, is well illustrated in the fiction of Roger Martin du Gard.

16. Roger Martin du Gard: The Novelist and History, New York, Cornell University Press, 1967, p. 1

Martin du Gard studied at the Ecole des Chartes (1899-1905),¹⁷ an Ecole Spéciale which is intended primarily for the training of palaeographers and archivists in the handling of historical sources, both documentary and archaeological. In his Souvenirs,¹⁸ he points out the long-lasting influence of his studies:-

Tout d'abord, l'attention qu'il m'a fallu accorder aux siècles passés, m'a donné du goût pour l'histoire en général, et a fait naître en moi une curiosité toute nouvelle pour les événements contemporains ...

Cet intérêt pour l'histoire que j'avais acquis aux Chartes, m'a fréquemment amené à faire, dans mes livres, une place aux faits politiques dont mes personnages se trouvaient être les témoins. Il m'était devenu impossible de concevoir un personnage moderne détaché de son temps; de la société, de l'histoire de son temps.¹⁹

The rigid scientific discipline of the Ecole, the meticulous regard for accuracy, the painstaking investigation, was to remain with Martin du Gard throughout his career.²⁰ Henri Peyre writes that Martin du Gard "stands as the most faithful imaginative portrayer of the conflicts that tore France between the Dreyfus Affair and World War 1 ... No history of the Third Republic has yet succeeded in bringing to life the significance of these French crises as have the novels of Martin du Gard".²¹ In his article, "Deux Romanciers d'aujourd'hui: Roger Martin du Gard et Henry de Montherlant",²²

17. With the exception of a year's military service in 1902-3

18. All quotations in the text are taken from the two volume "Pléiade" edition of Martin du Gard's Oeuvres complètes, Paris, Gallimard, 1955

19. Volume 1 pp. L-LI

20. see D. Boak, Roger Martin du Gard, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1963, p. 6

21. The Contemporary French Novel, New York, Oxford University Press, 1955, p. 39

22. Le Monde Nouveau, 15th January, 1925, pp. 25-6

see also J. Paulhan "Roger Martin du Gard", Nouvelle Nouvelle Revue Française, October 1958, p. 577 "C'est dans Jean Barois qu'on lira un jour l'Affaire Dreyfus, dans les Thibault la guerre de Quatorze, dans le Colonel de Maumort la guerre de Quarante".

Georges Heitz asserts that to comprehend the generation of 1890, future students will refer to Jean Barois; for a deeper understanding of the decade before the First World War, they will read Les Thibault. Schalk describes Les Thibault as "a slice of history transposed onto the plane of art",²³ and talks of the "suprahistorical" qualities of Martin du Gard's work.²⁴ He writes that "the professional historian would be quick to point out the subjective nature of transposition and identification and would probably argue that these phenomena bear no real relation to his craft. He would at the very least demand that the novels under consideration remain faithful to the history of the period they treat. Roger Martin du Gard's works are quite adequate in this respect".²⁵ As Robidoux points out:

...la réalité où nous vivons - comme, auparavant, celle du temps où écrivait Martin du Gard - se révèle strictement conforme à celle que décrit le roman.²⁶

Martin du Gard served as a non-commissioned officer in a motorized supply group assigned to the First Cavalry Corps during the First World War. His unit was constantly on the move and he consequently saw action over a broad area of the front. From the second day of mobilization until February 1919, when he was finally demobilized, he remained with the unit and was utterly repelled by what he witnessed. Not until 1933, however, did the numbing effect

23. Roger Martin du Gard: The Novelist and History, Op. cit. p. 13

24. Ibid. p. 7

25. Ibid. p. 16

26. Roger Martin du Gard et la Religion, Paris, Editions Montaigne, 1964, p. 297

of his war experience die away and did he feel able, even impelled, to use the war as subject matter.²⁷

L'Eté 1914²⁸ comprises 749 pages devoted to the recording of events leading up to the outbreak of hostilities. As a novel, it provides the most comprehensive and detailed description of the major issues of the summer^{of} 1914. Because of the significance of the work and the integral nature of the build-up to the mobilization of troops, it receives a significantly detailed analysis in this chapter.

L'Eté 1914 begins with an introduction to "Le Local", a group of young socialist revolutionaries, affiliated to larger existing organisations and of which Jacques Thibault is a member. Chapter IV opens with a precise date, Sunday 28th June. Jacques and his comrades are looking forward to the meeting of the great socialist Congress, the "Internationale", scheduled for 23rd August in Vienna. From the very beginning, then, we have fact mixed with fiction: Jacques Thibault and his friends are fictional characters, "Le Local" is a fictitious organisation, although, clearly, organisation and members are representative of other socialist groups. The date of the Vienna congress was finally moved forward to 9th August at the Brussels meeting of the "Bureau socialiste international", 29th-30th July.²⁹

J.-J. Becker starts one of his articles pointing out:

27. see D. Schalk op. cit. p. 15 "He had great difficulty in treating contemporary subjects and seemed always to need the cushion of objectivity provided by the passage of time before he could write about a given epoch".

28. Pléiade edition

29. see page 61 (this thesis)

Il y a des romanciers qui ont la réputation d'être aussi des historiens, il y a des romans qui bénéficient de l'audience de livres d'Histoire: c'est le cas de Roger Martin du Gard dans L'Eté 1914.³⁰

Howard C. Rice shares a similar view in Roger Martin du Gard and the World of the Thibaults - A Biographical and Critical Estimate.³¹ He sees L'Eté 1914 belonging as much to history as to literature.

Early discussions amongst the revolutionaries centre upon the growth of the "Internationale" particularly in Italy and Germany and the need to strengthen international unity, especially in view of the changing European political situation. Meynestrel acknowledges that:

"L'Europe d'aujourd'hui, comme la Russie de 1905, est nettement dans une situation pré-révolutionnaire. Les antagonismes du monde capitaliste travaillent l'Europe. La prospérité n'est qu'illusoire ... Mais quand, comment, surgira le fait nouveau? Quel sera-t-il? Crise économique? Crise politique? Guerre?"(pp. 64-5)

He continues:

"Tout est à faire! ... Tout. La préparation du prolétariat suppose un effort immense et coordonné, qui est à peine ébauché jusqu'ici".(p. 66)

Martin du Gard's style is sober, the content of his writing is factual with few emotive, and rhetorical structures. Tension is created but due to the build-up of the facts themselves rather than due to dramatic techniques. Sentence construction is both clear and concise.

Very early in the novel we can see that the group appear to have quite a privileged position which allows the revolutionaries to observe the events taking place around them. Jacques, in particular,

30. "Les origines de la première guerre mondiale dans L'Eté 1914 de Roger Martin du Gard", Relations internationales, no. 14, 1978, p. 143

31. New York, Viking Press, 1941, p. 20

shows a remarkable understanding of the complexities of the situation following the announcement of the assassination of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife at Sarajevo. This gives Martin du Gard the opportunity, via Jacques, Boehm, Mithoerg and Meynestrel, to outline the history of the Balkan crisis (pp. 89-90) and to examine the alliance structure in Europe at the turn of the century. (pp. 94-96) Jacques again is very well informed:-

"Supposons un instant que l'Autriche attaque la Serbie; et supposons ... que la Russie intervienne. Une mobilisation russe, c'est aussitôt la mobilisation allemande, suivie automatiquement d'une mobilisation de la France. Tout leur beau système d'alliance jouerait de lui-même... Ce qui revient à dire qu'une guerre austro-serbe aurait chance de déclencher un conflit général". (pp. 94-5)

Paterson's scepticism only encourages Jacques to state his opinions all the more firmly:

"Le fait est là! Qu'il y ait volonté de guerre ou désir d'intimidation, l'Europe, demain, va se trouver en face d'une menace terrible! En bien, nous, qu'est-ce que nous devons faire? ... Devant cette offensive, nous devons prendre position. Nous devons préparer au plus tôt la contre-attaque!" (p. 99)

The use of exclamation and the rhetorical question heightens the tension in this passage. One cannot help but feel that certain lines correspond most aptly to the rising anxiety of the late 1930's in Europe, the time during which Martin du Gard was writing. "... l'Europe demain, va se trouver en face d'une menace terrible!" "... Devant cette offensive, nous devons prendre position" could refer equally to the alarming growth of Nazism in Germany as to the crisis in the Balkans.

Jacques even suggests bringing forward the date for the Vienna Congress together with an open campaign to demonstrate the

possibility of a European conflict.(p. 101) He agrees with Mithoerg upon the desirability of mass proletarian demonstration in the eventuality of war:-

"Guerre à la guerre! Si elle éclate, il faut que le plus grand nombre possible de soldats partent avec cette conviction, bien ancrée, que la guerre est déchaînée par le capital, contre la volonté, contre les intérêts des prolétaires; qu'on les jette, malgré eux, dans une lutte fratricide, pour des fins criminelles ... Donc, allez-y, mes petits! Embouchez tous la trompette du pacifisme!"(pp. 102-3)

The intensity of Jacques' beliefs in this potentially fervid and zealous outburst, is again handled with lucidity and sobriety by the author. The use of frequent punctuation in Jacques' long speech ensures a coherent and precise argument, although Martin du Gard's unadorned style does tend to yield towards the end, as author and principal character almost seem to fuse in their enthusiasm to preserve peace at all costs: "Embouchez tous la trompette du pacifisme!"

When Jacques visits Antoine (19th July) in chapter XIV, he is astonished to find that, despite his medical professionalism, Antoine knows nothing of the impending crisis. Martin du Gard comments that, whilst he reads the newspapers, he has only a vague idea of the Balkan crisis.

"Toujours ces sacrés Balkans?... On devrait établir un cordon sanitaire autour des peuples balkaniques, et les laisser s'entr'égorguer, une bonne fois, jusqu'à la disparition totale".(p. 125)

The use of metaphorical speech ("cordon sanitaire") is unusual in Martin du Gard's prose but befits the character of Antoine.

He explains that he has neither time nor desire to interest himself in politics, that medicine and science take up all his energies. Nevertheless, Jacques still considers that it is incredible that his brother has not the slightest idea of what has been happening for the past three weeks:

"Il ne s'agit plus d'une petite guerre dans les Balkans: c'est toute l'Europe, cette fois, qui va droit à une guerre ... Tu n'as pas l'air de comprendre, Antoine ... Nous sommes arrivés au moment où, si tous font comme toi, si tous laissent les choses aller, la catastrophe est inévitable ..." (p. 129)

Antoine's reluctance to acknowledge the severity of the situation allows Jacques to demonstrate, once again, his detailed knowledge. He points out the weakness of certain Heads of State and how they are manipulated by their military commanders who desire war; he indicates those who would be in favour of war, Berchtold in Austria, Iswolsky and Sazonov of Russia; and mentions the Kaiser and Poincaré, perhaps even the English government, who do not desire war but who have resigned themselves to its inevitability.

It would appear that, historically, Martin du Gard has exaggerated the character of Jacques Thibault. As early as the 12th July Jacques realises that a European war is a serious threat and yet, historically, socialists were no better informed than the rest of the population.³² His astonishment at Antoine's ignorance is unrealistic. It is improbable, at that stage, that Antoine would have known any more. Little had appeared in the newspapers and it was not until the 24th July (five days after their supposed meeting) that any real publicity was accorded to the events. Therefore on the

32. see J.-J. Becker, "L'Eté 1914 de Roger Martin du Gard, Un Ouvrage d'Histoire?", *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, April-June 1978, pp. 214-5

19th July Antoine's lack of concern would seem quite justified. Nevertheless, the effect Martin du Gard obtains here emphasizes to what extent France was unprepared for conflict and how unexpected, even as late as mid-July 1914, it was. There are many other indications of this in the novel. Antoine stresses the pacifist nature of France:

"En France, à part quelques braves loufoques du genre de Déroulède, qui est-ce qui rêve encore de gloire militaire, ou de revanche? La France, dans toutes ses fibres, dans toutes ses couches sociales, est essentiellement pacifique! Et si, par impossible, nous étions jamais entraînés dans une bagarre européenne, une chose en tout cas ne fait aucun doute: c'est que personne ne pourrait accuser la France d'avoir rien fait pour ça ni lui attribuer la plus petite part de responsabilité!"(p. 131)

Later he agrees with Jacques about the nationalist revival in France but refuses to believe other than a minority of the population is involved.(p. 139) He is confident that the situation will resolve itself:

"Non! Non! Et non ! ... Moi je ne suis pas un type qui se lève pour intervenir dans les événements du monde! ... Un homme qui a un métier à exercer ne doit pas s'en laisser distraire pour aller faire la mouche de coche dans les affaires auxquelles il n'entend rien ... Moi, j'ai un métier ... J'ai autre chose à faire qu'à tâter le pouls de l'Europe!"(p. 143)

Antoine's rather familiar, colourful language contrasts with the composure and balance of most passages in the novel. His use of the word "loufoques" to describe the followers of Déroulède is pejorative as is the expression "faire la mouche du coche" when referring to world affairs. His parting metaphorical statement, "J'ai autre chose à faire qu'à tâter le pouls de l'Europe!" not only complements his own medical background, but his overall attitude of superciliousness to matters that do not directly concern him.

Daniel de Fontanin views the climate of events with similar unconcern. His main priority is to finish his military service.(pp. 210-11) Following Austria's ultimatum to Serbia and Germany's offer of support, he welcomes the French precautionary manoeuvres, as a change from the boring life of the barracks. He assures his mother, who fears for his safety:

"Au contraire, après tant de mois à la caserne, ç'a été une distraction, pour nous, de jouer à la petite guerre ..."(p. 285)

As Jacques scans the pages of La Liberté and La Presse, 15th July,(p. 179) he finds mention only of the Caillaux trial, of Poincaré's journey to Russia and of holidays. He informs Vanheede, a socialist colleague:

"Dans le public, personne ne sait, personne ne s'inquiète. C'est effarant ..."(p. 229)

As late as the 23rd July, he is astonished to find the lack of attention drawn towards the events in the Balkans by the French press:

Le compte rendu du procès de Mme Caillaux remplissait intégralement la première page de presque tous les quotidiens.

En seconde ou troisième page, quelques journaux se décidaient à annoncer, en bref, que des usines s'étaient mises en grève, à Petersburg, mais que l'agitation ouvrière avait été enrayée aussitôt par une intervention énergique de la police. En revanche, des colonnes entières étaient consacrées aux fêtes offertes par le tsar à M. Poincaré.

Quant au "différend" austro-serbe, la presse restait plutôt évasive.(p. 248)

The use of precise dates, reference to the press of the day and events reported, presented in a clear, logical manner, renders even more convincing an illusion of reality.

We have already mentioned that Martin du Gard makes reference to the nationalist revival in France during the summer of 1914; whilst public opinion was certainly unconcerned, on the whole, about the conclusions to the Austro-Serbian dispute, nevertheless, many were aware that war had threatened in the past, and Jacques in particular sees Nationalism building and spreading all the time. He sees Poincaré himself as the influential and encouraging factor and stresses to Antoine:

"Tu ne vois donc pas cette effervescence patriotique, belliqueuse, qui a gagné, depuis quelques mois, la société française et plus particulièrement la jeunesse?... c'est l'oeuvre personnelle de Poincaré! Il a son plan: il sait que, le jour de la mobilisation, le gouvernement aura besoin de s'appuyer sur une opinion publique chauffée à blanc qui, non seulement l'approuve et le suit, mais le porte et le pousse en avant ... La France de 1900, la France d'après l'Affaire, était trop pacifique. L'armée était discréditée; on se désintéressait d'elle. On avait pris l'habitude de la sécurité. Il fallait réveiller l'inquiétude nationale. La jeunesse et particulièrement la jeunesse bourgeoise, est un terrain d'ensemencement incomparable pour la propagande chauvine".(p. 139)

Jacques concludes that, quite intentionally, the politicians and statesmen have allowed to develop in France, what in medical terms would be known as "une psychose", "la psychose de la guerre,"(p. 140) and shows how this collective anxiety can only end in a "will to war" climate. Again Martin du Gard's use of short sentences interspersed amongst longer sentences, but all carefully broken down with frequent punctuation, adds plausibility to Jacques' reasoning, which makes it appear all the more credible, thus enlivening the entire situation. The comparison between the developing war climate and a case of psychosis is a rare example of the author's use of literary technique for effect and quite appropriate here as Jacques is addressing a man of the medical profession. However, Jacques'

nature appears a little contradictory here. On the one hand he criticizes the people of France for not paying attention to the Balkan crisis, on the other he criticizes the bellicose, nationalistic build-up in certain areas of society. Even his brother, Antoine, finds his views a little confusing:

Antoine avait décidé de laisser parler son frère; mais, à part lui, il jugeait ces diatribes bien incohérentes. Il y avait relevé, au passage, plusieurs contradictions. (p. 140)

Clearly there is a great deal of inconsistency in Jacques' reasoning. It would appear that Martin du Gard wishes to emphasize this, otherwise he would not have made Antoine comment in such a fashion. Perhaps the confusion is a reflection of how Martin du Gard felt himself, how he remembered others, during the summer of 1914. It seems evident that Martin du Gard must have desired to "chronicle" the socialist movement of the period. The character of Jacques dominates throughout. However, Martin du Gard had no first hand experience of this and, therefore, had to rely on documentation and advice. By his own admission he felt uncomfortable and incompetent in this area. In a letter to Marcel Lallemand, an expert in the field, he wrote:

Si vous saviez combien mes pieds sont d'argile, ce que je doute de moi, ce que je me gobe peu! Ce que je suis prêt à donner d'avance raison contre moi à toute critique sérieuse! Je n'ai jamais, ni si douloureusement, senti mes limites que depuis ces trois ans où je travaille à cet achèvement des Thibault.³³

J. J. Becker, in his article, "L'Été 1914 de Roger Martin du Gard, Un Ouvrage d'Histoire", believes that Martin du Gard must have

33. "Lettres à un ami", Nouvelle Nouvelle Revue Française, December 1958, p. 1138

had difficulties in analysing his documentation accurately. He believes that he only achieved an approximate idea of the socialist movement, that the terms socialists, anarchists, syndicalists, confused him, and points out that the use of the term "patron" in a party where there were many leaders and no real "head", is strange. There are other examples of an absence of sensitivity towards the socialist movement. When Jacques returns from Austria to Geneva, 12th July, (p.84) he reports on the developing war climate in Austria against Serbia:

"... depuis quinze jours, il y a eu, en Europe, mais surtout en Autriche, une suite d'évènements secrets ... D'une telle importance, qu'Hosmer a cru urgent d'alerter tous les centres socialistes européens ... vraiment les choses ont l'air d'aller vite ... Hosmer, en me quittant, m'a dit ceci, textuellement: "Explique-leur bien que, si on laisse aller les choses, avant deux ou trois mois, l'Europe peut être embarquée dans une guerre générale..." (p. 88)

From the beginning, according to Martin du Gard, the socialists knew exactly what was happening. In the novel, they are ready to launch themselves into the prevention of war as soon as possible. Jacques tells Antoine that industrialization and the capitalist system are at the base of the problem. He advocates the creation of a world where there is no exploitation, where there is equality and unity. (pp. 153-9) He concludes:

"... ma conviction profonde, maintenant, c'est que, seule, une révolution, un chambardement général jailli des profondeurs et qui remettra tout en cause, peuvent désintoxiquer le monde de son infection capitaliste ..." (p. 163)

Again the author's sober style is checked as Jacques, searching for whatever means possible to convince Antoine of the danger of capitalism, resorts, not for the first time, to medical imagery.

Capitalism is viewed as a poisonous disease from which society must be detoxicated immediately.

Whereas Martin du Gard is quite accurate in portraying the fundamental concepts of socialism, he either misuses his documents or invents when he shows the members of the socialist party fully aware of the implications of war and actively working to translate their basic principles into a strategy to avoid a European conflict. We have already seen that, in reality, members of the Socialist Party and leaders of the C. G. T. believed that threats to peace in Europe were far from immediate. There are other instances where Martin du Gard is guilty of invention. When Jacques returns to Geneva on 21st July, and reports on growing socialist activity in France, he is confident that elsewhere in Europe, resistance is building. He informs Vanheede:

"Les milieux révolutionnaires sont alertés, partout. On a compris que la menace est grave. Partout, on se groupe, on cherche un programme d'ensemble. La résistance s'organise, prend corps. L'unanimité, l'extension du mouvement - en moins d'une semaine - c'est très réconfortant! On voit quelles forces l'Internationale peut mettre en branle, quand elle le veut. Et ce qui s'est fait ces jours-ci, partiellement, séparément, dans toutes les capitales, ce n'est rien, en comparaison de ce qu'on projette! La semaine prochaine, le Bureau international est convoqué à Bruxelles..."(p. 236)

The style is again concise and clear. Historically, however none of this was true at the date Martin du Gard gives. L'Humanité, on 20th July, actually spoke of improvement in Austro-Serb relations; socialists in Austria and Germany were not alerted until the 23rd and 25th July respectively; not until the 24th July did the secretary of the "Bureau international", Huysmans, consult the executive committee; not until the 25th July was Jaurès contacted; not until

the 26th July, a week later than Martin du Gard reports, did the "Bureau international" decide to meet for Wednesday 29th July.³⁴

Reports of strikes and protest marches are also, to a large extent, exaggerated. In chapter thirty-six, Jacques assures Daniel that the situation is completely under control:

"Je ne peux pas te mettre au courant de tout ce qui se prépare ... Mais, crois-moi. Je sais ce que je dis. Il y a déjà, dans tous les milieux populaires d'Europe, un tel soulèvement d'opinion, un tel rassemblement des forces socialistes, qu'aucun gouvernement ne peut plus être assez sûr de son autorité pour jeter son peuple dans une guerre ... Tu n'as aucune idée de la puissance actuelle de l'Internationale ouvrière! Tout est prévu. Tout est préparé pour une résistance opiniâtre. Partout, en France, en Allemagne, en Belgique, en Italie ... La moindre tentative de guerre serait le signal d'une insurrection générale!"(p. 308)

He implies that the idea of a general strike was popular amongst all socialists, that the motion was passed easily by "Congrès".(p. 242) In reality, however, as late as 20th July, members of the Socialist Party were not entirely unanimous in their support. Ultimately the motion was passed, 56.8% of the vote to 39%, with 4.2% abstaining.³⁵

Nevertheless, as we have seen, Martin du Gard transforms the theory into certitude. Whilst he does accurately describe the call for a pacifist rally in the Bataille Syndicaliste, 27th July,(p. 377) he again exaggerates the Brussels protest march which followed the meeting in the Cirque Royal,(pp. 450-4) transforming an ordered, calm event, historically, into an almost revolutionary activity in the novel. Similarly, on the same evening, 29th July, the workers' meeting in the "Salles Nagram", according to Martin du Gard, clashed

34. See J.-J. Becker "L'Eté 1914 de Roger Martin du Gard, Un Ouvrage d'histoire?", op. cit. p. 222

35. see "L'Eté 1914 de Roger Martin du Gard, Un Ouvrage d'histoire?", op. cit. p. 225

with police and threatened the "Elysée" and the Minister of the Interior.(p. 461) It would appear that clashes did occur and arrests were made, but Becker insists that there were no reports in the national press about the Minister of the Interior or the "Elysée" palace.³⁶ According to Martin du Gard, after the meeting of the Bureau socialiste at Brussels, on 29th July, various countries were working towards the preparation of a general strike:

Keir-Hardie et Vaillant s'acharnaient à obtenir de tous les délégués présents l'adhésion au principe de la grève générale préventive, et l'engagement formel, au nom de leurs partis, de travailler activement, dans leurs pays respectifs, à la préparation de cette grève, pour que L'Internationale pût, en cas de guerre, faire obstacle aux projets belliqueux des gouvernements.(p. 444)

Becker again points out that only discussions were held and that Vaillant and Keir Hardie did not play important roles as Martin du Gard would imply.³⁷ Even the position of Jean Jaurès is transformed and does not entirely correspond to reality. Martin du Gard seems at pains to emphasize his sympathy and enthusiasm for revolutionary ideas. In a speech at Lyon, Jaurès affirms:

"Il n'y a plus qu'une chance pour le maintien de la paix: c'est que le prolétariat rassemble toutes ses forces ..."(p. 332)

Martin du Gard fails to mention, however, that this speech was made on the 25th July, as Jaurès became aware, for the first time, of the gravity of the crisis. He omits to give details of Jaurès' final

36. "L'Eté 1914 de Roger Martin du Gard, Un Ouvrage d'histoire,?", p. 224

37. see "L'Eté 1914 de Roger Martin du Gard, Un Ouvrage d'histoire?" p. 226 "On est loin de la coopération internationale contre la guerre imaginée par l'écrivain, on est loin d'un mouvement ouvrier français se préparant à opposer la grève générale à la guerre".

speech before his death, when he had had sufficient time to gather his thoughts:

Jaurès n'apportait rien de nouveau.(p. 448)

On the contrary, at this particular meeting in the "Cirque Royal", Jaurès received an acclamation from a crowd of 5,000 for his determination to implore the French and German governments to exercise the greatest influence over Austria and to curb Russian war moves. Clearly there is no indication, here, of revolutionary tendencies; indeed, in his final article before his death, Jaurès was speaking of the level-headedness needed by the nation and urging people to remain pacifist and calm at all costs. Further examples of the "colouring" of Jaurès' character can be found in the novel. According to Stefany, an article which Jaurès was to publish shortly before his death would rival "J'accuse" by Zola, so bitter and hostile was its tone;(p. 547)³⁸ Jacques' reflexions, following Jaurès' assassination on the 31st July and 1st August, suggest that Jaurès would have been capable of doing anything to prevent mobilization.(pp. 556, 621)

It would appear that Martin du Gard wrote of Jaurès' personality as he would have desired it; a vigorous and determined leader who could assure international cooperation against war, who could manage a workers' movement organising a general strike against the notion of a European conflict. We must remember that in the climate in which Martin du Gard was writing, twenty years on from the

38. Whilst Becker acknowledges that Jaurès felt the government to be lacking in energy and initiative towards the end of his life, nevertheless, he refuses to admit that his article would have contained anything stronger. See "L'Eté 1914 de Roger Martin du Gard, Un Ouvrage d'histoire", p. 228

events he is describing in the novel, (at the Reichstag election of July 1932 the Nazi party had become the largest political organisation in Germany. On 30th January 1933 Hitler had become Chancellor in a Nazi-Nationalist coalition. A year later the Nazis were the only political party in Germany and Hitler had succeeded Hindenburg as Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the German armed forces. By 1935 he had repudiated the military clauses of the Versailles Treaty and had announced conscription and full re-armament), the measures needed to safeguard peace were probably exactly those of which he dreams in L'Eté 1914, but which, of course, never came to fruition. Indeed, if the socialist reaction during the crisis, as portrayed in L'Eté 1914, had been entirely accurate, it would have been most difficult to have described the sudden change from "extreme revolution" to pacifism. In reality, indicators were present all the time. There are few, however, in the novel. Jacques is clearly astonished and totally unprepared for the reversal:

... pendant des semaines, il avait vécu, sans douter un seul jour du triomphe de la justice, de la vérité humaine, de l'amour; non pas comme un illuminé qui souhaite un miracle mais comme un physicien qui attend la conclusion d'une expérience infaillible - et tout s'écroulait ... Honte! Une rage froide, méprisante, lui serrait la gorge. Jamais il ne s'était senti aussi mortifié. Pas tant révolté ni découragé, que confondu et humilié: humilié par l'atrophie de la volonté populaire, par l'incurable médiocrité de l'homme, par l'impuissance de la raison! (p. 581)

The author almost seems to share Jacques' anger and weakening of self-control in this passage, which is unusually full of imagery and literary technique. The medical terminology is once again apparent, as first of all, Jacques is compared to a physician awaiting the conclusion of an experiment which is bound to succeed and yet somehow fails; secondly, his throat becomes hoarse with rage;

thirdly, he feels mortified; and finally, he comes to realise that society is blighted by an incurable disease, that of mediocrity. Adjectives abound in what is usually a sober and clinical style: "froide ... méprisante ... révolté ... découragé ... confondu ... humilié"; these serve to emphasize the despair of Jacques as he realizes the inevitability of the failure of the "Internationale" and the triple repetition of "par l'atrophie de la volonté, par l'incurable médiocrité de l'homme, par l'impuissance de la raison", underlines the hopelessness of the situation.

Martin du Gard refers to the sudden change in attitude of Gustave Hervé;(p. 462)³⁹ he mentions the futile organisation of last minute protest marches all over the country(p. 565) and the gradual abandonment of the "Internationale" by some of its staunchest supporters. Cadieux reasons with Jacques:

"... soyons réalistes: à partir d'aujourd'hui, ce qui est international, ça n'est plus la lutte pour la paix; c'est la guerre!"

Jumelin agrees:

"La guerre est là. Ce soir, que nous l'acceptons de bonne grâce ou non, nous sommes, nous socialistes, comme tous les Français, dans la guerre ... Notre activité internationale, nous la retrouverons, nous la reprendrons, oui: mais plus tard. Ce soir, l'heure du pacifisme est passée".(p. 616)

Rabbe views the cause of France as the cause of democracy and that it is the duty of all socialists to defend democracy against aggression;(p. 617) Pagès hopes that the war will be the last of all wars, a benefit to mankind; Odelle considers himself a "soldat de la Révolution", (p. 618) continuing the movement begun in 1789 against the

39. see also p. 646

inequalities of feudalism and absolute monarchy, this time against the dominance of twentieth-century capitalism; Hérard is confident that the sacrifice will bring about a prosperous future;(p. 619) it appears, rather melodramatically, that only Jacques remains. He laments the loss of his colleagues:

"... le plus désespérant ... c'est toute cette énergie qu'ils mettent au service de la guerre! ... Toute une force d'âme gaspillée, dont la centième partie aurait suffi à empêcher la guerre, si seulement ils l'avaient mise, à temps, tous ensemble, au service de la paix! ... Les plus acharnés contre la guerre sont devenus les plus ardents à courir la faire! ... Le Parti est décapité".(p.620)

Clearly Martin du Gard exaggerates the socialist hopes of avoiding an outbreak of hostilities in the summer of 1914. We have already seen where he admitted his discomfort at dealing with the socialist movement of the day, but one feels that with his historical training and preoccupation with detail, he could have researched more carefully the material with which he was so unfamiliar to a much more conclusive end. Certainly the turn-around of socialist opinion is dramatized more vividly as a result of the inaccuracies, but it would appear that Martin du Gard's reasons were not merely literary. The dramatic collapse of the socialist movement in L'Eté 1914, leaving Jacques Thibault alone to continue the fight against war, serves principally to provoke even further admiration for pacifist ideals and hopefully, against the 1930's backdrop of increasing tension in Europe due to the popularity of Hitler and the spread of Nazism, to encourage emulation of such non-belligerent policies.

Martin du Gard's portrayal of public reaction to the death of Jaurès and to the mobilization of troops, however, is highly credible. The atmosphere is one of tragic resignation and

acceptance. Jacques remarks that there are fewer shouts of "A bas Berlin!" in the streets than before Jaurès' death.(p. 556) the edition of L'Humanité, 1st August, is bordered in black;(p. 560) the declaration of a state of war has dramatic effects:

En une heure, l'aspect de la ville avait déjà changé. Autant de piétons dans les rues, sinon davantage; mais plus de flâneurs. Tous se dépêchaient, ne songeant qu'à leurs affaires. Chacun de ces passants semblait s'être découvert des difficultés à résoudre en hâte, des dispositions à prendre, une gérance à céder, des parents, des amis à voir, une réconciliation urgente à tenter, une rupture à consommer. Les yeux à terre, la bouche close, le visage soucieux, ils couraient, envahissant, pour aller plus vite, la chaussée, où les véhicules étaient devenus rares. Très peu de taxis: les chauffeurs avaient presque tous remisé, pour être libres. Plus d'autobus: les voitures de transport en commun étaient, dès ce soir, réquisitionnées.(pp. 587-8)⁴¹

Martin du Gard's description is analytical. He succeeds in portraying the despair and devastation of the people of Paris without resort to excessive emotionalism. Nevertheless, there were signs of enthusiasm, even if these were in the minority, and Martin du Gard does not ignore the fact, although it would seem he wishes to minimize their effect. As Jenny and Jacques sit in a cafe near the offices of Le Progrès, they overhear the conversation of several workers sitting at a nearby table. They clearly believe that France has done everything to preserve peace and is therefore the victim of aggression..She is fighting a defensive war. Their patriotism is intense:

"On a beau être pour la paix, on n'est pas des nouilles, après tout! La France est attaquée, la France doit se défendre! Et la France, c'est toi, c'est moi, c'est nous tous!"(p. 606)

41. see also p. 604 "Paris était calme mais tragique."

Jacques attacks their enthusiasm and attempts to convince them of the foolishness of their actions. He points out that "La guerre défensive", "La guerre légitime", "la guerre juste" is dupery, that France is a victim of eternal deception. His words have little effect. The militants continue:

"Je suis mobilisé le premier jour: demain!... Je hais la guerre. Mais je suis Français. Le pays est attaqué. On a besoin de moi, j'irai! J'irai, la mort dans l'âme; mais j'irai!"(p. 606)

Once more there is balance in the way Martin du Gard describes a typical reaction to mobilization. "Je hais la guerre. Mais je suis Français". Avoiding sensationalism and exaggerated heroism, with conciseness and clarity he portrays the lack of real choice that the average Frenchman had. There is even a hint of fear but no doubt about the ultimate decision: "J'irai, la mort dans l'âme; mais j'irai!" Again Jacques implores them to reflect, to refuse to be mobilized, to remain faithful to the "Internationale ":

"Vous ne voyez donc pas que vous êtes les dupes d'un jeu criminel? Avez-vous oublié que les gouvernements ne sont pas installés au pouvoir pour asservir les peuples et les faire massacrer - mais pour les servir, et les protéger, et les rendre heureux?"(p. 607)

The violent nature of their reply, however, causes Jacques to give ground and leave, although one cannot help feeling that Martin du Gard's sympathies rest heavily with him. This point of view is inevitable. By very nature of the fact that Jacques has been left to fight the campaign to preserve peace alone and by the very nature of Martin du Gard's own pacifist tendencies, it is evident that the more the odds are against Jacques, the greater the author hopes will be the admiration of the reader. This would seem to be confirmed when

later Jacques meets Saffrio who comments on the chauvinism of the French soldiers as they go to the front:

"Ce qui est le plus terrible, tu sais, voilà: c'est la folie de tous, devenus soldats! Leurs chansons, leur furia! ... Les trains de mobilisés, qui brillent des yeux, et qui crient: "A Berlin!" Et les autres: "Nach Paris!"(p. 675)

Jacques quickly dismisses this suggestion:

"Moi, ceux que j'ai vus partir ne chantaient pas".(p. 675)

Similarly, Martin du Gard quickly passes over the scenes of violence and devastation in Paris, following the news of the declaration of war. As Jacques accompanies Antoine to the station when he rejoins his regiment, we have glimpses of the "Avenue de l'Opéra" with its balconies draped with flags, the "Place de l'Opéra" where workers are installing searchlights; all along the boulevards we are told of the German and Austrian shops that have been ransacked and pillaged during the night, in particular the Cristallerie de Bohême and the Brasserie Viennoise.(pp. 634-5) No comment is made, however, as the car quickly turns into the "rue de Mauberge" where large numbers of soldiers wait patiently with their families, for the trains to arrive. Here, Martin du Gard is at pains to emphasize the pathos of the situation:

Un à un, sans arrêt, des mobilisés entraient dans l'enclos. Ils se ressemblaient. Ils étaient tous jeunes. Ils avaient tous mis de vieux vêtements sacrifiés, de grosses chaussures, une casquette. Ils portaient en bandoulière les mêmes sacoches gonflées, les mêmes musettes neuves d'où émergeaient un pain, un goulot de bouteille. Et la plupart avaient sur le visage la même expression concentrée et passive, une sorte de désespoir et de peur, matés.(pp. 636-7)

In particular, Martin du Gard dwells over the description of one young soldier leaving his wife and four year old son:

L'homme et la femme se regardaient une dernière fois ... L'homme se pencha, empoigna le bambin, l'éleva et l'embrassa ... La femme ne bougeait pas, ne disait rien: debout, en tablier de ménage, les cheveux défaits, les joues souillées d'avoir pleuré, elle dévisageait son homme avec des yeux fous. Alors, comme s'il eût craint qu'elle se jetât sur lui et qu'il ne pût plus s'arracher d'elle, au lieu de la prendre dans ses bras, il recula, sans la quitter des yeux; puis se retournant soudain, il s'élança vers la gare. Et elle, au lieu de le rappeler, au lieu de le suivre du regard, elle fit un brusque demi-tour, et se sauva. Le gosse qu'elle traînait derrière elle, butait, manquait de tomber; elle finit par le soulever du bout du bras et le hisser sur son épaule, sans s'arrêter, pour fuir plus vite, pour arriver plus tôt, sans doute, dans son logis vide, où, seule, et la porte close, elle pourrait sangloter tout son saoul.(pp. 637-8)

In both these passages Martin du Gard exerts control over literary technique and artistic temperament. One feels that Barbusse and Chevallier would have found it extremely difficult not to describe similar scenes depicting soldiers awaiting departure to the front lines, a farewell between husband and family, without the inclusion of imagery which would appeal to the emotions. With the minimum of both, indeed permitting himself only two adjectives to describe the mental state of the soldiers, "concentrée" and "passive", their faces showing "une sorte de désespoir et de peur", Martin du Gard conjures up a strong atmosphere of pathos, which constant punctuation and the sobriety of his description, on the whole, serve to emphasize all the more. In the scene depicting the parting of an individual family, again the author's lucidity and clarity avoid the over-sentimental climax, the melodramatic exchange of final utterances between husband and wife, husband and child, and preferring to leave unsaid what words could never hope to describe, Martin du Gard succeeds in creating the most moving and convincing of scenes.

Throughout there is the strong suggestion of grief but the author skilfully ensures that this does not dominate the situation. The woman says nothing, does not even move, as her husband kisses their child goodbye; the final melodramatic embrace is avoided as the husband steps back and turns away; the ultimate recall is avoided as the woman rushes out of the station; the indescribable unhappiness, the unspeakable sadness, is reserved for when the woman and child reach the privacy of their own home.

There can be little doubt that, in all these instances, Martin du Gard's own attitude of extreme pacifism shows through clearly.⁴² Denis Book believes that L'Été 1914 had "an immediate political objective: to prevent another war".⁴³ At the time of writing the novel, until the actual outbreak of the Second World War, Martin du Gard was intensely anti-militaristic. In February 1936 he wrote to Marcel Lallemand:

"Suis dur comme fer pour la neutralité. Principe: tout, plutôt que la guerre! Tout, tout! Même le fascisme en Espagne! ... même le fascisme en France! Tout: Hitler, plutôt que la guerre!"⁴⁴

These words echo those of Jacques Thibault in L'Été 1914 when he defends his views in the presence of Antoine's medical colleagues:

"Tout ce bel avenir problématique, je n'en veux pas, si c'est au prix d'une guerre! ... Tout, plutôt que l'abdication de la raison, de la justice, devant la force brutale, et le sang! Tout, plutôt que cette horreur et cette absurdité. Tout, tout, - plutôt que la guerre".(p. 525)

42. See D. A. Williams (ed.) The Monster in the Mirror - Studies in Nineteenth Century Realism, London, Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 276. "It could be argued that the Realist, whilst appearing to be concerned with the past, is in fact mainly preoccupied with the present"

43. Roger Martin du Gard, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1963, p. 138

44. Nouvelle Nouvelle Revue Française, December 1958, p. 1149

Boak points out that this attitude directly influenced Martin du Gard's choice of plot in L'Eté 1914 as indeed Martin du Gard himself freely admitted in his Nobel Prize speech at Stockholm, 10th December 1937:

"... permettez-moi d'avouer, combien il me serait doux de penser que mon oeuvre (...) peut servir, non seulement la cause des lettres, mais encore la cause de la paix. Dans ces mois d'anxiété que nous vivons; alors que, déjà, le sang est répandu aux deux extrémités du globe; alors que, déjà, presque partout, dans un air vicié par la misère et le fanatisme, les passions fermentent, autour des canons braqués; alors que, déjà, trop d'indices nous révèlent le retour de ce lâche fatalisme, de ce consentement général qui, seul, permet les guerres; en ce moment exceptionnellement grave que traverse l'humanité, je souhaite - sans vanité, mais de tout mon coeur rongé d'inquiétude - que mes livres sur L'Eté 1914 soient lus, discutés, et qu'ils rappellent à tous (aux anciens qui l'ont oubliée comme aux jeunes qui l'ignorent, ou la négligent), la pathétique leçon du passé".⁴⁵

Throughout the novel the author's major mouthpiece for his thoughts is clearly Jacques Thibault. In chapter eight he strongly disapproves of the violent revolution of the proletariat which Mithoerg advocates"(pp. 71-2) Later, in the same chapter, he claims that violence is an oppressive force that can never bring the people of any country true freedom He continues:

"J'ai la certitude qu'aucun vrai progrès ne peut être réalisé par des moyens vils. Exalter la violence et la haine pour instaurer le règne de la justice et de la fraternité, c'est un non-sens: c'est trahir, dès le départ, cette justice et cette fraternité que nous voulons faire régner sur le monde! ..." (p. 77)

45. Nouvelle Revue Française, vol. 13, 1959, p. 960. Martin du Gard's entire speech is reproduced under the title "Discours de Stockholm" with a short preface by R. Cheval pp. 957-60

With Antoine, Jacques is determined to convey the true horror of war.

He protests:

"Vous dites: "guerre", et aucun de vous ne pense "massacres sans précédent" ... "millions de victimes irresponsables" ... Ah, si seulement votre imagination sortait, une seconde, de sa torpeur vous vous lèveriez tous, toi le premier! pour faire quelque chose! pour lutter, pendant qu'il en est encore temps!"(p. 142)⁴⁶

The hindsight with which Martin du Gard was writing L'Eté 1914 is clearly apparent in this passage. It is difficult to imagine that anyone in the summer of 1914 would have envisaged "massacres sans précédent", "millions de victimes irresponsables", particularly as the general feeling was that the war would be over by Christmas. It is almost as if Martin du Gard becomes so impassioned by his principal character's determinations to prevent war and by his own enthusiasm to warn of the danger of a second major conflict, that he loses a little of the lucid objectivity displayed elsewhere in the novel to such a large extent.

Half the fortune left by Jacques' father is donated anonymously to the "Bureau international".(p. 468) At the mass protest rally at Montrouge, Jacques receives a standing ovation for his passionately delivered speech, which is aimed at convincing the people that the power to prevent war remains with them:(pp. 493-8)

"Aucun pouvoir légal, aucun décret de mobilisation, ne peut rien sans nous, sans notre consentement, sans notre passivité! Notre sort dépend donc de nous seuls! Nous sommes les maîtres de notre destin, parce que nous sommes le nombre, parce que nous sommes la force!"(p. 494)

He continues:

46. see also pp. 525, 526, pp. 537-540

"La paix, aujourd'hui, elle ne peut plus être sauvée par les gouvernements! La paix, aujourd'hui, elle est entre les mains des peuples! Entre nos mains, à nous!"(p. 496)

Even after Jaurès' assassination, although he feels isolated, he is determined to stand by his principles;(p. 562) he admits to Stefany his intention to keep international socialism alive:

"Même si nous ne devons plus être que dix! Même si nous ne devons plus être que deux! Maintenir, coûte que coûte, l'Internationale! ... Maintenir l'Internationale!"(p. 621)

Fifty-two of the final seventy-eight pages of the novel are devoted to Jacques' ultimate bid for peace and his plan to fly over the front lines in Alsace and drop messages of pacifism to the troops below. He explains to Pilote his vision of soldiers refusing to fight, demoralised officers, fraternisation of troops on both sides, once they have read about the truth.(p. 682) Almost eight pages are devoted to the drafting of his manifesto.(pp. 687-690, 696-701) It begins with a lengthy explanation of how the troops have been duped into fighting a so-called "defensive war", by the governments of both sides, how they have succumbed to the propaganda of the national press, how they have betrayed their own intelligence.(pp. 696-8) He appeals to the emotions by reminding the soldiers of the homes and families which they have left behind, of the dangers they face and of their dignity which they are losing daily.(p. 699) He stresses that with a little thought, however, they can deliver themselves from their misery and ends with a powerful outburst of encouragement:

"Courage! N'hésitez pas! Tout retard peut vous perdre! Il faut que votre révolte éclate DÈS DEMAIN!

DEMAIN, AU LEVER DU SOLEIL, Français et Allemands, TOUS ENSEMBLE, à la même heure, dans un même élan d'héroïsme et d'amour fraternel, levez vos crosses, jetez vos armes, poussez le même cri de délivrance!

TOUS DEBOUT, POUR REFUSER LA GUERRE! POUR IMPOSER AUX ETATS LE RETABLISSEMENT IMMEDIAT DE LA PAIX!

TOUS DEBOUT, DEMAIN, AU PREMIER RAYON DU SOLEIL!"(p. 701)

Not only is the entire episode melodramatic but since it is pure invention and since the reader knows what is going to happen, anyway, that war is unavoidable whatever individual characters may say or do, it follows that there is a) a lack of tension and b) a potential weakening in Martin du Gard's claim to historical accuracy. Although the reader realizes that Jacques' gesture will be futile, its futility in itself does not necessarily mean a lack of accuracy. A Jacques figure might well have attempted such a gesture and failed. The fact that one did not, however, and that Martin du Gard devotes such a large section to the attempt in the concluding pages of the book, possessing, as we have already seen, staunch pacifist tendencies, renders him vulnerable to the attack of fabrication for propaganda purposes. This brings us to a basic confusion in the novel. Throughout, as we have seen, Martin du Gard is trying to reconstruct the events of 1914 and their immediate effects. His documentation is scrupulous. He describes, in addition to what we have examined, the Italian mobilization, the work of the Action française, the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia and the Serbian reply, Germany's support for Austria, Serbian mobilization, Russian mobilization, the threat of "Carnet B", the work of the Ligue des Patriotes, German mobilization, French mobilization, the position of England, Jaurès' assassination, the C. G. T., and the outbreak of

war.⁴⁷ His desire to achieve accurate historical reconstruction is unsuccessful however for, as we have already seen, his insertion of purely imaginary scenes distorts the presentation of actual historical events. Two further examples may be cited, the Stolbach episode and the character Rumelles. Stolbach, a colonel of the Austrian General Staff, journeys to Berlin to finalize plans for co-operation between Prussia and Austria, should war break out. Immediately before his return to Vienna, his briefcase is stolen, containing documents proving Austro-Prussian collusion. Jacques brings the documents back to the Socialist leaders in Belgium, but Meynestrel (under the emotional shock of his wife's departure with Paterson to England) destroys them and consequently all hopes of preventing the war by publishing them in the international press. The entire story is pure fabrication.(pp. 423-6, pp. 437-42) The character Rumelles, a politician, is used to convey confidential information about the progress of events and the real opinions of the French Government, as opposed to its public statements.(pp. 345-8, 355-8, 470) Since Rumelles is entirely fictional, however, again historical veracity is weakened. Becker points out: "R. Martin du Gard a pris sans aucun doute de larges libertés avec la vérité historique".⁴⁸ He also claims that Martin du Gard minimises the role of Germany overall, in the novel, failing to portray the truth that, had Germany not insisted that Austria act, war would never have broken out. Becker also believes that Martin du Gard is guilty of

47. see J.-J. Becker, "Les origines de la première guerre mondiale dans l'Été 1914 de Roger Martin du Gard", *Relations Internationales*, 1978, p. 154. "... dans l'Été 1914, la plus grande partie des informations ou des discussions a pour objet les origines immédiates de la guerre".

48. Op. cit. p. 158

maximising French bellicosity in the events leading up to the declaration of war. This accusation of bias is worth deliberating. In article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles, which brought the war to an end, Germany accepted the responsibility for herself and her allies for causing all loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals had been subjected as a consequence of the hostilities. As early as 1897 Bülow, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs and Tirpitz, State Secretary for the Navy, encouraged Kaiser Wilhelm to adopt a policy of "Weltpolitik", designed to pursue world-power status. Cambon, French Ambassador in Berlin, wrote to Jonnart, Minister for Foreign Affairs, March 1913, that the German Government was constantly rousing patriotic sentiment. Foch points out in his memoirs that whilst the Germany of 1914 had no recourse to wage war in order to conquer the world, the Berlin Government was driven forward by the "blind" pan-German party.⁴⁹ Martin du Gard implies, however, that Germany should accept no more responsibility for the deterioration of the political situation than any other nation.⁵⁰ Indeed, and to the contrary of French diplomatic documents relating to the outbreak of the Great War,⁵¹ there are strong sentiments expressed about the bellicosity of President Poincaré and the aggressive foreign policies of France.⁵² Foch, in his memoirs, stresses, however, that the France of 1914 was far from desiring war and had done everything possible to avoid it.⁵³

49. London, Heinemann, 1931, p. xi (Translated by Colonel T. Bentley Mott)

50. *L'Eté 1914* see pp. 279-84, 413-4, 418

51. see "The French Yellow Book" in *Collected Diplomatic Documents relating to the outbreak of the European War*, London, H. M. S. O., 1915, pp. 121-265

52. *L'Eté 1914*, see pp. 134-7

53. *Op. cit.* pp. XIii-XIiii

As late as 30th July 1914, Viviani wrote that Sir Edward Grey be informed of the facts concerning the different emphasis being placed on French and German military preparations, so that England would be fully aware that it was not France who was taking the aggressive steps. J. Remak, in the Origins of World War I 1871-1914,⁵⁴ writes that, when compared with the involvement of other nations, the responsibility of France appears mild. He points out that even the most irreconcilable groups of Frenchmen were organising no Pan-Gallic movements, that there was nothing in France to compare, for ambition and folly, with either the Pan-Slavs or the Pan-Germans.⁵⁵ He concludes:

... The fact is that the French, in August 1914, did not go to war for Alsace, but because the Germans lacking the political imagination and the diplomatic skill to keep France neutral, first presented an unacceptable ultimatum and then began to march on Paris ...

In 1914, the French entered the war because they had no alternative. The Germans had attacked them.⁵⁶

This is not entirely the situation described by Martin du Gard in I'Eté 1914. The minimising of Germany's role in the build-up to the outbreak of war and the maximising, even exaggerating of France's guilt, is not due to a question of anti-nationalism, or to a desire to share out equally the responsibilities between the different parties. It would seem that Martin du Gard's only aim was to write an indictment against war; perhaps he felt that this would have more power, more influence, in France, if portrayed from the home country's angle, rather than if he focussed on the enemy, which might have increased public bitterness and condemnation of Germany, but not

54. New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967

55. Ibid. pp. 142-3

56. Ibid. pp. 142-3

of war itself, the major issue. The instruction became, in a sense, more important to Martin du Gard, than the actual historical reality. There is also a failure to analyse all documentary evidence accurately, and to take certain documents and directly change their original significance. For example, Jacques cites an article, 19th July, on the front page of Le Matin, which is entitled "Si la guerre éclatait ...", in order to impress upon Antoine the imminence of war. (p. 142) In fact, the article was printed 20th July, but, more importantly, subtitled "Comment les milieux militaires de Saint-Petersbourg conçoivent le rôle de l'armée russe", and consequently giving a completely different meaning to the article.⁵⁷ In chapter LVIII Jacques is dissatisfied with the speakers at the Montrouge meeting, 30th July, and consequently speaks himself. L'Humanité 1st August, reports the meeting and confirms that four speakers filled the public with the horror of war. At the end of the meeting, apparently, all who had attended were convinced. Clearly, Martin du Gard again distorts the reality of the situation and shows the secretary trying to keep discipline according to the direction given by the "Comité central". (p. 490) There was no "Comité central", however, in the Socialist Party before 1914. In "L'Été 1914 de Roger Martin du Gard, Un Ouvrage d'histoire?", Becker suggests that Martin du Gard might be confused with the Communist party of his own day. Becker also claims that there are other minor areas in the novel, where Martin du Gard's scant knowledge of worker's movements in 1914 has resulted in passages clearly influenced by the political background at the time he was writing.⁵⁸ For example, Jacques speaks

57. In fact the article is not devoted to diplomatic tension whatsoever, but concentrates mainly on the visit of Poincaré and Viviani to Russia.

58. Op. cit. p. 231

of the joining together of several parties in all the "milieux de gauche".⁶⁰ Either he considers that only the workers' movement forms the "left", and, in this case, it is difficult to understand to which parties he refers as joining together; or, he is thinking of a socialist/radicalist union of parties, which was not historically true, for the radicalists participated in no political action against the war. Martin du Gard writes of the "organes de gauche" calling all pacifists to a meeting in the "Place de la République", 27th July 1914.⁶¹ L'Humanité was the major socialist left-wing newspaper but this did not carry the above message on Monday, 27th July 1914. He suggests that a liaison between the syndicalist movement and the Socialist party was very much a probability.⁶² In fact, at the time in question, 26th-27th July 1914, the Socialist party was extremely quiet. Indeed, surprised at its inactivity, Gustave Hervé wrote in La Guerre Sociale, 29th July 1914:

"Socialistes parisiens, dormez-vous?"

Martin du Gard's understanding of the "milieux de gauche", the "organes de gauche" and the syndicalist/socialist liaison, is more akin to events in 1935-6 than in 1914.

Martin du Gard is not only attempting to reconstruct the events of 1914 and their immediate effects (with obvious distortion and limitation) in L'Eté 1914, but in certain passages he clearly attempts an analysis of these same events in the light of the war itself and its aftermath. The character of "docteur" Philip is a case in point. In a conversation with Jacques in chapter XL, he not

60. pp. 200-201

61. p. 377

62. p. 376

only pours scorn on German socialism, shows grave doubt about whether the masses will rise to Jaurès' influence, but gives his own theory of modern war, an opinion which could be attributed, in retrospect, to the 1914-18 conflict. He asserts:

"Vue avec quelque recul, il n'y a pas une guerre moderne qui n'aurait pu être évitée, semble-t-il, très aisément: par le simple bon sens et la volonté pacifique de deux ou trois hommes d'Etat ... C'est par peur que, neuf fois sur dix, les peuples se jettent les uns sur les autres."(p. 344)

He continues, exploring his theory of fear, and concludes that Austria fears Serbia and a compromising of her prestige; Russia fears Germany and that onlookers will consider passivity as a sign of weakness; Germany fears a Russian invasion, France fears German weapons and Germany only arms herself out of fear. No country will make the slightest concession for fear of showing their fear. It would appear that the depth of understanding, here, has been acquired through hind-sight rather than contemporary observation. In an interview with Antoine before his mobilization, Philip warns of the danger of a long war which will weaken all nations.(p 595) He compares the situation to that of Oedipus:

"Nous de même ... Nos prophètes avaient tout prédit; on guettait le danger, et on le guettait bien du côté d'où il est venu, des Balkans, de l'Autriche, du tsarisme, du pangermanisme ... On était prévenu .. On veillait ... Et pourtant, la voilà: on n'a pas pu l'éviter! Pourquoi? ... Je tourne et retourne la question .. Pourquoi?"(p. 595)

Much more prophetic, however, is his comment about the outbreak of war signifying a new era in world history:

"Juillet 1914: quelque chose finit, dont nous étions; et quelque chose commence dont nous, les vieux, nous ne serons pas".(p. 596)

His pronouncement of the three most important things in his life, the third being the outbreak of war which he claims will poison his old age, again discusses issues and raises questions which were only commonly current after the war, not before it.(pp. 596-8) He offers the thought that pacifists, such as Jacques Thibault, might be the forerunners of the future and continues:

"Peut-être que cette guerre fatale, en déséquilibrant à fond notre vieux continent, prépare une floraison de pseudovérités nouvelles, que nous ne soupçonnons pas? ... Pourquoi non? Tous les pays d'Europe vont avoir à jeter dans ce brasier la totalité de leurs forces, aussi bien spirituelles que matérielles. C'est un phénomène sans précédent. Les conséquences sont imprévisibles ... Qui sait? Tous les éléments de la civilisation vont peut-être se trouver refondus, dans ce brasier! Les hommes ont encore tant d'expériences douloureuses à faire, avant le jour de la sagesse! ... Le jour où, pour organiser leur vie sur la planète, ils se contenteront, humblement, d'utiliser ce que la science leur a appris ..." (pp. 598-9)⁶³

In order for the drama of the situation to be brought out in full, which is clearly Martin du Gard's intention, it follows that certain characters must be aware fully of the events in order to emphasize all the more the messages to be gained. Realistically, few people had any idea of what was really happening until war broke out and it appears that Martin du Gard himself was not one of those few.

Finally, behind all these points lies Martin du Gard's aim of preventing a further war by either his reconstruction of the events of 1914 or his analysis of them, or both, and at the same time welding the entire narrative on to the earlier volumes of *Les*

63. Jenny, also, appears too conscious of the final significance of events see p. 371

Thibault whilst fusing the destinies of the individual characters with that of the whole of Europe.

Martin du Gard's basic attitude throughout his life was one of pessimistic humanism and, clearly, this was reinforced by the 1914-18 war. By the early 1930's, he could no longer view the First World War as a suspension, a parenthesis, for the European situation had become too ominous. It was becoming more apparent that a return to peace and stability was not going to be realized and that future conflict was imminent. In depicting the chain of events leading to the outbreak of war, Martin du Gard is trying to convince his readers of the horror and pointlessness of that war, indeed, any war. When one wishes to use history to teach a lesson, however, very often it is difficult to avoid fashioning the history to represent what one would have liked it to be. The fraudulent outline which Martin du Gard uses in L'Eté 1914 not only allows his fictitious characters to react to external forces and portray a moment of history as it was, but how it could, perhaps should, have been. The didactic tone throughout is, therefore, very evident. Writing with hind-sight, it is extremely difficult for Martin du Gard not to hide the ending from his characters, and more importantly, his readers. There is, perhaps inevitably, always an intrusion of the "climate of opinion" upon his objectivity. Seen in this light, the novel is history, but only in a second sense. The revolutionaries, he shows, are not the socialists of 1914 but more so the communists of the 1920's; Jacques' missions, the network of Moscow, seminating Europe with communist activity; the trade unions and the parties on the left, possibly the rise of the Popular Front. Denis Boak points out that no novel has as yet satisfactorily treated the totality of war, and that it was

too much to expect that Les Thibault, a vehicle not primarily intended for this purpose, could be successfully adapted to it. He believes that the political overtones of L'Eté 1914, and the pacifists' desire to prevent the outbreak of another war, merely made the effect worse.⁶⁴ He also asserts that readers open to influence on a rational level would scarcely be restricted to reading novels in their search for evidence, that, indeed, works of historical scholarship, presenting more or less the same case as Martin du Gard, had been in circulation for over a decade.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, it is only fair to praise its verisimilitude. L'Eté 1914 is above all a literary work in which historical facts are, for the most part, well integrated, or, where the fictional narrative is grafted on to historical events, with occasional presentation of historical characters. These characters, however, always remain unimportant, in the context of the novel, and are subordinated to their fictional counterparts. L'Eté 1914 is not a work of historical reference, but, historical events are, nonetheless, brought into the present, made "alive", through the fiction. The overall effect of the novel is a personalization of history, rendering it more intelligible for the average reader.

d) Romains: Le Drapeau Noir: Prélude à Verdun - An integration of the historical and the fictional

Jules Romains, pseudonym of Louis Henri Jean Farigoule,⁶⁶ was twenty-nine at the outbreak of war in 1914. He was mobilized as an auxiliary until 1915, when he was medically discharged and released

64. Roger Martin du Gard, op. cit. p. 195

65. Ibid. p. 161

66. He adopted the pseudonym in his teens and changed his name legally in 1953.

to teach at the Collège Rollin, Paris. What he saw and read of war shattered the carefree world of his youth which had already been devastated by his military service experience (1905-6), at Pithiviers, where he was disgusted at the absurdity of combat. Despite the limitations of his own direct military experience, he was determined, once the war had ended, to do his utmost to ensure that society would never again be subjected to such horror and became increasingly concerned, in the post-war years, to maintain peace. The 1930's was a decade of unparalleled activity for Romain, both literary and semi-political. He was particularly concerned about the suppression of the liberty of expression, the growth of Nazi Germany and the spectre of another European war. In 1933 Problèmes européens was published with the aim of improving Anglo/French understanding in the face of a resurgent Germany; Le Couple France-Allemagne (1934) envisaged a partnership between France and Germany. It follows that a significant part of Les Hommes de Bonne Volonté (twenty-eight volumes of prose fiction, expressing Romain's vision of the modern world and focussing upon the period October 1908-October 1933), should be devoted to the First World War. Volumes XV and XVI deal with events leading up to and including the battle of Verdun;⁶⁷ the final forty-six pages of volume XIV, Le Drapeau noir⁶⁸ and the first three pages of Prélude à Verdun cover the summer of 1914 and events preceding the outbreak of war. Despite the intrinsic interest of the events 1914-18, however, only a small proportion of Romain's work is devoted to the description of the outbreak of the First World War. It does not form an integral part of Le Drapeau Noir and is hardly

67. Volume XV Prélude à Verdun, Paris, Flammarion, 1938

Volume XVI Verdun, Paris, Flammarion, 1938

68. Paris, Flammarion, 1937

mentioned in Prélude à Verdun. In an article "Roger Martin du Gard",⁶⁹ Dorothy Bussy suggests that Les Hommes de Bonne Volonté is a deliberate challenge to Les Thibault in scope and bulk; despite the attention devoted to the First World War, however, there are few grounds for comparison. One of the major differences is the integration of real historical figures into the novel, who are not subordinate in any way, but who are placed in direct contact with fictional characters, and whose thoughts and views are directly expressed in the narrative. Denis Boak points out:

Real figures of course lend veracity to a fictional narrative, while serious discussion of European political history inevitably requires mention of actual statesmen. To this extent Les Hommes de Bonne Volonté is a historical novel, and Romain has no inhibitions about bringing actual figures to the fore.⁷⁰

The actual figures brought to the fore in Le Drapeau noir, during the summer of 1914, are Lenin, Jaurès and the Kaiser, Wilhelm II of Germany. Chapter XXIII, "Assassinat, Au loin d'un Archiduc", begins with the news of the Sarajevo incident and Lenin's reaction whilst journeying with friends from Zakopane to Peronin. He remains unconvinced that the assassination will lead to war between Austria and Serbia and believes that the great Powers of Europe, Russia, Germany, France, England are not yet ready for conflict. Well before arriving at Peronin, he has dismissed the event from his mind.

"Tenez!" dit-il sur le ton du jeu "je veux bien parier pour une date: 1917. Si je perds, je paierai le champagne, à Cracovie ... ou ailleurs".(p. 251)

69. New Statesman and Nation, 4th December, 1937, p. 917

70. Jules Romain, New York, Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974, p. 119

Jaurès enters the narrative as a result of a visit from Gurau, a fictional character, who is introduced in volume I as a left-wing politician and who has become minister of Public Works by the summer of 1914. Jaurès expresses grave concern but is determined that an atmosphere of calm should prevail:

"... ce qui dépend de nous, c'est de ne pas faire de résonance, c'est de "matelasser" tant que nous pouvons de tous les côtés où nous avons accès".(p. 256)

He promises to contact, as soon as possible, representatives from workers' organizations in France and colleagues overseas and also advises extreme caution with regard to Poincaré.(p. 256)⁷¹ He shows confidence in the German socialist movement and emphasizes the need for all sections of the "Internationale" to work together to avoid war.

".. une agitation générale, une colère des masses prolétariennes montant d'un peu partout ferait sûrement réfléchir ces messieurs dans leurs cabinets et leurs chancelleries ... Je ne vois pas actuellement de meilleure chance pour la paix".(p. 258)⁷²

Romains' style is analytical, befitting the public and political prominence of his historical characters. An audience gained by Maykosen, a fictional American political journalist, with Kaiser Wilhelm II, gives an opportunity for the German viewpoint to be expressed. The Kaiser approves of any Austrian action towards Serbia. Referring to Emperor Franz - Joseph, he says:

71. See also *L'Eté 1914* pp. 134-7 Jacques points out to Antoine, Poincaré's fear of Germany. "... il est persuadé que la force seule, en se faisant craindre, peut assurer la paix ..." pp. 136-7

72. See also pp. 273-4 where Jaurès promises a meeting of the "Internationale" at Brussels, 29th July and that he will continue to closely survey Poincaré and the situation in Russia.

"A sa place, frappé par ce deuil terrible, car c'est la dynastie qui est décapitée, je n'aurais pas la patience qu'il a! ... Il faut donner une leçon à la Serbie, et à toute cette racaille ... Il faut non seulement donner une bonne leçon à la Serbie, mais l'éliminer définitivement comme facteur politique ... Il faut laisser l'Autriche toute seule donner sévèrement la leçon. Elle travaillera pour la tranquillité de l'Europe. Cela ne se discute pas".(p. 265)

Romains writes in a lucid and sober fashion. The exclamations which accompany the Kaiser's angry outbursts are probably merited. A communiqué from Jules Cambon, French Ambassador at Berlin to Bienvenu-Martin, Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs in Paris, 24th July 1914, explained that Kaiser Wilhelm's impressionable nature must have been affected by the assassination of a prince whose guest he had been only a few days previously.⁷³ The Kaiser does not fear a European conflict resulting from such action. England, he believes, has no desire for war with Germany; France and Russia are insufficiently prepared, lacking in heavy artillery.⁷⁴ He concludes:

"Dans deux ou trois ans ils risqueront peut-être la partie. Mais maintenant? non".(p. 266)

The following day, Maykosen learns from a contact in the "Wilhelmstrasse", that the Imperial Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, is

73. See "The French Yellow Book", in Collected Diplomatic Documents relating to the outbreak of the European War, op. cit. p. 162

74. At the beginning of the war France had 3,793 cannon (75's) in comparison to Germany's 5,000 (77's); 300 pieces of heavy artillery (the 105 (1913), the 120 short (1890) the 120 long (1878), the 155 (1904)) in comparison to 2,000 heavy and 1,500 light pieces on the German side.

"La supériorité de l'armée allemande en artillerie moyenne et lourde est écrasante".

see E. Lavissee, Histoire de France Contemporaine, tome 9 "La Grande Guerre", Paris, Hachette, 1922, p. 157

Pierre Drieu la Rochelle writes in La Comédie de Charleroi, (Paris, Gallimard, 1934) "Nous n'étions pas prêts. Nous n'avions rien de ce qu'il fallait. Nous étions un foutu peuple. Tous ces députés, tous ces généraux. Les pantalons rouges et pas de canons. Et pas de mitrailleuses non plus". p. 16

in favour of immediate Austrian action, without necessarily informing Germany; and that Austria, still uncertain what action to take, is determined to act soon.

"Il n'y a qu'une chose sûre; ils veulent en finir avec la Serbie d'une manière ou de l'autre".(p. 271)

In other parts of the novel, Romans accurately describes the atmosphere of the summer of 1914. The reaction of Jallez, a fictional character, to the assassination of the Archduke Franz-Ferdinand, is typical of a large proportion of the population of France. Firstly, he has only vague ideas as to the identity and importance of the archduke, and secondly, although he senses that the event adds to the constantly deteriorating political situation in Europe, he recognizes that this has been in decline for some time with no visible adverse effects. He is, therefore, not unduly worried:

Cette nouvelle balkanique lui faisait l'effet du "poids sur l'estomac" dont parlent les bonnes gens. Mais depuis quelques années les hommes d'Europe avaient pris l'habitude de respirer, de marcher, de s'amuser, avec des poids de rechange sur l'estomac ...

Il profita donc de la journée qui était admirable ... Après le dîner, il resta très tard sur les quais pour voir interminablement s'évanouir, dans les eaux et dans le ciel, une lumière couleur de perle.(p. 251)

Romains allows a little imagery to describe the feelings of Jallez, a civilian figure, as the news of Sarajevo is described as pressing heavily upon his stomach like a weight. He uses the same image a second time when he stresses that, for several years, the politicians too have been used to carry around with them such heavy weights pressing on their stomachs. The weights are clearly representative of the ominous outcomes of a European conflict. The end of this

passage is almost poetic, as Jallez gazes into the water, then into the sky, acting as a total contrast with the oppression at the beginning. The excitement in the capital, as tension rises in the days preceding mobilization, is clearly conveyed. People can be heard singing the "Marseillaise", the "Chant du Départ", shouting "Vive la France!", "Vive l'Armée!", "A bas l'Autriche!", even, "Vive la Serbie!"; pictures of Joffre and other army generals can be seen posted to walls; there is the distinct feeling that support for Jaurès and the pacifist movement is declining.(pp. 275-6)⁷⁵ Romain describes the "Boulevards":

Il y régnait un compromis, encore discret, mais dont l'odeur montait à la tête, de dimanche d'été et d'émeute patriotique. Sur la chaussée, peu encombrée par les voitures, passait de temps en temps un petit cortège de jeunes gens avec un drapeau ... Quand ils rencontraient un soldat permissionnaire, ils lui faisaient une ovation. Ce n'était pas très grave; mais c'était sans précédent.(p. 275)

Again events are portrayed logically and clearly. Romain refuses unduly to dramatise the final hours leading up to mobilization. It is interesting that, like Chevallier, in La Peur, he too describes the atmosphere of Paris like that of a riot. The literariness of Chevallier's account, however, is not present here. Public response to mobilization is again described, with credibility, by Romain. In the opening lines of Chapter I, "La Victoire en Chantant", of Prélude à Verdun, Frenchmen leave their homes and families in unprecedented numbers for the front;(p. 5) for the most part, convinced that their country is engaged in a defensive war, and that the affair concerns them, personally. Romain points out that not everyone shared the

75. See also p. 278

same enthusiasm and confidence, but, that in general, soldiers went willingly to battle.

Tous ne jubilaient pas. Tous ne fleurissaient pas les wagons, ou ne les couvraient pas d'inscriptions gaillardes. Beaucoup ne regardaient pas sans arrière pensée les paysans qui, venus le long des voies, répondaient mal aux cris de bravade, et saluaient un peu trop gravement ces trains remplis d'hommes jeunes. Mais ils avaient en général bonne conscience.(p. 5)

This passage is reminiscent of the scene in L'Eté 1914 where Martin du Gard describes the departure of troops at the Gare du Nord. The sobriety of both accounts and lack of melodrama encourages more readily a feeling of pathos and sympathy in the reader. However, for many soldiers, the war provided not only an exciting challenge, but, an opportunity to fulfil one's duty as a citizen of France:

Les Français préféraient s'imaginer que, ce qu'ils avaient derrière eux, c'était l'humanité; qu'une fois de plus, voyant qu'elle ne pouvait sauver son destin qu'au prix d'une contestation sanglante, elle avait décidé de les choisir, eux, pour champions. Il leur fallait, bien entendu, sauver aussi le sol natal, et même profiter de la circonstance pour reprendre deux provinces naguère perdues. Mais le plus important était de prouver au monde qu'on restait les soldats de la Révolution ...(p. 6)

There is the feeling here that first of all France was going to war in order to respond to the aggression of Germany and defend her native soil; secondly, whilst so doing, to retake territory lost since 1870. The reference to "soldats de la Révolution" echoes the description of Odelle in Martin du Gard's, L'Eté 1914. Romain shows how, in the early days of August 1914, many looked forward to a life of adventure without the constraints of contemporary city existence; others imagined a carefree time with none of the mundane pressures and worries of everyday; few believed that the war would not have ended by Christmas.(p. 7) His use of "real" figures and his

reference to other politicians clearly strengthens the novel's claim to historical veracity. It appears that it is they who are expressing their own views and not simply the author's thoughts and opinions. And yet, paradoxically, as the novel's claim to veracity is strengthened, so too, is it weakened; the very fact that "real" characters interact with fictional counterparts, emphasizes the fraudulent outline in the narrative, seriously impairing the "realistic" effect. There are sections, also, where Romain finds it difficult to prevent the fact that he is writing with hindsight from entering into the plot. As the enthusiasm of the French nation grows upon learning of Austria's refusal to accept the Serbian response, Romain comments:

C'est ainsi que ce brave peuple, d'hommes assez mal vêtus, peu soigneux de leur personne et de taille plutôt courte, se préparait à entrer une fois de plus dans l'Histoire. (Le Drapeau Noir, p. 278)

These lines are not without dramatic technique. The use of the adjective "brave", the reference to the soldiers as "mal vêtus" and "peu soigneux", is intended to conjure up sympathy and admiration for those who head for the trenches. The use of the verb "se préparer" is ironic, as the troops had no choice in the matter. As for entering into History, this is complete exaggeration for effect, as no individual had any notion of the scope and duration of the struggle that lay ahead, indeed the majority of men were convinced that the conflict would have ended by Christmas 1914. Theatrical (even melodramatic) in parts, the entire final chapter is more an epitaph to France and her people than an accurate description of events leading up to 1st August and mobilization. Romain begins with a short description of Paris during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870.

He continues to stress the proximity of the city to the German border:

Ville frémissante. Ville qui n'avait jamais eu le temps d'oublier l'Histoire, la dernière Histoire. Ville dangereusement située. Quand le vent soufflait de l'Est ... il ne mettait que trois heures pour venir de chez l'ennemi; et il n'avait même pas à se donner le mal de faire du saut d'obstacles. La plaine était grande ouverte; la plaine disait: Entrez. Ville qui ne pouvait jamais dormir que d'un oeil.(p. 279)

Romains turns his attention away from Paris in order to consider the geographical situation of France. He concludes:

Elle aussi était mal placée pour la sécurité; mais fière de sa place, à cause de l'honneur.(p. 281)

He dwells, in particular, upon the word "honneur", and shows how, in the past, the pride of the French nation has been seen in all areas of the world.(pp. 282-3) From the Country he moves to the people of France, above all the hard working rural community whose love of the soil is synonymous with their devotion to the Nation. He praises their industry, their determination, their adaptability and their religion; he admires their talents.(pp. 284-292) He comments:

On ne s'étonnait plus que ces grands douteurs et amateurs de gauloiseries eussent fait les cathédrales et les Croisades; ni que ces casaniers et jouisseurs circonspects eussent consenti à tant de guerres lointaines pour les beaux yeux d'un roi ou d'un empereur; ni que ces promoteurs du patriotisme, du "Vive la Nation!" et de la manie de Monsieur Chauvin, se fussent proclamés presque dans les mêmes temps les soldats de la Paix universelle et les champions de la République Internationale ...(p. 292)

Romains' final pages emphasize the patriotic spirit of the French people, the love of their country and their deep-seated hatred of Germany:

Cette Europe, la leur, devenue mère ou tutrice de tous les peuples, source des pensées et des inventions, détentrice des plus hauts secrets, leur était moins précieuse ... que le plaisir d'humilier le voisin.(pp. 293-4)

The novel reaches its dramatic conclusion, with Jean Jerphanion, a fictional character, hearing the sound of the "tocsin", the symbol of mobilization, calling the people of France to war.(p. 294)

Clearly, Jules Romains' sober and lucid style of writing in the depiction of the events leading up to the outbreak of war, has a great deal in common with that of Martin du Gard. The rather melodramatic and figurative final pages of Le Drapeau Noir find their parallel in those which depict Jacques' dream and mission towards the end of L'Été 1914. The fundamental aims of Romains and Martin du Gard, however, are quite different. Romains could not possibly successfully portray the life of a generation of people without mention of the cataclysm directly affecting the life of every Frenchman during that period. The War, as the most cruel and tragic experience of the age, had naturally to occupy a major place in his overall portrayal of French society. At the same time, he wished by the very act of writing, to help to avert another war. It was not the events depicted in Le Drapeau Noir and in the opening pages of Prélude à Verdun that were designed to fulfil this desire, but the Verdun volumes as a whole (Prélude à Verdun and Verdun), both published in 1938, the year of Munich. Unlike Martin du Gard, Romains makes no effort to deal comprehensively with the events leading to the declaration of hostilities, (or the War itself - he only uses a single crucial episode - the battle of Verdun), but merely selects major issues which he then assigns to fictional as well as historical characters. The consequence of using both, side

by side, is a wide-ranging synthesis of events, alternating narration and reaction with reflection on the build-up to mobilization. Writing twenty years after the end of the war and with the completion of L'Eté 1914 the previous year, the use of historical characters in an active way, as opposed to Martin du Gard's passive use, is perhaps Romain's' unique contribution to the depiction in literature of the events of the summer of 1914. One final distinction from Martin du Gard is the more detached and reflective stance which Romain takes, whereas one senses Martin du Gard's passionate involvement in events almost on every page.

SECTION II

1914-18 TRENCH WARFARE AND MILITARY OBSESSION

CHAPTER V

The physical horrors: consequence and defiance

In this section it is our intention to examine responses to the suffering and carnage of trench warfare along the western front. In chapter V, we shall begin with a brief, historical reconstruction of the horrors, using secondary materials in the form of letters, diaries, memoirs, to substantiate these claims. In chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9, through the works of four writers we shall then investigate how these events were then translated and reproduced in novel form, both during and after the war years. The following novelists and their works will be studied: Henri Barbusse: Le Feu (1916), Clarté (1919); Georges Duhamel: Vie des martyrs (1917), Civilisation (1918); Roland Dorgelès: Les Croix de Bois (1919); and Gabriel Chevallier: La Peur (1930).

a) A historical reconstruction of the physical horrors of trench warfare

In section I we examined the reactions to the outbreak of war and the general enthusiasm with which the hostilities were welcomed. Newspaper reports throughout the opening weeks of August 1914 would appear to perpetuate and accentuate an atmosphere of success and contentment. The whole of the front page of L'Humanité, 9th August, was taken up with the title "Les Français à Mulhouse", following the

occupation of Mulhouse by the 7th Corps under general Bonneau two days earlier;¹ Le Matin, 13th August, reported success in Belgium:

La Belgique tient bon, l'armée d'invasion voit son offensive brisée et s'arrête, la cavalerie teutonne pratique surtout avec une grande maîtrise le demi-tour.

Three days later L'Echo de Paris reported: "Nouveaux et importants succès des troupes françaises" and L'Humanité, 18th August, "Les forces allemandes se retirent en désordre en abandonnant un énorme matériel". J.-J. Becker points out that, informed in such a manner, French public opinion was hardly prepared to support the reality of events.² This gradually filtered back to the population via soldiers' letters and the arrival of the first casualties.³ The title of one of the leading articles of Le Temps, 20th August, read "Savoir durer!" An article in the Revue des deux mondes, 1st September, acknowledged: "On s'attend à ce qu'elle [la guerre] soit longue et difficile". Becker writes:

... après avoir fait preuve d'un excès de confiance, l'opinion publique a été frappée de plein fouet par la révélation que la guerre n'était pas l'entreprise facile dont on s'était donné l'illusion.⁴

It was the battle of the Marne, however, 6th-13th September 1914, which proved that the rapid, decisive victory anticipated at

1. It was, in reality, of no great military value. Mulhouse was to fall to the enemy two days later, be occupied again and then finally abandoned, 24th August 1914

2. 1914: Comment les Français sont entrés dans la guerre, Paris, Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1977, p. 524

3. During the final week of August 1914, 1,500 wounded soldiers arrived in Vendée and 3,000 in Vichy. see Ibid. pp. 545-6. Blond puts the French losses for August and September 1914 at 329,000 men killed, lost and taken prisoner, more than 1/6th of France's total war losses. See La Marne, Paris, Presses de la Cité, 1962, p. 315

4. Op. cit. p. 558

the beginning of August was highly improbable. The neutralisation of offensives on both sides led to the construction of over 12,000 miles of trenches on the Allied side alone, of which 6,250 miles were occupied by French soldiers. Fussel writes:

When we add the trenches of the Central Powers, we arrive at a figure of about 25,000 miles, equal to a trench sufficient to circle the earth. Theoretically, it would have been possible to walk from Belgium to Switzerland entirely below ground ...⁵

The line of fortifications stretched from the North Sea coast of Belgium, southward, containing Ypres, Béthune, Arras and Albert, and continuing in front of Montidier, Compiègne, Soissons, Reims, Verdun, St. Mihiel and Nancy before joining the Swiss border at Beurnevisin, in Alsace. The Belgians held the top forty miles to the north of Ypres; the next ninety miles to the river Ancre were occupied by British troops; the French army held the rest, to the south.⁶ Blond writes:

Deux armées immenses se sont immobilisées l'une en face de l'autre. Le front est devenu un mur.⁷

Ferro acknowledges that Germany set the example with systems of trenches, saps, communication-trenches, dug-outs, listening-posts and that the French army was, indeed, slow to follow.⁸ Provisional constructions were strengthened with salients and re-entrants, needed to avoid enfilading; parapets and listening-posts were added, for observers; sand-bags in order to give protection from splinters;

5. The Great War and Modern Memory, New York and London, Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 37

6. See Fussel Ibid. p. 36

7. Verdun, Paris, Presses de la Cité, 1961, p. 28

8. The Great War 1914-18, London, Routledge and Kegan, 1973, p. 86

barbed wire in order to obstruct enemy attacks. As Blond points out, however, the quality varied from sector to sector:

Le mot de tranchées, des milliers de fois employé à propos de la première guerre mondiale, a désigné des excavations absolument différentes, depuis la véritable tranchée profonde de plus de deux mètres, aux parois bien verticales, au fond parfois recouvert d'un caillebotis, en certaines de ses parties couverte comme un abri, jusqu'au sillon tout juste appréciable dans la terre mêlée de débris humains. Même remarque pour l'abri, qui fut tantôt une vraie salle souterraine, tantôt une niche minuscule dans la paroi d'une tranchée ou d'un entonnoir, lieu d'asile précaire jusqu'à l'illusion.⁹

Trench-warfare had its own rules, rhythms and customs. Few soldiers escaped its vicissitudes. Lack of fresh water was prevalent and this especially created problems during the heat of the summer months. Thirst was one of the major preoccupations of men in the front lines. Many drank rain water which collected in shell holes,¹⁰ the badly wounded cried out incessantly for water to be brought to them:

Le blessé entendait les autres et il leur parlait, il les suppliait de venir lui donner à boire, une gorgée d'eau ... "A boire!" était le cri le plus fréquent. Des soldats de qui le bidon était plein passaient sans rien vouloir entendre à côté de ces blessés qui criaient: "A boire!", et ensuite: "Salauds, bande de vaches, fumiers!" On ne pouvait pas en vouloir à ceux qui refusaient. Ils savaient qu'ils avaient au moins une chance sur trois de se trouver bientôt à leur tour blessés, et souffrant de la soif. Et même si on n'était pas blessé, on restait souvent deux ou trois jours sans pouvoir emplir son bidon. Sur ce champ de bataille, la soif était la soeur de la mort.¹¹

The adversity of the winter months, alternating periods of extreme cold and sudden thaw, brought further discomfort. The 1916-17 winter in particular was the worst on record since 1894-5.

9. Verdun, op. cit. p. 23

10. see Blond Verdun ibid. p. 174

11. Ibid. p. 251

12. Verdun, ibid. p. 313

In Arras there were fifteen degrees of frost and inter-company football matches were played on the river near Sézanne, with the ice two feet thick in places. Blond writes:

En janvier 1917, le thermomètre descendit à moins vingt, les hommes devinrent des statues boueuses glacées presque sans vie cohabitant avec des cadavres congelés, et les chirurgiens militaires amputèrent d'innombrables pieds et mains, bras et jambes, gelés, gangrenés, inguérissables.¹²

He describes how the rain water, which collected in the trenches, would gradually freeze in the low temperatures and how it was not uncommon for sentries to stand on duty throughout the night and by the following morning be surrounded by a thin layer of ice.¹³ By mid-1917 Leon Wolff claims that half the terrain of Flanders was so badly flooded, due to constant rainfall, that "it resembled a natural lake".¹⁴ He explains that the ground in Flanders was almost pure fine-grained clay, sometimes with a crust of sand on top or a thin coating of loam. In certain places there was no topsoil at all. Because of the impervious clay, the rain could not escape and tended to stagnate over large areas. Unable to soak through, the ground remained perpetually saturated.¹⁵ Blond describes an incident on the 4th October 1916, when a colonel, inspecting the front lines, found French and German troops sitting on the parapets, the trenches full

13. Ibid. pp. 140-1

14. In Flanders Fields, London, Penguin, 1979, p. 286. (1st published Longmans Green and Co 1959)

15. Ibid. pp. 112-113

of water.¹⁶ The incessant rain created extreme problems in the frontal zone. Alistair Horne writes:

In the mud, which the shelling had now turned to a consistency of sticky butter, troops stumbled and fell repeatedly ... heavily laden men falling into the water-filled holes remained there until they drowned, unable to crawl up the greasy sides.¹⁷

Almost the entire visible and tangible world of the soldier along the western front was mud in various stages of solidity and concentration.

La poussière et la boue, voilà la guerre. Il n'y avait plus maintenant que des mots tout à fait réalistes, fantastiquement concrets. Les autres mots étaient démonétisés, incompréhensibles.¹⁸

Constant artillery fire created a featureless landscape of endless military rubble, shattered buildings and tree-stumps. It was pitted with shell-craters containing fetid water and the dead. The Germans employed a steel-cored bullet to pierce parapets and sand-bags; against air attack, luminous or incendiary bullets were used, since they could blow up gas-hulls and petrol tanks. "Minenwerfer" threw projectiles, vertically, weighing from fifty to a hundred kilogrammes

16. Verdun, op. cit. p. 295. "Pieds gelés" (trench-foot) was responsible for the second largest number of admissions to hospitals in France during the war. see A. Horne, The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916, p. 310 "Day after day the constant rain, freezing at night, was profoundly demoralising. A steady stream hobbled to the rear on frost-bitten feet ..."

17. The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916, London, Penguin, 1964, p. 187 (1st published Macmillan, 1962). In The Development of Modern France, London Hamilton, 1940, Brogan emphasizes the absurdity of Joffre expecting a "swift, irresistible blow", early 1915 from infantry stationed in water-logged trenches from which it was difficult to climb out. (p. 480).

18. G. Blond, Verdun, op. cit. p. 8. see E. Lavissee, Histoire de France Contemporaine, tome 9. (La Grande Guerre), Paris, Hachette, 1922, p. 150 "L'hiver passe, si rude dans les tranchées qu'il a fallu multiplier les relèves: sinistre cortège d'hommes changés en blocs de boue, et qui s'avancent par les boyaux, en file indienne, dans la nuit profonde, sous la pluie".

and dropping them very close - within one hundred to five hundred metres - to given targets. These mines were particularly dreaded, as they could destroy whole trenches.¹⁹ Blond points out that, at the beginning of the battle of Verdun, the German army was equipped with more than 800 cannon of which 540 were heavy pieces, and 152 trench mortars; that each enemy battery possessed 3,000 shells. In comparison the French had 270 cannon of which only 140 were heavy pieces and a grand total of 15,000 shells.²⁰ He describes the chaos of bombardment:

Plus rien n'existait qu'un monstre rugissant, hurlant, tonnant, partout répandu, qui crevait la terre, la soulevait, la fouillait, la déchirait, la jetait par morceaux énormes dans l'épaisseur de fumées suffocantes mêlées de poussière et de débris qui avaient remplacé l'air respirable. Constamment sans la moindre interruption, tombait du ciel jaune obscurci une pluie de fin du monde faite de terre, de branches, de pierres, de poutres, d'armes brisées, de morceaux de métal, de fragments d'étoffes et de débris de corps humains. Il n'était pas question d'un autre mouvement humain. Toute présence humaine se trouvait réduite à une terreur terrée.²¹

Blond emphasizes the extent of the bombardment on the morning of 21st February 1916. Trench lines in the Bois de Caures, de Ville, de Herbebois, d'Hautmont, du Cap de Bonne-Espérance sectors, were completely destroyed, the noise gradually became intolerable and the air poisoned by the gasses from the exploded shells. Horne speaks of a "gigantic forge that ceased neither day nor night".²² Between 21st February and 5th March 1916 over 7,900 soldiers were killed, 28,000 wounded and 33,000 missing.²³ In the trenches of the Herbebois sector one man per company was killed every five minutes.²⁴ Blond

19. see Ferro, op. cit. p. 87

20. Verdun op. cit. p. 60

21. Ibid. p. 55

22. The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916, op. cit. p. 186

23. Blond G. Verdun op. cit. p. 159

24. Ibid. p. 58

indicates the difficulty in assessing the full horror of shell-fire, even by those who have experienced it. Objectivity under such appallingly frightening conditions became most difficult to maintain. Lavissee writes of the closing exchanges of the battle:

Sur toute la surface du champ de bataille jusqu'aux arrières-lignes, une pluie de fer s'est abattue jour et nuit sans interruption. Des crêtes situées en arrière de Verdun, on voyait l'horizon entièrement recouvert par les explosions comme par les nuées d'un éternel orage ... Sous ces explosions continues, il n'y avait plus de tranchées.²⁵

The use of poisonous gas added to the horror of the situation. It was first used on 27th October, 1914 in the Neuve Chapelle sector, when the Germans fired 3,000 shrapnel shells containing a nose and eye irritant, with little effect. Solutions were so weak that it was not known they were actually used until Germany acknowledged the fact at the end of the war. On 31st January, 1915, in an attack in Poland, improved lachrymatory shells were fired by the enemy, but again the result was failure due to the nullifying effect of the intense cold. The first successful use of asphyxiating gas was at Langemarck on 22nd April 1915, by the Germans, during the First Battle of Ypres. Ferro points out that the effect was immediate and shattering but that the German army failed to exploit the situation, their own infantry fearing to occupy the area and there being no reserve force with gas-masks.²⁶ The French first used gas shells at Loos, September 1915. Chlorine gas had a powerful irritant effect on the respiratory organs and on the mucus membranes. The individual experienced spasms of the glottis, burning sensations in the eyes, nose and throat, and bronchitis and oedema of the lungs. Phosgene

25. *Histoire de France Contemporaine*, op. cit. p. 227

26. *Op. cit.* p. 88

shells had similar effects but were considered more dangerous because they were less perceptible. Low concentrations could be inhaled for a considerable time yet still prove fatal. The symptoms were shallow breathing and retching; a pulse of up to 120, an ashen face and a discharge of four pints of yellow liquid from the lungs each hour of the forty-eight hours which such spasms could last. In 1917 "ypérite", mustard gas (dichlorethyl sulphide) was introduced. The effects were not apparent for up to twelve hours. The gas attacked the bronchial tubes and stripped the mucus membrane; eyelids became swollen, red patches formed where the skin had been exposed developing into large blisters within 24 hours. In the more severe cases the skin became corroded and was actually burnt through to the bone. Georges Blond describes a gas attack in Verdun:

On avait mis nos masques, naturellement. On n'avait guère l'habitude, on se trouvait tous ridicules avec ces gros yeux et ces hures. Il y en a qui se sont mis à secouer la tête et même à faire la danse de l'ours. ... le temps passait, alors il y en a qui ont ôté leur masque, ou bien ils le soulevaient. Ceux-là ont commencé à tousser juste comme quatre types hurlants dégringolaient dans l'abri ... ils criaient comme des coqs enroués ... On les a étendus, mais il n'y avait pas grand-chose à faire pour eux, une mousse rosée sortait de leur bouche ... c'était terrible à voir, surtout pour ceux qui avaient commencé à tousser et qui ne pouvaient plus remettre leur masque.²⁷

Between 1st July 1915 and 11th November 1918, the French discharged thirteen million "75" gas shells, 4 million heavy gas shells and bombs, and 1,100,000 grenades. The aftermath of constant bombardment and gas attacks was utter devastation. Horne describes the battlefield as a "compound of brown, grey and black, where the only forms were shell holes".²⁸ John Ellis depicts conditions as

27. Op. cit. pp. 263-4

28. The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916, p. 186

nightmarish, "a physical and spiritual desert" which becomes "... more featureless with every passing day".²⁹ Blond writes:

On dirait une planète morte, calcinée, fumante encore ... Les bois sont des rassemblements, plus ou moins denses, plus ou moins étendus, de fagots verticaux; certains, des cimetières de poteaux noircis espacés.³⁰

He describes the dramatic change of the Verdun battlefield seen in a series of aerial pictures taken firstly in August then September 1916. Those of the village of Fleury before the shelling show a confluence of roads and streets; those of the same area during and after bombardement differ enormously:

... puis des ruines très distinctes; puis une sorte de radiographie d'organe malade, puis une pâleur incertaine, enfin plus rien, l'identification complète avec le sol environnant, avec ce sol non plus lunaire, mais aplati, martelé, métaphysique, comme certaines toiles abstraites exprimant une totale misère de l'âme.³¹

For the soldiers - bombarded, machine-gunned, gassed, knowing neither where to go nor what to do - their entire existence in the trench lines became debased. The decadence of the battlefield with its featureless uniformity and manifestations of destruction, depersonalized the men who occupied the trenches. Blond describes them as "pourriture ardemment disputée";³² he shows how battle fatigue changed their physical expressions,³³ how many troops continued to persevere with habits of the past, even though they were no longer relevant or necessary (checking their wallet, for example), in order to make sure that they still existed as a human being and

29. Eye-Deep in Hell, New York, Pantheon, 1976, p. 5

30. Verdun, op. cit. p. 81

31. Ibid. p. 292

32. Ibid. p. 15

33. Ibid. p. 118

had not been transformed entirely into an object.³⁴ Clearly the constant contact with the wounded and dead had a serious demoralizing effect on all soldiers. Horne writes that the misery of the men at the casualty clearing stations almost surpassed description.³⁵ He tells of casualties arriving for treatment, their wounds often frozen by the intense cold, men hideously mutilated by German shells and shrapnel, yet never having seen the enemy. He describes one clearing station at Bras, where the seriously wounded lay in their hundreds outside the building awaiting evacuation, and exposed to the incessant enemy shell fire. Impassable roads, precision shelling by the German "380's", meant that it took the all-too-few motor ambulances many hours to cover a few miles and consequently immediate evacuation of the badly wounded was not always possible. To cope with these mutilations on such a massive scale, the French medical services were severely ill-equipped. The French Medical Service in 1914 was inferior to both Britain and Germany, and had been prepared for a short war. Horne writes that "their miscalculation possibly cost France an army corps of men; for, with wounds impregnated by dirt and debris from the explosion of shells, hideous "gas gangrene" became the single largest mortality factor among the wounded".³⁶ He points out that an effective cure was not discovered until a few weeks before the Armistice and that during the April fighting at Verdun on the Right bank, one French regiment had 32 officers wounded of whom 19 subsequently died, the majority from gas gangrene.³⁷

34. Ibid. p. 176

35. The Price of Glory Verdun 1916 p. 113 Horne claims that at Verdun a casualty would have been fortunate to have received any treatment within 24 hours, that during the height of the battle, July 1916, many of the wounded were kept in the vaults of Fort Souville for over six days before they could be evacuated. see p. 196

36. Ibid. p. 74

37. Ibid. p. 198

There were never sufficient surgeons or ambulances, few drugs and often a lack of chloroform with which to perform the endless amputations. The surgery itself was often crude and equipment inadequate. Many stations overflowed with badly wounded soldiers, some of whom had been waiting for treatment for several days. Lack of facilities and the length of time that many casualties had to wait, meant that quite minor wounds often became fatal. Insanitary railway cattle-trucks, which were used to transport many of the wounded back to hospitals in the rear, resulted in the contraction of fatal tetanus by troops. Even in these hospitals the mortality rate was high. In an attempt to reduce the infection of head wounds, Joffre issued an order, during the early part of 1916, banning beards. There was little improvement in the casualty figures. Between 21st February and the end of June 1916, 23,000 French soldiers had died in hospitals as a result of wounds received at Verdun alone.³⁸ By the end of the war, of the three Western Powers, France had the highest ratio of deaths to wounded: 850,000 soldiers killed in action and a further 420,000 who had died of their wounds or sickness.³⁹ Georges Blond explains how the expression "poste de secours" was often an administrative title, that in reality, often it consisted of nothing more than a doctor working in a shell hole with a table and stretcher. He continues:

Les brancards des blessés s'y touchaient; parfois étaient superposés le long des parois; au centre juste la place pour le major et son aide, et la table. Les blouses des deux hommes étaient rouges comme des vêtements de boucher; la viande humaine douloureusement posée devant eux était bien plus sale que celle que découpent les bouchers et souvent on n'avait pas le temps de vider au-dehors les

38. Ibid. p. 198

39. Ibid. p. 75

pansements maculés jetés à terre qui finissaient par former un épais tapis ...⁴⁰

He describes graphically the horrific wounds to the flesh caused by shrapnel and bullets:

... les blessés le ventre ouvert retenant à deux mains leurs intestins, les os broyés déchirant la chair, les artères pissant le sang ... les cervelles à nu sous le pansement ... les deux poignets coupés ... les orbites vidées, les poitrines trouées, les peaux de visage pendant en drapeau, les visages sans mâchoire inférieure, toute cette abomination de la guerre ...⁴¹

The lack of morphine, poor lighting and insanitary conditions, gave rise to much disease. Blond points out that the "bonne blessure" desired by many soldiers often led to death due to infection. The squalid life of the trenches encouraged lice and rats which multiplied rapidly under such conditions. Blond describes the mortally wounded left outside the clearing-stations to die:

Les rats énormes, vigoureux et hardis, de plus en plus nombreux, véritables vainqueurs de la bataille ..., trouvaient que les cadavres entreposés à trente pas de là dans la grange du château ne leur suffisaient pas et ils s'attaquaient aux agonisants dès qu'on ne les surveillait pas. Les infirmiers les chassaient à coups de bâton.⁴²

The daily inoculation of horror and casualties, however, gradually rendered men immune and indifferent to the suffering of others. Obsessed by their own misery, they became conditioned to the pain around them which manifested itself in a morbid acceptance of the mutilation of the dead, and an apathetic, almost callous rejection of the wounded. Blond describes the wounded who remain in no man's

40. Verdun, op. cit. p. 260

41. Ibid. p. 260

42. Ibid. p. 262

land, whom the stretcher bearers fail to reach due to intense bombardment:

Un blessé agonisait dans un trou d'obus à dix pas d'un autre où se trouvaient des hommes bien vivants qui ne pouvaient pas lui porter secours, des mitrailleuses tirant sur tout ce qui bougeait. Le blessé .. les suppliait de venir lui donner à boire ... ou encore il les suppliait de venir l'achever. Le blessé suppliait pendant des heures, appelant ces hommes l'un après l'autre, chacun par son nom, car il les avait entendus parler entre eux. Et ces hommes finissaient par se boucher les oreilles en souhaitant de toutes leurs forces que ce type-là crève enfin.⁴³

There was a similar absence of attention to the dead. Blond describes the towns and surrounding areas of Iverny and Penchard at the beginning of September 1914. Corpses are to be seen everywhere.⁴⁴ He speaks of the advance of the 324th infantry regiment along the trenches at Hautmont, February 1916, where the ground was literally covered with the dead and where troops were forced to march on bodies as they moved into forward positions.⁴⁵ He estimates that of the half million German and French dead at Verdun, 150,000 soldiers, at least, never received a proper burial and that in many instances, due to incessant bombardment, they were simply absorbed by the earth where they had fallen.⁴⁶ Horne points out that many gullies were dubbed "La Ravine de la Mort" by the French troops; that compressed areas of the battlefield became open cemeteries where corpses were quartered and re-quartered by German shell-fire or where those that had been buried were disinterred then reinterred.⁴⁷ In these circumstances the stench of putrefaction became intolerable. Blond writes of:

43. Ibid. p. 251

44. La Marne, op. cit. p. 159

45. Verdun, op. cit. p. 100

46. Ibid. p. 292

47. The Price of Glory Verdun 1914 pp. 187-8

L'odeur qui vous sépare du monde vivant, celle à laquelle aucun nez d'homme ou d'animal jamais ne pourra s'habituer.⁴⁸

Later he continues:

Le thème, le leitmotiv de tous les témoignages de combattants sur le caractère du champ de bataille ... s'exprime en un mot: putréfaction ...

L'odeur de charogne, mais nous la portons sur nous. Tout ce que nous touchons, le pain que nous mangeons, l'eau boueuse que nous buvons, sentent la pourriture. C'est que la terre aux alentours est littéralement truffée de cadavres.⁴⁹

b) A historical reconstruction of the consequences and of the defiance of such conditions

In the History of the First World War, Liddell Hart writes that "the issue of battles is usually decided in the minds of the opposing commanders, not in the bodies of their men".⁵⁰ As the war continued, however, it became increasingly doubtful whether operations were being managed competently, in view of the high losses, and whether, indeed, the price of victory merited the appalling casualty lists. Ferro questions the humanity and ability of the military leaders. He claims that a lack of scientific inquiry, an ignorance of technical factors, a disregard of the relationships existing in any period between the art of war and the state of technical knowledge and an unconcern for industrial capacity, were the characteristic features of such men.⁵¹ Brogan points out that although the French soldier might and did obey the most fantastic orders, nevertheless, he was under no illusions about their absurdity.⁵² He emphasizes the fact that staff officers, who made important decisions well behind the

48. Verdun op. cit. p. 229

49. Ibid. p. 292

50. London, Faber and Faber, 1934. (Edition used: Cassell, 1970 p. 111)

51. The Great War 1914-18, op. cit. p. 97

52. The Development of Modern France op. cit. p. 483

main line, acquired more and more the reputation of theoreticians, "spinning their fine theories in safety and comfort and leaving their impossible execution to the fighting troops".⁵³ The philosophy of "L'attaque à outrance", as it became known, was firmly established throughout the French Army in 1914. It had its origins in Colonel de Grandmaison, Chief of the "Troisième Bureau" (operations) of the General Staff. His excessive and extravagant beliefs took no consideration of the intentions of the enemy, total confidence was placed in the bayonet as the supreme means of imposing authority over the enemy and gaining victory. The rigid dogma asserted that should the enemy seize the initiative, all terrain should be defended to the death, and, if lost, regained by an immediate counter-attack, however inopportune. Enforced by threat of court martial and disgrace, tactical initiative among French army commanders was severely stifled during the early years of the war. Many were distracted from manoeuvres that consisted of withdrawing a few kilometres in order to lure the enemy out of position and lead him to fall disorganized under a counter-offensive. Horne points out that even Foch, France's leading military intellect, followed the de Grandmaison line and that the few leaders, like Pétain, who acknowledged the horrific consequences of "attaque à outrance", especially if unsupported by heavy, accurate, artillery fire, were refused promotions, when merited.⁵⁴ Machine guns and heavy cannon, however, were deemed contrary to the Grandmaison spirit. The strength of the French Army was seen in the lightness of its guns.⁵⁵ Joffre, who had been

53. Ibid. p. 484

54. The Price of Glory Verdun 1916, op. cit. p. 20

55. see Horne p. 23 The whole French Army possessed only 300 heavy guns in 1914, the Germans had 3,500. The French heavies were mostly elderly 120 millimetre guns built in the 1880's, with no recuperation

elevated to chief of the French general staff in 1911, was conscious of this weakness but failed to secure in time the funds necessary for a new artillery. This defect of equipment was matched by defects of tactical training. Military tacticians denied or minimized the fact that a man standing still or seated fired more rapidly and more accurately than a man advancing on foot. They argued that troops could be trained to stand losses in their advance and that the power of the offensive would compensate for preliminary losses once the enemy lines had been reached. The bayonet would redress the balance of the rifle. The doctrine took no account of recent improvements in equipment, the magazine rifle, the effective machine-gun, the quickfiring field-gun and smokeless powder. It was highly unrealistic in 1914. French leaders also refused to believe that the German Army could make good soldiers out of reservists. Reconciled to the fact that their own reserve divisions were not at the level of their active divisions, Joffre and his staff failed to acknowledge the threat of a complete enemy army corps composed of reserve troops and were unaware that entirely new formations, the "ersatz" units, had been created. During the opening weeks of the war repeated reports of an enemy army in force were disregarded. Instead, the French General Staff went ahead with the disastrous Plan XVII, which directed 800,000 men towards the Rhine with the objective of destroying the German advance in its initial stages. Joffre's erroneous belief that no enemy reserve corps were available, that the strength of the German right indicated weakness in the centre and

system so that they had to run out up a ramp; they were outclassed in every way by the German 210's and 150's. For "super-heavy" artillery, the French had to make do with a few 270 mm. mortars dating back to 1875, while the Germans had brand new 280's that could fire a shell weighing nearly 750lbs over a distance of six miles.

that the left would easily be matched by the British and Belgian army, was to prove the first of many fatal mistakes. The allied attack was delivered against an enemy, not only strong enough to withstand it and with enough extra strength to develop its own plan of campaign almost undisturbed, but in excellent defensive positions and much better equipped for warfare in the Ardennes and on the Meuse. By 25th August the Allied armies were in rapid retreat from an enemy greatly superior in numbers; De Castelnau's Second Army, which was to have led the advance to the Rhine, retreated to Nancy almost in a rout; the élite XX Corps commanded by Foch was severely affected; the British Expeditionary Force and the remaining French armies were driven back to the Marne. 300,000 French soldiers had been killed and wounded.⁵⁶ By the winter of 1914, after the battle of the Marne and the first battle of Ypres, France had lost 300,000 killed and a further 600,000 soldiers wounded, captured, and missing.⁵⁷ Blond writes critically of Joffre, Foch and the French General Staff in La Marne. Of Joffre and his staff, he quotes from Winston Churchill in writing:

C'est le général Joffre et ses officiers ... qui sont responsables de l'affreuse et incommensurable erreur commise dans l'évaluation de presque tous les facteurs qui entraient en jeu au début de la guerre.⁵⁸

He describes the indifference and inhumanity of the army commanders:

... les généraux voyaient distinctement manoeuvrer des divisions entières, compagnie par compagnie, et des vagues d'assaut s'avancer - si lentement, à cette distance! - vers des positions allemandes encore intactes ...

56. see Brogan op. cit. p. 470

57. see Horne op. cit. p. 27

58. Op. cit. p. 48

L'odeur des cadavres en train de griller dans les ruines de Montceaux n'arrivait pas jusqu'aux narines des généraux, ni à leurs oreilles les cris, les gémissements et les râles des Français et des Allemands en train de se battre comme des dogues ...⁵⁹

He criticizes the reluctance of officers to issue orders to dig and defend, but, instead, to persist with the outdated theory of attack, even against enemy machine-gun fire:

... parce qu'on leur avait appris que le seul mode honorable d'action pour l'infanterie était la charge au clairon.⁶⁰

Of Foch, Blond describes the devotion to the offensive and points out:

Il devait lui-même, commandant du 20^e corps à la déclaration de guerre, goûter les fruits amers de la doctrine de l'offensive à outrance.⁶¹

As early as December 1914, General de Maud'huy had insisted that only a commanding superiority in artillery could give any hope of success for the infantry attack. Even Foch, although optimistic to the point of fanaticism, recognized that the Allied armies did not dispose of the necessary means of imposing their will on the enemy and breaking through the opposing lines in one great assault. Nevertheless, Joffre remained inflexible in his vision of a single brief battle. Four months of futile attacks throughout the winter and spring of 1914-15 cost the 4th Army alone 400,000 troops;⁶² during the whole of 1914 Joffre pursued the wasteful strategy of "grignotage", and a series of major battles took place, each one aimed at a breakthrough. Eighteen divisions under Foch attacked in Artois in May 1915.

59. Ibid. p. 186

60. Ibid p. 242

61. Ibid. p. 194

62. see Brogan op. cit. p. 480

After the French had lost 102,500, more than twice as many as the defenders, the offensive was abandoned.⁶³ In September 1915, Joffre attacked in Artois and the Champagne, encouraging the British to make their first major effort of the war at Loos. Despite the protest of Haig, Commander of the British 1st Army, that his supply of artillery and shells was too inadequate to make plans for an offensive, Joffre insisted that a successful breakthrough would be the signal for a general offensive of all the French and British Armies along the Western front which would compel the Germans to retreat beyond the Meuse and possibly end the war. His unquenchable optimism, however, was totally unrelated to the conditions of modern warfare. Liddell Hart writes:

Never, surely, were "novice" divisions thrown into a vital stroke in a more difficult or absurd manner, and in an atmosphere of greater misconception of the situation in all quarters.⁶⁴

French casualties were 191,797 to 141,000, the British lost 50,380 to the German's 20,000.⁶⁵ Assaults failed largely due to the lack of heavy guns and ammunition. Horne points out that at Arras, Pétain had been limited to 400 shells on a twelve-mile front and that many of the hastily manufactured shells burst in the French instead of in the German lines. Shells from the 75's fell short of the enemy trenches, consequently attacking soldiers were mown down by untouched machine gun posts.⁶⁶ There were other astonishing and fatal mistakes made by Joffre's General Staff during 1915. During the battle of Second Ypres, 22nd April 1915, the British lost 59,000 men, twice as

63. see Horne op. cit. p. 33

64. The History of the First World War, op. cit. p. 265

65. see Horne op. cit. p. 33

66. Ibid. pp. 33-4

many as the Germans who attacked them, as a result of a gas attack of which the French had been made aware as early as the end of March 1915. German prisoners had spoken of gas cylinders stored in trenches and of the method of discharge, but French commanders, who then held the salient, took no action regarding the warning. Curiously, details of the warning did appear in the Bulletin of the French Tenth Army, in Picardy, for 30th March, and when a German deserter gave himself up on 13th April to the French 11th Division, at Langemarck, relating that cylinders with asphyxiating gas had been placed in batteries of 20 cylinders for every 40 metres along the front, the French Divisional Commander, General Ferry warned his Corps Commander, Balfourier, and other nearby Divisions. Balfourier ignored Ferry's advice and a liaison officer from Joffre's H.Q. dismissed the information as a myth. Other Commanders did not think the warning worth passing on to their troops who waited in ignorance until suffocation overtook them. Foch's supreme confidence in an immediate counter attack resulted in a further 60,000 lives lost. Liddel Hart claims that the battle of Second Ypres was one of "pure manslaughter", for which the commanders in charge ought to have been held accountable.⁶⁷ Brogan points out that by the end of 1915 France had suffered two million casualties, of whom 600,000 were dead. In a period a little less than that during which the United States was a belligerent, France had lost seven times as many men as the United States, out of a population a little over a third as great.⁶⁸ Joffre did make serious efforts to study the reasons of the failure of each vain battle, but, both Brogan and Horne stress his reluctance to

67. The History of the First World War, op. cit. p. 254

68. The Development of Modern France, op. cit. p. 482

leave his H.Q. at Chantilly. Horne writes that he could not bear to have his tranquillity upset by confrontation with the actual horrors of war. He continues:

In all his lengthy memoirs there is not one mention of the human element, not one word about the dreadful suffering of his soldiers ... so many First War generals, overwhelmed by the size of the forces suddenly placed under their command, tended to regard casualties as merely figures on a Quarter-master's return; and in Joffre, the engineer, the technician, this dismal characteristic was particularly accentuated.⁶⁹

Horne also emphasizes the fact that Joffre had little experience in commanding a large body of infantry and was not a first-rate strategist or tactician.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, at the Chantilly conference of the Allied Commanders, 5th December 1915, Joffre emphasized the commendable aspects of the autumn offensives in Champagne and Artois and again supported an offensive on the lines of a broad frontal attack "bras dessus bras dessous", when sufficient ammunition was available. Before this materialized, however, came the German attack on Verdun in February 1916. Six months previously, Colonel Emile Driant predicted that the enemy offensive would be launched on the line Verdun-Nancy in a letter to his friend Paul Deschanel, President of the Chamber of Deputies. He also stressed the shortage of workers and barbed wire in order to make certain that the fortress at Verdun remained impregnable, and, in the case of the French first line being penetrated, the complete inadequacies of the second line of defence. The contents of the letter eventually reached Galli ni, Minister of Defence, and an Army delegation, sent to Verdun in December 1915, confirmed Driant's remarks. Joffre, humiliated at Driant's

69. The Price of Glory Verdun 1916, op. cit. pp.30-1

70. Ibid. p. 28

intervention, completely underestimated the danger, and ignored suggestions that the Verdun defences were inadequate. On the first day, alone, 80,000 shells fell in the Bois d'Haumont sector, a rectangle of approximately 140 metres by 280 metres;⁷¹ two days later at Samogneux, confusion and alarm at General Bapst's H.Q. resulted in a routine order for the recapture of the area, despite the fact that the garrison and village were still being held by French troops. General Herr, unknowingly, ordered the French artillery assembled behind Fort Vacherauville to concentrate its fire on the supposedly enemy-held position. The results were horrific. The 72nd and 51st Divisions lost 332 officers and 15,892 men between them, out of an establishment of 26,523.⁷² On the 23rd February, the 37th Division arrived at Verdun and within thirty-six hours had lost over 4,700 of 12,300 complement. By the end of March 1916, 89,000 French soldiers had been killed. During May 1916, 10,000 French soldiers died in the fighting over the vital Côte 304 sector. By the end of the month, the casualty totals had mounted to 185,000 overall in the French army. When the bid to take Verdun finally came to an end, on the 15th July 1916, the French had lost over 275,000 soldiers and 6,563 officers. Over 120,000 of the French casualties had been sustained in the last two months alone.⁷³ The conflict continued, however, until December 1916. France's Official War History sets her losses at Verdun during the ten months at 377,231, of which 162,308 were killed or missing or

71. see Horne p. 87

72. see Horne pp. 110-111. Horne quotes General Percin that faulty communication and poor artillery liaison occurred with regularity throughout the First World War. He estimated that 75,000 French troops alone had been 'mown down' by their own artillery during the course of the war. See footnote p. 110

73. see Horne, pp. 114, 176-7, 183, 211, 298

taken prisoner.⁷⁴ In The First World War: An Illustrated History,

A. J. P. Taylor writes:

Verdun was the most senseless episode in a war not distinguished for sense anywhere.⁷⁵

Georges Blond claims:

Cette forme monstrueuse de la guerre dont les historiens parlent placidement, que nous nommons sans penser à la réalité - guerre d'usure - avait fini par trouver, devant Verdun, une sorte de justification épouvantable.⁷⁶

The horror of the Somme offensive 1st July 1916 with limited participation by the French Army due to Verdun, nevertheless, resulted in a further 200,000 French casualties. A. J. P. Taylor writes:

Idealism perished on the Somme. The enthusiastic volunteers were enthusiastic no longer. They had lost faith in their cause, in their leaders, in everything except loyalty to their fighting comrades. The war ceased to have a purpose. It went on for its own sake, as a contest in endurance

He goes on to say that:

The Somme set the picture by which future generations saw the First World War: brave, helpless soldiers; blundering obstinate generals; nothing achieved.⁷⁷

Blond emphasizes the absurdity of the situation during the latter months of 1916:

Il était maintenant bien évident qu'aucun des deux adversaires ne pouvaient vraiment écraser l'autre, lui faire mordre la poussière ... et cependant quel gouvernement oserait, après avoir mille fois

74. Quoted by Horne see p. 327

75. London, Hamilton, 1963, p. 94

76. Verdun, op. cit. p. 273

77. Op. cit. p. 105

répété: "Jusqu'au bout!" proposer ou simplement accepter la paix? Cela aurait été reconnaître l'immense absurdité de la tuerie, aveu dangereux.⁷⁸

Clearly the war had lost its way. There was now a marked change of tone to Gallieni's original rallying cry of "jusqu'au bout". On 3rd September 1914, with the Germans advancing on Paris and the exodus of the government to Bordeaux, Gallieni had proclaimed his support for Paris "to the end".⁷⁹ The label was to remain. Béranger, in the obituary for Gallieni, wrote:

Quel Français oublierait sa déclaration comme Ministre de la Guerre en décembre 1915, déclaration que le Sénat fit afficher sur tous les murs de France: "Il y a deux ans la France voulait la paix: aujourd'hui la France veut la guerre et elle la poussera jusqu'au bout".

Jusqu'au bout! C'est le seul testament que Gallieni laisse à la France.⁸⁰

The slogan appeared as an encouraging newspaper headline in the Paris-Midi, 27th January 1915 and the 17th December 1915,⁸¹ and "Jusqu'au bout!" also became the title of the monthly bulletin of the "Association fraternelle des anciens combattants de la Marne (6^e Armée)". After Verdun and the Somme, however, "jusqu'au boutisme" had taken on a different meaning. On 23rd September 1916, Almereyda wrote in Le Bonnet Rouge:

La paix allemande? ... jamais!

Mais le jusqu'au boutisme aveugle qui, sans certitude de victoire totale, interdit à nos gouvernements d'abréger le cauchemar, jamais non plus!...

78. Verdun, op. cit. p. 290

79. "J'ai reçu le mandat de défendre Paris contre l'envahisseur. Ce mandat, je le remplirai jusqu'au bout". see C. Slater, Defeatists and their enemies, London, Oxford University Press, 1981

80. Published in Paris-Midi 28th May 1916

81. "Tous ensemble jusqu'au bout" and "Jusqu'au bout pour l'écrasement du Boche et la victoire de l'Indépendance!"

La Gazette des Ardennes, 19th November 1916 spoke of "les lunettes de l'illusion jusqu'au boutiste" which the politicians and army commanders wore, and which far from the originally positive and optimistic overtones, now implied a more obsessive and sinister determination to see things through to the end. This outlook was epitomized by General Robert Nivelle, who, with the "promotion" of Joffre to Marshall of France 27th December 1916, became Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies along the western front. Horne describes Nivelle as "an out-and-out Grandmaisonite", who, like Foch, believed that victory was purely a matter of moral force. He writes:

His ambition was as boundless as his self-confidence. When it came to casualty lists among the infantry he commanded, he combined the blind eye of an artilleryman with the unshakable belief that so long as the end was success the means mattered not.⁸²

Nivelle was optimistic that a Spring Offensive launched against the Chemin des Dames sector would end the war in one swift blow. Victory was promised within forty-eight hours or the attack would be stopped. What is most astonishing, however, is Nivelle's extreme carelessness about such a vital operation. A written plan had been sent to the British Foreign Office, had been retyped and distributed to at least ten individuals in England, copies of the Order of Battle had been circulated to front-line officers as low as company level, the general outline of the plan even appeared in the French Press. On 3rd March a French sergeant was captured by the Germans in a trench raid at Maisons de Champagne and found to have information concerning the attack on his person. On 4th April another surprise raid near Sapigneul on the 5th Army front captured a Zouave sergeant-major and

82. The Price of Glory Verdun 1916, op. cit. p. 227

a document giving details of the whole 5th Army Order of Battle and objectives. The enemy prepared accordingly for the impending attack. The nine divisions stationed in the sector were increased to 40 and a new system of barbed wire, machine-guns, trenches and concrete strong-points established. The Germans then retreated from their positions on the exposed salient to stronger zones as far back as a hundred kilometres, laying waste the villages and countryside as they retreated. Despite full knowledge of the enemy's manoeuvres, Nivelle remained inflexible and refused to modify his original plan in any fundamental way. Leon Wolff writes:

The incredulity of Pétain, Haig, Robertson, Painlevé, and even his own generals only spurred Nivelle on to a greater frenzy of optimism and activity.⁸³

The French offensive began on 16th April 1917, a date too late to give any change of surprise. Postponements had meant a prolongation of the artillery preparation with a consequent weakening in intensity; the weather was vile which made transport extremely difficult. Wolff points out that once again the French infantry were faced with the bleak prospect of advancing almost helplessly against well prepared and intact German field and machine-guns.⁸⁴ At the end of the second day Nivelle had penetrated a mere two miles and lost 120,000 men. Wolff writes:

The troops felt that they had been betrayed by callous generals, that the preparations had been slipshod, that they had been sent forward on a gamble to almost certain doom.⁸⁵

83. In Flanders Fields, London, Penguin, 1979, p. 87 (1st published Longmans Green & Co, 1959).

84. Ibid. p. 92

85. Ibid. p. 93. see J. Williams, Mutiny 1917, London, Heinemann, 1962, pp. 36-7, 46, 53. Williams writes of inadequate creeping barrage, non-existent artillery liaison, preliminary bombardment

Refusing to resign, Nivelle was removed from command 28th April 1917 and Pétain succeeded him as chief of the General Staff, 15th May 1917. Frustration and disillusionment following Nivelle's too optimistic victory assurances,⁸⁶ together with the demoralizing casualties, however, had exhausted the morale and courage of the French Army in general. As early as August 1914 isolated cases of discontentment, war-weariness, had been acknowledged in the 49th Brigade under the command of General d'Infreville, in the 7th Division under General Trentinian and the 8th Division under General de Lartigue;⁸⁶ communication no. 8820/5, 21st June 1915, from Joffre to all army commanding generals, warned of self-inflicted wounds and of the methods, employed by some soldiers, of preventing wounds from healing by covering the affected areas with bandage impregnated with a powdered substance; Pedroncini points out that between 1914 and 1917 the "Service Historique de l'Armée", Les Armées Françaises dans la Grande Guerre, (tome V, vol. 2, p. 194), assesses 15,745 desertions, on average per year;⁸⁷ and a report by General Franchet d'Esperey, 10th June 1917, to Pétain, pointed out the fact that the bravest and finest soldiers of the French armies had been killed either before or during the battles of Verdun and the Somme. He writes:

L'infanterie compte maintenant dans ses rangs un grand nombre de récupérés ... fort mécontents de risquer leur peau à leur tour.⁸⁸

which left barbed wire and concrete bunkers undestroyed, appalling tank losses and conditions at the 5th Army's main evacuation centre for the wounded reminiscent of the blackest days of the Crimea.

86. see G. Pedroncini, Les Mutineries de 1917, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1967, pp. 21, 22, 23

87. Ibid. footnote 1 p. 25

88. Cited by Pedroncini in Les Mutineries de 1917, op. cit. p. 26

By April 1917, however, events had reached a crisis point. Troops were weary of attacking barbed wire defences and machine-gun emplacements, to no apparent effect, and of the dreadful losses suffered. Pedroncini claims that the futility of such attacks and the infantryman's fear of being called on to resume offensive operations that had been so badly handled by the high command, was one of the major causes of the French mutinies that spread throughout the Army in 1917.⁸⁹ There were other grievances: the soldier had to suffer hardships at a time when many civilians were making huge profits in a way unknown to a frugal country before 1914; food and drink supplies were monotonous and of poor quality; accommodation behind the lines during rest periods was often wretched and leave irregular and hopelessly in arrears. Williams points out that active-service men were sometimes going without leave for twelve months or more⁹⁰ and Pedroncini affirms that the 32nd Regiment of the 18th Division protested against "la manière dont les hommes sont jetés constamment sans repos dans des opérations offensives"⁹¹ and that the 18th Regiment of the 36th Division mutinied due to "les permissions insuffisantes".⁹² In addition to these worries, a stealthy flow of subversive propaganda was reaching the front lines. Thoumin writes:

"Depuis plus d'un an, des tracts, des brochures, journaux pacifistes parviennent aux armées. Il en sévit maintenant une

89. Ibid. pp. 106-7 see p. 138 Pedroncini claims that the 82nd Brigade rebelled against their commander General Bulot due to his strict discipline and "Des pertes considérables pour des attaques sans grand succès ..." see also pp. 125-6, 140

90. Mutiny 1917, op. cit. p. 10

91. Les Mutineries de 1917, op. cit. p. 108. Mutinies in the 41st Division began also due to lack of rest. see p. 142

92. Ibid. p. 113

véritable épidémie. On en arrête plus en quinze jours qu'on n'en saisisait en trois mois en 1916.

Ils apportent le doute, quant à la justice de la cause pour laquelle les soldats se battent. Ils font l'apologie de l'Allemagne, affirment l'impossibilité de la victoire et prétendent que la paix seule résoudra les problèmes du charbon et de la vie chère".⁹³

The low ebb of the troops rendered them ideal targets for pacifist, revolutionary propaganda.⁹⁴ Newspapers such as L'Humanité, Le Bonnet Rouge, Le Journal du Peuple, Le Populaire du Centre, exercised a disastrous influence over the Army as a whole.⁹⁵ Hervé wrote in La Victoire, 24th June 1917:

Il est incroyable que le gouvernement en pleine guerre ... laisse se faire, ouvertement ou jésuitiquement, une propagande pacifiste qui, en pareil moment, constitue une véritable trahison au profit du Kaiser.

At the end of June 1917 the "Chambre" introduced a bill to curb pacifist propaganda which was bitterly disputed by Le Bonnet Rouge and La Tranchée Républicaine who claimed that the press was already heavily censored and that the uncalled-for severity was merely a pretext enabling the Right to lay hands on its political opponents. On 17th July 1917, Goldsky wrote in La Tranchée Républicaine:

Il n'y a pas de défaitistes chez nous. Tous nous voulons que cette guerre voie le triomphe de la France.⁹⁶

The news of the Russian Revolution of March, with its promises of peace, and the growing internal discontent added to the soldiers'

93. La Grande Guerre (troisième époque 1917-18), Paris, Julliard, 1960, p. 40

94. Pedroncini discusses the matter thoroughly in Les Mutineries de 1917, chapter III "Le G. Q. G. et la Propagande Pacifiste", op. cit. pp. 36-52. see also pp. 270-1

95. see J. Williams, Mutiny 1917, pp. 102-103, 107

96. For a fuller discussion of the many journalistic quarrels that broke out, see C. Slater, Defeatists and their enemies, op. cit. pp. 81-84

anxieties. On the 14th May 1917, Duval, financial director of Le Bonnet Rouge was arrested with a cheque in his possession for 158,000 Swiss francs, traceable to a bank in Mannheim; on the 13th July Le Bonnet Rouge was suspended for good when military documents were found in the paper's offices. Almereyda was arrested and a month later found mysteriously strangled in prison. Léon Daudet, (1868-1942) amassed impressive files on all the "défaitistes" implicated in the affair and concluded they were carrying out their work with the financial support of Malvy, Minister of the Interior. He was accused openly of treason in the Senate by Clemenceau, 22nd July 1917, and resigned the following month. Frustration amongst the civilian population manifested itself in the form of strikes and protest marches. Though there had been strikes between 1914 and 1917, these had been neither widespread nor significant.⁹⁷ In January 1917, however, major stoppages began in the clothing industry in Paris and in several factories doing war work: Panhard-Levassor, Vedorelli, Priestley, Malicet and Blin. Working-class discontent was acerbated by the rise in prices during the spring of 1917, particularly at the end of May, when the failure of the Chemin-des-Dames offensive dispelled hopes of a quick peace.⁹⁸ On May Day, 1917, 10,000 members of the building workers' unions took strike action; the movement quickly spread through the clothing industry, civil service and by the beginning of June to establishments making such defence equipment as helmets and gas masks, and to munition factories proper, particularly in the aviation sector. Becker estimates that

97. see Ferro op. cit. p. 178. In 1915 there were 98 strikes involving 9,000 strikers. In 1916, 314 strikes involving 41,000 strikers. 1917 however saw 697 strikes with 294,000 strikers.

98. see J.-J. Becker, Les Français dans la Grande Guerre, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1980, p. 207

altogether 71 industries were affected and the number of strikers in the Paris region rose to 100,000.⁹⁹ Unrest rapidly spread throughout the country. There was a profound change in what had been, until then, a massively patriotic and confident attitude. On 10th June a telegram from the Minister of the Interior to all prefects asked them to report on morale and social unrest in their departments. By the end of June 1917 only three departments, Pas-de-Calais, Eure-et-Loire and Sarthe, were thought to contain a good level of morale throughout.¹⁰⁰ Civilian morale had inevitable repercussions on that of the army.¹⁰¹

Pedroncini claims that the first serious outbreak of indiscipline broke out in the 20th Regiment and the 33rd Division, 29th April 1917, although there are reports of soldiers abandoning their posts as early as the 16th and 17th April.¹⁰² He estimates that although the crisis had passed by 23rd October 1917, according to Pétain's La crise morale et militaire,¹⁰³ isolated incidents continued until January 1918. The worst region affected was the sector of the Nivelle offensive, from Soissons to Aubérive. 250 cases of collective insubordination among combat troops, although never while in the line of fire, are recorded by Pedroncini, affecting units in half the infantry divisions, on various dates, although each case involved small groups of men only, often less than

99. Ibid. p. 210

100. Ibid. see pp. 228-30

101. Ibid. see chapter 15 "La Crise de Morale" pp. 217-218

102. Les Mutineries de 1917, op. cit. p. 58

103. Paris, Les Nouvelles Editions Latines, p. 145

a hundred.¹⁰⁴ The mutinies were in most places peaceable enough.

Pedroncini writes:

Les formes de l'indiscipline, considérées dans leur ensemble, apparaissent comme une protestation plus que comme une contestation.¹⁰⁵

They lasted from a few hours to a maximum of one or two days,

"Comme une crise de colère, de fatigue ou de désespoir, qui soulage et que l'on regrette".¹⁰⁶

Wolff points out that in general the mutinies took place only when the troops were ordered back into the front lines.¹⁰⁷ Williams estimates that 2,625 soldiers deserted to or in face of the enemy during 1917, as against an average of 1,437 and that desertions to the rear were 27,579 compared with an average of 15,745.¹⁰⁸ Pedroncini's research indicates that about 40,000 soldiers were involved in all,¹⁰⁹ of whom 689 were originally condemned to death, resulting in 43 official executions.¹¹⁰ He points out, however, that a good third of the army was not at all contaminated by acts of insubordination.¹¹¹

104. see Les Mutineries de 1917 p. 62. Pedroncini claims there were 191 cases in 121 different infantry regiments,; 37 cases in 23 battallions of "chasseurs"; 12 cases in 7 artillery regiments; 9 cases in 7 colonial infantry regiments; and 1 case in a territorial infantry regiment.

105. Ibid. p. 179

106. Ibid. p. 178

107. In Flanders Field, op. cit. p. 94 see Pedroncini "La Crise d'Indiscipline" op. cit. pp. 57-172 and Williams chapters 6-13 for a full discussion on the types of collective insubordination.

108. Mutiny 1917 op. cit. p. 241

109. Les Mutineries de 1917 op. cit. p. 308

110. Ibid. see pp. 194 and 212. Wolf puts the final figure of executions at 23 (In Flanders Fields p. 96); Williams at 35 (Mutiny 1917 p. 241); Ferro claims 554 death sentences were issued and 49 executions carried out (The Great War p. 184)

111. Ibid. p. 309

Pétain, Nivelle's successor as Commander-in-Chief toured the whole line, restoring confidence between officers and men. The leave allowances of all troops were greatly improved. Pétain deemed each soldier should have seven days of leave every four months. Rest in reserve zones was equally as important. Every unit leaving the front line was to be assured of a three to four day rest period, well away from the battle zone, with comfortable lodgings and reasonable food provided in order that the soldiers could recover as fully and as quickly as possible from their combat fatigue. Rest zones were completely reorganized with mattresses, sleeping-bags, cooking facilities, showers, washrooms, laundry facilities, stoves and such necessary comforts, all provided. Every effort was made to improve the quality and variety of food supplied to the troops, and the excessive consumption of wine was halted and then carefully moderated as a precautionary measure. Pétain was conscious that the army's identity had received a moral and psychological blow; subordinates needed to feel of use to their superior officers and confident that they would no longer be sacrificed in futile offensives. When Pétain had finished his visit of the trenches, he had spoken to over a hundred divisions and for the first time the average soldier felt that he had a leader interested not only in victory but in the lives of his countrymen at the front. A new system of citations was introduced and a new shoulder-braid added to the "Légion d'honneur", reserved for those with 6 military commendations, in order to reward and recognize bravery and acts of heroism. Concerned about the insufficient measures taken to reduce pacifist propaganda, Pétain first approached Malvy, then Painlevé and finally even the President of the Republic, pointing out that the Press should not be a source

of pessimism and discouragement but of perseverance and enthusiasm.¹¹² The French recovery, however, was slow, and for the remainder of 1917 the British had to bear the heaviest burden of the campaign. Brogan writes:

The Army rapidly convalesced but it was not fit for violent activity.¹¹³

It carried out a few limited, inexpensive but highly successful operations, (including one which finally dislodged the Germans from the "Mort Homme"), designed by Pétain to complete the restoration of morale, to restore faith and to show that offensives need not all be costly and futile. Nevertheless, as Horne points out, for all Pétain achieved as "le Médécin de l'Armée", the French Army would not be the same for the rest of the war; never again would it be able to repeat the stubborn heroism it had shown at Verdun in February 1916.¹¹⁴ The impression of defiance in the soldier towards those whom he should have considered his leaders and guides, would remain for many years.

The problem of literary expression now remained for those who decided to translate their feelings and experience into words. The physical horrors of trench warfare were so unbelievable and ghastly that it became immediately almost impossible to find appropriate words with which to describe them. The difficulty was to employ adequate vocabulary which would convey the pain and suffering, without exaggeration and ornateness. There was also the moral dichotomy of the indecency, on one hand, of using such deplorable experiences as literary subject matter and, on the other hand, of

112. Ibid. see part III, chapter II "Méthodes de guérison" pp. 232-278

113. The Development of Modern France, op. cit. p. 499

114. The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916, op. cit. p. 324

failing directly to acknowledge this hideous inhumanity, of failing to demonstrate indignation and abhorrence of the folly of those in high-command who dictated patterns of war with little regard for the sacrifice of life and ever-increasing casualty lists, despite the inadequacies of language. Cruickshank points out that "Flawed immediacy can be more valuable testimony than flawless but detached reconstruction."¹¹⁵ This would suggest that those who witnessed at first hand and who then wrote down their thoughts and reactions in the form of letters, diaries, memoirs, perhaps provide a valuable starting point by the immediacy and alleged authenticity which they offer.

c) Physical horrors: letters, memoirs and diaries

In his general introduction to *Témoins*,¹¹⁶ Jean Norton-Cru states quite strongly that the experiences of trench life can never be translated successfully by anyone other than him who has encountered them at first hand. In particular he warns against historical documentation:-

On croit que les histoires générales, les histoires militaires, les études stratégiques nous donnent des guerres de l'antiquité, du moyen âge, des temps modernes, de l'époque contemporaine, une image qui rivalise d'exactitude avec l'histoire politique, sociale, économique, intellectuelle ou artistique de ces mêmes périodes. C'est là une illusion, aussi tenace que dangereuse.

A historian works, for the most part in the abstract, relying upon his intellect and powers of analysis and synthesis, in order to portray a moment of history. He is, to a large extent, free to interpret how he would wish. The direct witness, however, works with

115. *Variations on Catastrophe*, op. cit. p. 43

116. Paris, Les Etincelles, 1929, p. 1

concrete fact; and although this invites a more subjective approach, Norton Cru would have us believe that the memory of the individual acts as a restraint upon the creativity of his mind, consequently producing a more accurate image overall. He writes:

Si quelqu'un connaît la guerre, c'est le poilu, du soldat au capitaine; ce que nous voyions, ce que nous vivons, est; ce qui contredit notre expérience, n'est pas ... (p. 14)

He concludes that no worthwhile record of events can be produced without being directly inspired by those who have seen for themselves. It must be said that life in the trenches was tragic, and that writers attempting such descriptions had to avoid deliberate sallies of the imagination resulting in over emotional and superficial accounts. Francis Grierson wrote, shortly after the end of the war:

We love the illusions that flatter our poor memories and our ignorance of historical records. We love to magnify the truth and create new romances out of the old occurrences arriving under fresh guises.

We love to read history as we read novels of adventure and then forget.¹¹⁷

Nevertheless, the 'poilu' knew of only one aspect of the war, the reality of his own trench life existence; yet war is not a single entity. Whilst we should acknowledge Norton-Cru's viewpoint, we must be careful not to adopt a too narrow stance. A survey of soldiers' memoirs, letters, diaries, show there were others, however, who shared his views. In 1917 Gaston de Pawlowski reflected:

117. Illusions and Realities of the War, London, John Lane, 1918, p. 105

L'histoire militaire n'est qu'un tissu de fictions et de légendes elle n'est qu'une forme de l'invention et la réalité est pour bien peu de chose dans l'affaire!¹¹⁸

In the same year Georges Bonnet wrote in L'âme du soldat:

Si nous combattons la légende c'est qu'elle nous paraît à la fois inutile et dangereuse.¹¹⁹

In 1919, Marcel Fourier wrote:

Ah, comme toujours, ceux qui n'ont pas vu, comment peuvent-ils juger?¹²⁰

In the same year Meunier claimed in L'Angoisse de Verdun:

La guerre seule parle bien de la guerre.¹²¹

Georges Kimpflin respected the narrowness of soldiers' testimonies but argued that this very narrowness was in itself a source of precision:

Le combattant a des vues courtes ... mais parce que ses vues sont étroites, elles sont précises; parce qu'elles sont bornées, elles sont nettes. Il ne voit pas grand'chose, mais il voit bien ce qu'il voit. Parce que ses yeux et non ceux des autres le renseignent, il voit ce qui est.¹²²

What all these writers fail to point out, however, is the difficulty in transcribing the visual; words are not direct "témoins de l'histoire". Indeed, they are frequently less expressive and vivid than the gesture, the sight, the feeling, the smell, the sound. They may be arcane, in that the understanding of them is limited to those

118. Dans les rides du front, Paris, La Renaissance du Livre, 1917, p. 61

119. Paris, Payot, 1917, p. 70

120. Avec les chars d'assaut, Paris, Hachette, 1919, p. 117

121. Paris, Hachette, 1919, p. 127

122. Le premier souffle, Paris, Perrin, 1920, pp. 13-14

who share their specific meaning; they may directly include some people yet immediately exclude others. André Maillet wrote in Sous le fouet du destin: histoire d'une âme aux jours héroïques 1915-16 that soldiers would never find "les termes capables d'évoquer dans toute leur poignante réalité, les heures que nous vivons ..." ¹²³

Maillet goes on to suggest that perhaps only music could reconstruct, in a truthful and meaningful way, the atmosphere of war (p. 214), an idea shared by Malherbe in La Flamme au poing:

Le langage secret et passionné de la musique ... pourrait bien traduire seul ... la grandeur obscure des sacrifices de nos combattants et tout le violent spectacle qui hante nos regards. ¹²⁴

Nevertheless, this powerlessness of expression did not discourage many of those who experienced trench warfare from writing. In La Boue des Flandres, Max Deauville acknowledges that the horror of the war was beyond the capacity of one individual to describe; he subsequently refers to all writers as "artisans du mensonge", emphasizing the difficulty of communication when using, what he refers to as, "le moule rigide des mots". ¹²⁵ However, this does not dissuade him from recording his memories as faithfully as possible. He writes:

Songeons à l'image du passé avec franchise. Songeons à celle que nous évoquons dans l'esprit de ceux qui nous écoutent. Songeons

123. Paris, Perrin, 1920, p. 213 see also L'abbé J.-M. Bourceret Sur les routes du front de Meuse, Paris, Perrin, 1917, p. 188.

"En écrivant ces lignes, je suis encore sous le coup de l'émotion qui m'envahit alors et me cloua sur place ... Il faut avoir passé par ces épreuves pour se rendre compte de ce qu'elles peuvent être: les récits qu'on en fait n'en donnent qu'une très lointaine idée, car il n'y a pas de mots dans la langue humaine capables de les traduire avec la saisissante exactitude de la réalité".

124. Paris, Albin Michel, 1917, p. 130

125. Brussels, Maurice Lamertin, 1922

à la laide mélancolie qui fut notre partage. Rappelons-nous la misère, la peur qui nous a secoués ... Et même s'il faut qu'un jour pour sauver un pays ou l'honneur, de nouveaux soldats prennent les armes, pourquoi leur mentir, pourquoi faire miroiter devant leurs yeux le mirage de la gloire et de l'héroïsme? (BDF pp. 123-4)

Ducasse, Meyer and Perreux point out that the French public was, however, very much ignorant of the early manoeuvres of August 1914, of the failure of "plan XVII", and that not until the third week of August were their first anxieties aroused, when Joffre telegraphed the War Ministry that a war of attrition would have to be endured and an official communiqué announced to the country: "situation inchangée de la Somme aux Vosges ..."

La Somme, alors que tout le monde nous croyait en Belgique!¹²⁶

Sergeant J. Ducasse of the 107th Angoulême infantry, killed in action 1st May 1915, writes in his Carnet de Route,¹²⁷ 6th September 1914, of the discouragement and dismay of troops during the Marne retreat and R. Jubert confesses his unpreparedness for the hardship of trench warfare and his amazement at the realities of war:

Je l'imaginai sous un autre aspect, et comme la pensée populaire la voit ... J'imaginai le rôle magnifique du fantassin, l'héroïsme en action tous les jours, l'âpre joie du combat, le risque auquel on se prétend supérieur et qu'on veut maîtriser, le premier rôle brillant ... les charges héroïques, la vie colorée des uniformes ... J'ai bien changé d'esprit.¹²⁸

Jacques Roujon describes similar disappointment in his Carnet de Route (August 1914-January 1915), contrasting the enthusiasm of the early volunteers with the horrors of life in the trenches.¹²⁹

126. Vie et Mort des Français 1914-18, Paris, Hachette, 1962, p. 41

127. cited in Vie et Mort des Français 1914-18, *ibid.* p. 48

128. Verdun, Paris, Payot, 1918, pp. 169-70

129. Paris, Plon-Nourrit, 1916, p. 33

Ducasse, Meyer and Perreux emphasize the vulnerability of the soldier during the first winter of the war:

Nos hommes manquaient de tout. Avec leurs ongles, autant qu'avec l'outil individuel ... ils creusèrent des trous, baptisés "secteurs", protégés d'abord par un simple fil de fer tendu, auquel on accrochait des bouteilles et des boîtes de conserve, comme appareils de résonance. On dormait dans des niches de glaise, des flaques de boue et de neige; on montait la garde sans tricot, sans passe-montagne, enveloppé dans une vieille couverture ...(V et M p. 60)

In particular, they dwell on the mud and the cold, against which the soldiers battled constantly:

Entre les "coups durs", les soldats passaient le plus clair de leurs jours à écopier l'eau, à remblayer les parois toujours glissantes, à s'abriter de la pluie par des toiles de tente, bientôt alourdies sous son poids. Souvent les hommes enfonçaient jusqu'aux genoux dans cette colle. Pour sortir leurs pieds de "la mélasse", l'effort faisait un bruit de coup de canon.(V et M p. 78)

Ducasse's diary entry for Wednesday, 9th September 1914, describes the horrors of sleepless nights in the rain and mud of Flanders. Seated or standing, the pain is equal. The hours appear interminable:

On a beau se nouer un mouchoir autour du cou, l'eau coule en petites rigoles, le long du dos ... Je cherche à protéger mes cartouchières et la culasse de mon fusil ... Je tends l'oreille aux bruits d'en face: rien que le vent et la pluie ... Certains de mes hommes parviennent à ronfler; d'autres geignent, comme des enfants. Je rêve à des draps impossibles, à ma chambre au-dessus du jardin ... Cette nuit est longue à finir.(cited in V et M p. 51)

Mairet, in Carnet d'un combattant, (11th February 1915-16th April 1917), writes of his equal fear of shell fire and water;¹³⁰ Galtier-Boissière describes the Souchez plateau during the second winter of the war as:

130. Paris, Crès, 1919, p. 34

... une mer en furie; c'est véritablement le CHAOS, l'image de la terre après le déluge.¹³¹

Marc Boasson, who was killed in the 1918 offensive but whose chronicle of war-experience, Au Soir du monde, was not published until 1926, recalls the vivid memory of marching columns of soldiers covered in mud and wet due to the incessant rain:

De voir ces statues de boue ... ces yeux dilatés ... ces exténueements, ces agonies en marche, une colère saisit les plus calmes. Quelle honte! Voilà donc ce que l'on peut faire avec des hommes ... Rien, rien jamais ne s'est vu d'aussi abominable. Ce n'est pas de l'héroïsme, ça. C'est de l'ignominie.¹³²

The humiliation and degradation to which the troops were subjected in the front lines is described by Pézard in Nous autres à Vauquois as he remembers the trenches in front of the village church. The scene is one of confusion and neglect:

Partout des pierres qui se désagrègent; des boîtes de conserves tordues qui luisent; des piquets qui branlent dans leur alvéole, la tête fendue et rouie par les coups de mailloche impuissants; des franges et des cascades de loques de zinc, friables comme du linge brûlé par la lessive; des calottes métalliques ... minces ferrailles rouillées et cabossées, au creux desquelles dorment deux ou trois pieux croisés ... des rouleaux de fil de fer tout rouges d'oxyde, des fusils cassés et tordus, des poignées de baïonnettes avec un tronçon de lame, des chargeurs allemands, des outils brisés, des rails, des rondins, des planches, des claies effondrées de travers sous la ruine des talus...¹³³

Amongst such wastage, writes Péricard, "une odeur infecte nous prend à la gorge".¹³⁴ The unhealthiness of the soldiers, who rarely washed and changed their socks, who never changed their clothes for long periods of time, whose hygiene and sanitary habits deteriorated

131. En rase Campagne, Un Hiver à Souchez, 1915-16, Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1917, p. 271

132. Au soir d'un monde, Paris, Plon, 1926, p. 127

133. Paris, La Renaissance du Livre, 1918, p. 131

134. Ceux de Verdun cited in Vie et Mort des Français 1914-18, *ibid.* p. 47

constantly, encouraged the presence of rats and pestilence. Ducasse, Meyer and Perreux write:

Au second rang des calamités venaient les rats et les poux, multipliés par ... l'abondance des déchets de paille dans les abris, où l'odeur "d'aigre et d'urine" était indicible, et des détruits répandus un peu partout. (V et M p. 78)

In Carnets d'un Fantassin, Delvert claims that it was impossible, at times, to rest in the trenches, even during a lull in the fighting, due to the discomfort caused by flies and lice, in particular. On one page in his diary, he notes that he has not managed to sleep for seventy-two hours.¹³⁵ Lintier complains of the constant noise of artillery and machine-gun fire:

Dormir! dormir!, et surtout ne plus entendre le canon. Vivre sans penser, dans un silence absolu. Vivre après avoir tant de fois failli mourir.¹³⁶

The effect of lack of rest is described by Max Deauville in Jusqu'à l'Yser:

L'anéantissement est si grand que tout apparaît comme dans un rêve. Le sommeil et la douleur, la faim, se confondent. L'esprit ne désire plus rien, ni la halte, ni le repos. Nous irons comme des automates jusqu'à ce que nous tombions.¹³⁷

Jacques Meyer claims that hours of endless waiting and inactivity accentuated the fatigue amongst troops. In La Biffe, ten years after the end of the war, Meyer writes:

Journée lente, lourde, terrible de monotonie et d'appréhensions. Le soleil de midi tape ferme et accentue encore la torpeur. Des moments de sommeil, j'ignore de quelle durée. Mes compagnons m'offrent du pain et du singe; comme il abonde, je

135. Paris, Albin Michel, p. 288

136. Ma Pièce, Paris, Plon, 1916, p. 277

137. Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1917, p. 85

l'accepte pour ménager mes rares provisions et mange à même la boîte.¹³⁸

Cazin shares a similar thought in L'Humaniste à la Guerre. Hauts de Meuse 1915 when he laments the loneliness of life in the trenches, the incertitude of surrounding activity, the desire to make an active contribution to the war effort:

Je serai au comble de la joie quand on avancera et que je verrai du pays.¹³⁹

Long hours of enemy bombardment increased the feeling of captivity and vulnerability of the soldier in the front trench lines. Ducasse, Meyer and Perreux describe how constant shell fire had a bewildering and frightening effect:

... on tend le dos sous l'orage d'acier, en attendant, sans oser l'espérer, qu'il cesse, que la batterie qui vous a "encadré" de ses quatre coups trop longs, puis trop courts, ne va pas réussir à "vous prendre en fourchette" et régler son tir sur votre coin, centre du monde. Retranchés dans un cimetière, comme il arrive parfois, les explosions risquent de vous assommer d'une croix de pierre ou d'une planche de cercueil et font mourir les morts une deuxième fois. (V et M p. 107)

Paul Lintier describes how the noise and unpredictability of bombardment gradually stripped away man's dignity, filled him with so much fear and doubt, that he began to envisage his own death and his own corpse left behind on the battlefield.¹⁴⁰ L'abbé P. Dubrulle expresses a similar idea in Mon régiment dans la fournaise de Verdun et dans la bataille de la Somme, where he writes about soldiers having the idea that certain shells were clearly designed to kill them personally:

138. Paris, Albin Michel, 1928, p. 57

139. Paris, Plon, 1920, p. 52

140. Ma Pièce op. cit. pp. 75-6

Oh! alors, quelle horreur, lorsqu'on entend poindre dans le lointain le souffle ténu, lent, et que subitement l'on perçoit les nuances spéciales de l'obus personnel, l'accélération extrêmement rapide, le crescendo brutal du sifflement. Alors, l'on est crispé depuis la pointe des cheveux jusqu'à la plante des pieds, et l'on attend dans une sorte d'agonie ... le coup suprême ... l'on est submergé d'une horreur intense ... c'est la chair qui se cabre devant le traitement infligé, c'est réceptivité, mais c'est surtout l'horreur du néant - je ne saurais dire autrement - de la dislocation.¹⁴¹

Schmitz writes of the intensity of the experience, describing how each passing minute merely retards one's death by another sixty seconds, rendering it even more imminent as the accuracy of the gunners increases:

On a la sensation que le cerveau bouillonne. Tout devient point fixe, motif à des raisonnements qu'on ébauche et qu'on n'achève pas; sujet de déductions qui convergent toutes au même centre nerveux, mais qui elles aussi s'arrêtent en chemin, sous la formidable pression de la minute actuelle et de ses angoisses sans cesse renouvelées. Les peines intellectuelles et morales de l'Enfer ... doivent être dans ce goût.¹⁴²

Pézard comments on the artificiality of the situation which resembles nothing that the soldiers have ever experienced in their lives previously. Powerless to react, unable to escape, it is almost as if they are in a state of limbo until the shelling has finished.

Nous ne faisons rien ici; au milieu d'un désordre inguérissable, nous attendons sans rien pouvoir sans rien imaginer, sans rien espérer, la fin de quelque chose que l'on nous a dit d'endurer. Nous sommes là, voilà tout. Nous sommes tout court, sans heure et sans lieu humains.¹⁴³

As the shelling becomes more accurate and abrupt and the fear intensifies, it is as if one's entire status as a human being is

141. Paris, Plon, 1918, pp. 26-7

142. Sous la rafale, Paris, Bloud, 1918, p. 159

143. Nous autres à Vauquois, op. cit. p. 232

removed. Man becomes depersonalized. Jacques Meyer comments in *La Biffe*:

... on reste à peine un être humain, on est plutôt un pauvre animal effrayé, qui se cache, comme l'autruche, pour être oublié par le destin mauvais, mais meurtri brutalement en pleine chair, en pleines entrailles, par chaque éclatement proche dont le sol transmet les ondes en autant de vibrations douloureuses.¹⁴⁴

Ducasse, Meyer and Perreux speak of a new kind of man developing out of the years of trench warfare, "l'homme des tranchées". (V et M pp. 69-70) They claim that living in unfamiliar, hostile surroundings reduced the soldiers' behaviour to that of frightened animals:

... pour être oublié par le destin, meurtri brutalement en pleine chair, en pleines entrailles, par chaque éclatement proche, dont le sol transmet les ondes en autant de vibrations douloureuses. (V et M p. 93)

Max Boasson compares their reactions and the demands made of them to those of machines. He foresees little hope for France in the future as a strong, powerful country:

Rien, rien jamais ne s'est vu d'aussi abominable ... C'est de l'ignominie. Quelle nation nous feront demain, ces épuisés, vidés de santé, vidés de pensée, écrasés de surhumaines fatigues.¹⁴⁵

Gaudy describes the return of troops to the rest lines after duty at the front in *Les trous d'obus de Verdun*. Physically fatigued, they can barely walk; mentally fatigued, their faces are haggard, their

144. Op. cit. pp. 59-60

145. *Au soir d'un monde*, op. cit. p. 127 see A. Maillet *Sous le fouet du destin* op. cit. p. 105 "Qu'importe notre valeur intellectuelle et morale? ... Nous ne sommes plus que des unités de combat, des machines de guerre, des machines à tuer".

gaze vacant; they appear to have lost all strength and desire to complain:

On voyait dans les regards un abîme de douleur, quand ces forçats de la guerre levaient l'horreur de leur martyre ... Des territoriaux, qui regardaient à côté de moi, avaient cet air de tristesse qui vous vient devant un enterrement qui passe. J'en entendis un qui disait:

"C'est plus une armée! c'est des cadavres ..."146

Gaudy remembers clearly an incident when the 57th regiment, on their way to the front line, was passed by the 119th regiment, in the opposite direction. All of the soldiers were running, including the officer in charge, their faces corpse-like, their eyes fixed straight in front of them:

... rien ne semble les intéresser que cette pensée: S'en aller! s'en aller très vite, maintenant que pour eux c'est fini. Et nous qui montons, nous continuons notre chemin sans mot dire.¹⁴⁷

The growing casualty lists accentuated their misery. During the opening five months of the war, Ducasse, Meyer and Perreux point out that 300,000 French soldiers were killed, 600,000 wounded, taken prisoner or disappeared, a total of 900,000 in comparison to the enemy's 750,000.(V et M p. 62)

Ducasse writes in his diary 11th September 1914:

Quelle boucherie! Des centaines de cadavres, pièces de canons, sacs éparpillés, une odeur pestilentielle ... Partout, des morts, d'un vert noirâtre.(V et M p. 53)

During the battle of Verdun, Ducasse, Meyer and Perreux write that after two days of attacking the enemy at Haumont, on the 22nd February 1916, only 64 men remained out of eight companies of the

146. Paris, Plon, 1922, p. 234

147. Ibid. p. 109

362nd infantry regiment; that on the 4th May, the 6th company of the 60th regiment attacked Mort-Homme and in a day was reduced from 143 men to 11.(V et M p. 174) By April 1917, as Nivelle prepared his fatal spring offensive, casualty figures had risen to one million dead and two million wounded.(V et M p. 311)

Max Deauville writes in Jusqu'à l'Yser:

Chaque jour des hommes tombent. Les uns étaient avec nous depuis peu, d'autres depuis longtemps. L'un deux frappé d'une balle dans le ventre, inerte, silencieux comme ceux qui sont atteints de la sorte, glacé, les mains le long du corps, dans sa capote qui déjà lui sert de suaire, les yeux fixés sur la nuit, comme se parlant à lui-même, exprime ce qui dort confusément dans le coeur de chacun de nous: "Avoir souffert si longtemps pour finir tout de même par mourir."¹⁴⁸

Laurentin describes the intense machine-gun fire of the enemy during an offensive in Artois resulting in the deaths of three hundred soldiers from his regiment in one day;¹⁴⁹ Gaudy emphasizes the eternal obsession of the infantryman, the day when the killing would end:

Quand cela finira-t-il? Oui, quand cesserons-nous d'être ces bêtes traquées, luttant sans cesse pour avoir notre place libre au soleil?¹⁵⁰

In L'Humaniste à la Guerre. Hauts de Meuse 1915, Cazin protests vehemently against the increasing horrors of trench warfare:

Quiconque ne maudit point la guerre soit maudit! AMEN, Par le sang et par la meurtrissure; par les cris d'effroi et d'agonie dont les ténèbres frissonnent; par le vent glacial de l'obus qui fait hérissier les cheveux et l'horrible flamme qui les roussit; par les larmes qui sèchent sur le visage des morts ... qu'il soit maudit!¹⁵¹

148. Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1917, p. 384

149. Le sang de France, Paris, Bloud, 1919, p. 193

150. Les trous d'obus de Verdun, op. cit. p. 217

151. Op. cit. pp. 205-6

The extent of the devastation and the numbers of casualties multiplied and intensified constantly over the years, with the result that troops gradually became accustomed to the carnage and wastage along the western front. André Pézard notes his personal horror at his own composure upon the sight of a first corpse;¹⁵² Cornet-Auquier explains that human life seemed to have lost all value. He describes the strange laughter of soldiers surrounded by so much death and destruction.¹⁵³ Hallé attempts a rational explanation:

Si nous devons penser à tous ceux qui sont morts, notre fardeau de tristesse deviendrait trop lourd à porter.¹⁵⁴

In Pour la France, Joubaire concludes that humanity has become insane, that mankind must be mad in order to carry out such massacre and destruction. He writes:

Je ne trouve pas de mots pour traduire mes impressions. L'enfer ne doit pas être si terrible. Les hommes sont fous.¹⁵⁵

Clearly, the stench and chaos of the casualty clearing stations and the appalling wounds from which many of the troops suffered, was living proof of man's inhumanity to man. Chauveau describes the horror of a medical post behind the front line in Derrière la bataille:

Odeur de sang, partout de sang, du sang noir et de la boue, du sang rouge qui coule. Cris de douleur et râles d'agonie. Un vivant à côté d'un mort, et puis tous deux on les emporte. Un vivant qui crie, un vivant qui râle, un mort on l'emporte. Toujours on en apporte, des vivants, des morts. On en apporte qui sont morts déjà quand ils arrivent. On en apporte, qui sont morts avant que j'aie

152. Nous autres à Vauquois 1915-16, op. cit. p. 47

153. Un soldat sans peur et sans reproche, Paris, Fischbacher, 1918, p. 27

154. Là-bas avec ceux qui souffrent, Paris, Garnier, 1917, p. 69

155. Paris, Perrin, 1917, p. 276

fini de les panser ... On les apporte, on les emporte, barbes sanglantes, faces ouvertes, yeux arrachés qui pendent, crânes béants, membres tordus, broyés, déchiquetés, ventres crevés d'où les entrailles sortent, du sang noir partout, du sang noir et de la boue, du sang rouge qui coule, odeur de sang, du sang, de la souffrance, de la mort.¹⁵⁶

Meunier describes a similar scene in L'Angoisse de Verdun where the wounded are constantly brought in the medical stations but where there is little room, if any, to let them rest, and no time, whatsoever, to treat them individually according to the speed and demands of their needs;¹⁵⁷ after one month at the front Volatier wrote to his fiancée:

On se demande après des secouées comme cela, comment il se fait qu'on est encore en vie. Si jamais je rentre je ne vous raconterai jamais cela; c'est trop horrible.¹⁵⁸

Soldiers gradually began to envy those who had been evacuated to base hospitals or even home for convalescence with superficial wounds, not too serious, but serious enough to demand specialized treatment away from the trenches. Volatier dreams about such a wound in Au Vieil-Armand(pp. 131-2); Vuillermet writes:

"Pourvu que ma blessure soit assez grave pour que je sois évacué à l'intérieur", dit naïvement un blessé au médecin qui le panse. Si, par pudeur patriotique et aussi pour ne pas faire trop de peine à ceux qui restent, l'expression de ce souhait ne vient pas brutale sur toutes les lèvres, chacun de ses mots est longuement savouré dans beaucoup de coeurs.¹⁵⁹

Ducasse, Meyer and Perreux believe that it is almost impossible to reconstruct the horror of trench warfare in all its exact detail, and credibly to depict the unimaginable scenes along the Western front

156. Paris, Payot, 1917, pp. 121-2

157. Paris, Hachette, 1919, p. 71

158. Au Vieil-Armand, Paris, Beauchesne, 1918, pp. 131-2

159. Avec les alpins, Paris, Lethiellieux, 1918, pp. 164-5

in a realistic manner, even though an individual might have directly witnessed such. (V et M p. 71) Pierre Mac Orlan wrote in Les Poissons morts, 1917:

On ne racontera jamais très bien cette guerre parce que la mémoire garde mal les traces de cette vie intense, en somme inimaginable. Une éponge abolit les souffrances dès que le repos apparaît à l'horizon ...¹⁶⁰

Nevertheless, many soldiers were haunted by the necessity to remember when they only desired to forget. In Sous la terre de France, Paraf examines the moral need to attempt to tell the truth about the war;¹⁶¹ in Verdun, Jubert urges soldiers not to forget and to record their experiences for posterity:

Hâtons-nous de penser ... hâtons-nous vers ces souvenirs que demain recouvrira l'oubli: hâtons-nous de ressusciter ces états d'âme.¹⁶²

The motivation for describing the horrors of the trenches is potentially the most interesting aspect of the "eye-witness" accounts. There appear to be two major factors. Most soldiers wrote out of a kind of duty and were motivated by the desperate need to reflect the age to the age. They realized that they were almost completely divorced from the civilian population of the rear and, indelibly imprinted with an experience that those who had not been to the front could never really know, they recognized the importance for the whole nation to understand the same experience. A second motive was not only to commemorate the men who failed to return from the war, although this was a high priority, but to create a general

160. Paris, Payot, p. 53

161. Paris, Payot, 1917, p. 110

162. Paris, Payot, 1919, pp. 218-9

memorial to their comrades and to wasted youth, without glorifying war itself.

d) Consequence and defiance: Letters, memoirs and diaries

In their memories of the early encounters in 1914, and particularly of the Marne retreat, Ducasse, Meyer and Perreux question the ability and readiness of their commanding officers for the demands of modern warfare:

Le plan XVII, enfin, semble ignorer "la puissance du feu", notre infériorité en matériel. Il fait trop confiance à "l'allant", ou "facteur moral", aux attaques à la baïonnette, lancées de loin, sans le soutien du canon.¹⁶³

Above all, they challenge the outmoded tactics and unsuitable experience of many army commanders:

... les officiers ont été moins formés que déformés par les guerres coloniales. Ils ne se sont pas heurtés, jusqu'ici, à une armée moderne, puissamment équipée ... Et surtout, depuis 1911, les "brevetés" de l'Etat-Major se sont enthousiasmés pour les méthodes "napoléoniennes" ... la doctrine à la mode est l'attaque à outrance. "Vaincre, c'est avancer". Il faut pousser l'esprit offensif jusqu'à l'excès.¹⁶⁴

The extensive colonial service of Joffre is carefully emphasized. After graduating from the Polytechnic as an engineer, he was sent to Indo-China, where he began a long career in France's new empire. He first gained credit by his efficiency in organizing the supplies for a column of soldiers in conquest of Timbuctoo (1894) and this was later followed by service in Madagascar. At the age of 52, he was recalled to France to assume the post of Director of Engineers and seven years later, in 1911, became Chief of the General Staff. He

163. Vie et Mort des Français 1914-18, op. cit. p. 34

164. Ibid. p. 34

was, therefore, almost sixty-three at the outbreak of war. Ducasse, Meyer and Perreux write:

Il fut mal préparé à "penser la Grande Guerre" dans toute sa complexité. Pour ménager ses nerfs et garder sa sérénité, il évite le contact des mutilés, des combattants; il s'enferme dans le bloc étroit de sa certitude, non sans prêter l'oreille aux flatteries de son entourage, à ses doctrines "illusionnistes ..."165

They are especially critical of High Command at the beginning of 1917. The moral factor so important in 1914 seemed to have been forgotten. The weariness and the downheartedness of the troops not considered.¹⁶⁶ They write of the absurd failure of the Nivelle offensive, of misty, icy, weather which affected the precision of artillery fire and liaison attempts; of lack of surprise and detailed enemy knowledge of the plan of attack, of barbed wire fortifications and concrete gun points that remained intact; of staggered enemy defences that offered overwhelming resistance to the attacking French troops.¹⁶⁷ De Granvilliers launches an angry attack on those in high office in Le Prix de l'homme.

Comment songer sans colère aux chefs coupables d'incurie, aux officiers de carrière qui n'en savent pas sur la guerre plus long que les civils après avoir été soldats pendant leur vie entière, à ceux qui avouent avec suffisance qu'ils ignorent jusqu'au maniement du téléphone.¹⁶⁸

Bernier criticizes the failure of generals to admit their frequent mistakes in spite of the often alarmingly high percentage of casualties. He bitterly regrets their infrequent visits to the front

165. Ibid. p. 63

166. Ibid. p. 310

167. Ibid. p. 313

168. Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1919, p. 59

lines and blames this for their costly blunders and lack of understanding:

N'étant jamais dans la bataille que les tranchées circonscrivaient étroitement et, fait plus grave, en préservant leurs officiers d'état-major, ils ne comprenaient pas que l'on ne pût franchir un réseau de fil de fer, même intact, non plus que courir sans être tué sur des mitrailleuses en action. De toutes parts, de tous les régiments montaient les cris de détresse des officiers subalternes. On refusait de les croire car par définition l'inférieur dans l'armée a toujours tort devant le supérieur.¹⁶⁹

Bernier points out that the few generals who recognized the truth and saw fit to protest were quietly "limogé". The word came to refer to those commanders who had been unmasked as inadequate or troublesome and sent to Limoges to less crucial jobs in the rear. By the time of the Marne, two out of five Army Commanders, ten out of twenty Corps Commanders and forty-two out of seventy-four Divisional Commanders had been sacked or sent to Limoges. By mid-1916 they included Generals Herr, Bapst, de Bonneval and Chrétien.¹⁷⁰ Bernier concludes his attack:

Mais qui parmi les chefs s'enlisa dans les boyaux gris? Celui qui n'a pas compris avec sa chair ne peut vous en parler.¹⁷¹

Similar sentiments are shared by Tézanas du Montcel in Dans les tranchées. Not only does he criticize the commanders' lack of presence, but also their rigid discipline and strict enforcement of rules, even in the most inappropriate situations. Such an attitude did not inspire soldiers with admiration and devotion but with fear and secret defiance. He writes:

169. La percée, Paris, Albin Michel, 1920, pp. 46-7

170. See Horne, op. cit. pp. 32, 141

171. La percée, op. cit. pp. 67-8

Les grands chefs sont vraiment au-dessus de leur tâche, et surtout dans leurs fonctions morales. Non seulement ils ne font rien pour se faire aimer, mais nous arrivons à avoir pour ces supérieurs qu'on ne voit jamais aux heures de danger et dont nous n'avons guère que des paroles désagréables, des sentiments qui n'ont rien à voir avec le respect et l'affection qu'ils devraient savoir mériter.¹⁷²

Delvert complains that the apparent lack of interest and indifference shown by many commanding officers led to disastrous breakdowns in communications which often had fatal effects. In Les Opérations de la 1^{re} Armée dans les Flandres, juillet-novembre 1917, he writes of the lack of artillery liaison which results in the French guns bombarding their own positions:

Voilà le bombardement qui recommence. Cette fois, ce sont les nôtres qui tirent ... mais sur nos propres tranchées. Un vrai tir de démolition ... Le craquement de nos obus - sec et rageur, très caractéristique - est effrayant et démoralisant pour les hommes. Et les obus se pressent, se pressent de plus en plus drus.¹⁷³

He clearly emphasizes the confusion and complexity of farcical chains of command instituted by the "anonymous" chiefs in the rear:

Jamais un observateur en première ligne! Nous tirons des fusées, le capitaine commandant la batterie n'a pas le droit d'exécuter le tir de barrage! Il faut qu'il attende l'ordre du chef de groupe! Lequel reçoit l'ordre du poste central! C'est au poste central que se tiennent les signaleurs qui observent les fusées. D'après leurs renseignements, des ordres sont donnés aux chefs de groupe, qui donnent des ordres aux commandants de batterie, qui donnent des ordres aux chefs de pièce.

De plus, aucune batterie n'a de secteur fixe. Elles tirent tantôt ici, tantôt là.

Après cela, étonnez-vous que notre 75 soit surtout terrible pour les fantassins français ...¹⁷⁴

172. Paris, Champion, 1925, p. 379

173. Paris, Fournier, 1921, p. 273

174. Ibid. p. 285

Dubrulle widens the angle of attack to include anyone desiring and directing war,¹⁷⁵ an approach echoed by Deauville in La Boue des Flandres:

La guerre n'est que le suicide misérable d'une foule en folie.
Ses remous sanglants ne servent que les intérêts de ceux qui la dirigent.¹⁷⁶

In a letter written to his young pupils, dated 31st December 1914, Adjudant Henri Boulle, a former teacher, curses all politicians, army commanders, heads of state, who have brought about the war. He writes:

Maudits soient à jamais ceux qui, par orgueil, par ambition ou par le plus sordide des intérêts, ont déchaîné sur l'Europe un tel fléau, plongé dans la plus effroyable misère et ruiné à jamais peut-être tant de villes et de villages de notre belle patrie!

Maudits soient à jamais ceux qui portent et porteront devant l'Histoire la responsabilité de tant de souffrances et de tant de deuils.¹⁷⁷

In Carnet d'un Combattant, Mairet denounces war as "Folie sans nom, Stupidité sans bornes".¹⁷⁸ He laments the sacrifice of youth and the destruction of wisdom and knowledge by folly and brutality. Bréant illustrates the irony of scientific progress, initially designed to make society a more comfortable place in which to live, yet, having succeeded in creating only further wretchedness and disillusionment:¹⁷⁹

Ah! c'est beau, c'est beau à crier, à pleurer! La guerre! la guerre scientifique, moderne la guerre du progrès, infamie!¹⁸⁰

175. Mon régiment dans la fournaise de Verdun et dans la bataille de la Somme, Paris, Plon, 1918, p. 38

176. Brussels, Maurice Lamertin, 1922, p. 330

177. La dernière lettre, op. cit. pp. 44

178. Paris, Crès, 1919, p. 271

179. De l'Alsace à la Somme, Paris, Hachette, 1917, p. 188

180. Ibid. p. 213

Galtier-Boissière emphasizes the powerlessness of mankind against steel and fire, the folly of trying to defend oneself with grenades and rifles against machine gun enfilade and artillery bombardment. Courage and valour are scarcely effective against such impersonal forces.¹⁸¹ Doussain declares war to be a monstrosity and militarism, a plague to humanity.¹⁸² According to Joubaire, man has become intoxicated with the thought of death and destruction. In Pour la France, he writes:

Oui, l'humanité est folle! Il faut être fou pour ce que l'on fait. Quels massacres! Quels scènes d'horreur et de carnage! Je ne trouve pas de mots pour traduire mes impressions. L'enfer ne doit pas être si terrible. Les hommes sont fous!¹⁸³

Ronarch sees the essence of war as horror and sadness, and vehemently protests against its continuation. He cannot accept the argument that war will always exist because it has always existed, and expresses his optimism for the future:

J'espère et je crois fermement que la France ne reverra pas de sitôt une conflagration telle que la grande guerre, car il faudrait pour cela que l'humanité fût vraiment folle.¹⁸⁴

De Pawlowski insists that nowhere in the front lines can one find soldiers who do not acknowledge the stupidity and barbarity of trench warfare; that patriotism and heroism are idealistic concepts about which the average soldier thinks little, if at all. He points out:

181. En rase campagne. Un Hiver à Souchez, 1915-16, Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1917, pp. 288-9

182. Castel Pépère, Paris, Albin Michel, 1918, p. 251

183. Paris, Perrin, 1917, p. 276

184. Souvenirs de la Guerre, Paris, Payot, 1921, p. 329

C'est en civils et pas du tout en militaires que nous faisons la guerre.¹⁸⁵

Mairet dismisses the fact that by 1916 soldiers still held notions of fighting to regain Alsace-Lorraine, to ruin Germany or out of duty to their country. He asserts that they fought because they had no other option.¹⁸⁶ Cazin rejects the myth of the honour of dying for one's country:

Rien n'est plus doux que la patrie. Cela est dans Homère.

Cela est vrai. Mais que mourir soit le sort le plus beau, cela n'est pas vrai. Le sort le plus beau, c'est de vivre longtemps et d'être heureux. Pourquoi mentir?¹⁸⁷

In many cases the psychological pressures of bombardment, machine gun fire, waiting to attack, night fatigue duties in no man's land, horrific casualties often for little gain in ground, and the indifference of commanding officers, rendered soldiers almost insane.

In Carnet d'un combattant, Mairet writes:

Je me souviens d'une époque où j'étais intelligent, sensible et bon.

Le canon m'a rendu bête, les énormes émotions du combat ont fait de moi un blasé et les mauvais traitements m'ont desséché le coeur.

Je doute de tout, même d'être bon encore à quelque chose.¹⁸⁸

Indeed, the vast majority of men found little upon which to base varying degrees of optimism for the future. Few were capable of anything other than fragmented reflection. Many were afraid to admit that an overriding sensation was one of fear. In a letter written by

185. Dans les rides du front, Paris, La Renaissance du Livre, 1917, p. 33

186. Carnet d'un combattant, op. cit. pp. 174-5

187. L'Humaniste à la Guerre. Hauts de Meuse, 1915, Paris, Plon, pp. 195-96

188. Op. cit. pp. 255-6

"Sergent" Maurice Ninoret of the 123e Infantry regiment, dated 4th May 1916, the carnage and horror of Verdun is clearly indicated. Ninoret, however, is at pains to stress his lack of fear:

Soyez persuadés que ma façon de vous écrire ne m'est pas inspirée par un sentiment de crainte, mais bien parce que je suis logique avec moi-même...¹⁸⁹

On the other hand, in Ceux qui vivent, Marot emphasizes that no soldier escaped the sensation, that it was a common human reaction and not a sign of weakness to be shunned. He writes:

Tout le monde passe par là ... Les aspects de la peur varient ... depuis l'agacement jusqu'à la folie, de la dépression à la fuite, tantôt comiques tantôt terribles, souvent répugnants, mais toujours d'une sincérité criante: c'est le seul état sur lequel on ne puisse se tromper soi-même, ni tromper les autres.¹⁹⁰

Rimbault shares this sentiment in Journal de campagne d'un officier de ligne. He points out that total bravery in front of the enemy is an exaggerated and unnatural characteristic of man, that every man is afraid of death in some degree. He concludes:

Les écrivains qui disent qu'un soldat français n'a jamais peur ne connaissent rien à la psychologie de la guerre ... Donc, à la guerre, tous nous avons peur.¹⁹¹

Dubrulle claims that even the strongest nerves found it difficult to endure the stress during the hours of bombardment:

Oh! alors, quelle horreur, lorsqu'on entend poindre dans le lointain le souffle ténu, lent, et que subitement l'on perçoit les nuances spéciales de l'obus personnel, l'accélération extrêmement rapide, le crescendo brutal du sifflement. Alors, l'on est crispé depuis la pointe des cheveux jusqu'à la plante des pieds, et l'on attend, dans une sorte d'agonie ... le coup suprême ... l'on est

189. La dernière lettre, op. cit. p. 226

190. Paris, Payot, 1919, pp. 137-8

191. Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1916, p. 204

submergé d'une horreur intense ... c'est la chair qui se cabre devant le traitement infligé, c'est la révolte de notre être nerveux contre des chocs qui dépassent sa force de réceptivité, mais c'est surtout l'horreur du néant ...¹⁹²

Maillet considers that the hours prior to an attack are the most frightening of all. In Sous le fouet du destin, he attaches no glory to "going over the top" and raiding the enemy lines.¹⁹³ He describes the vivid scenes of carnage which pass through the minds of the waiting soldiers. He believes that the most ordinary and newest recruits of all become the equals of some of the bravest men in history during this most critical period.¹⁹⁴ Lefebvre-Dibon is of the same opinion and even regards the final order to attack as a relief:

Il faut avoir vécu ces instants pour se rendre compte de l'état nerveux dans lequel on finit par être après ces heures où, sentinelle en faction inactive et impuissante, on a senti cinquante, cent fois peut-être, l'angoisse de la fin, le souffle de la mort ... Aussi est-ce presque un soulagement quand, enfin, fou d'exaspération, l'on peut sortir de la tranchée pour voler en avant, pour tuer!¹⁹⁵

Hallé describes the difficulty of remaining composed, of not showing one's fear to others in the line. He writes of the nervous laughter and forced smiles:

Ah! Quelle force nous avons, pauvres êtres misérables pour sourire et tenir calme notre visage quand tout notre être voudrait bondir et hurler de terreur ...¹⁹⁶

The absurdity of having to assume a correct posture, of having to conform to a set pattern when confronting death, is clearly brought

192. Mon régiment dans la fournaise de Verdun et dans la bataille de la Somme, Paris, Plon, 1918, pp. 26-27

193. Paris, Perrin, 1919, p. 99

194. Ibid. p. 116

195. Quatre pages du 74^e RI, Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1921, pp. 77-8

196. Là-bas avec ceux qui souffrent, Paris, Garnier, 1917, p. 36

out. Hallé draws attention to the proximity between life and death in the trenches. One instant man is intact, the next instant he is destroyed. The precious quality of life is evident but too often overlooked:

Si on arrêtaît, si on cessait cette affreuse guerre maintenant, tout de suite, je pourrais m'étendre et dormir sous ce soleil. Oh, dormir en pensant que c'est fini, que je vivrai, que j'aurai des joies, des peines, de la douleur, des jouissances; que je ne serai pas tué!¹⁹⁷

Lintier expresses similar wishes in Ma pièce, where he vows to appreciate and enjoy every second of life should he survive the horror of trench warfare:

Il me semble que je m'arrêterai à toute heure, interrompant une phrase ou suspendant un geste, pour me crier à moi-même: Je vis, je vis! Et dire que tout à l'heure, peut-être, je ne serai qu'une chair informe et sanglante au bord d'un trou d'obus!¹⁹⁸

Ducasse, Meyer and Perreux remember the fear that darkness brought about, even in the calmest of sectors.¹⁹⁹ Bessières believes that even in the reserve lines, even on leave away from the front, a soldier was never exempt from the feeling of fear:

En principe, un soldat a toujours la frousse: quand il monte, quand il descend, quand il va à la soupe et qu'il en revient. Il n'y a que les civils: les journalistes, les députés, les sénateurs, les ministres en maraude autour du front, qui n'aient jamais la frousse.²⁰⁰

The ultimate folly was that soldiers continued to accept and to persevere. Deauville points out that such tenacity and resolution, in the eyes of the military authorities and the civilian population,

197. Ibid. p. 32

198. Paris, Plon, 1916, p. 166

199. Vie et Mort des Français 1914-18, op. cit. p. 92

200. Le Chemin des Dames, Paris, Bloud et Gay, 1918, p. 129

made them "good" soldiers, whose bravery and courage was exemplary.

There is more than a hint of irony in his writing:

... dans le fond je m'en fous, je ne pense plus à rien. Et c'est pour cela que l'on tient dans les tranchées. C'est pour cela que nous nous sommes de bons soldats.²⁰¹

Nevertheless, by May 1917, as we have already seen, morale in the French Army had declined considerably, soldiers showed that they were no longer prepared to endure the absurdities of war and to continue to suffer in silence. Morel-Journal writes in Journal d'un officier de la 74e division d'infanterie et de l'Armée française d'Italie:

Ce sont les généraux Nivelle, Mangin et consorts qui sont les responsables de cet état d'esprit; ils ne se sont pas préoccupés assez de ce que l'homme pensait ou ressentait; pour eux, c'était un fusil, pas davantage. Le moral le mieux trempé ne résiste pas à la longue à pareil traitement et tant va la cruche à l'eau qu'à la fin elle se casse.²⁰²

Ducasse, Meyer and Perreux estimate that the French troops were perilously close to a repetition of the Russian collapse,²⁰³ and that the recovery of the situation under Pétain was, more so than the battle of the Marne in 1914, "le grand "miracle" de cette guerre".²⁰⁴ They pay a significant tribute to the humanity of Pétain in the midst of senselessness and ineptitude:

Général en chef, Pétain sut rester aussi un bon colonel d'infanterie. Non pas le doctrinaire, qui se perd dans les nuées. Non pas l'esprit mesquin, dont les seules victoires sont des cheveux coupés ras. Véritable "médecin de l'armée", il fit améliorer les cantonnements, surveiller les vivres, lutter contre les mectants; il régla les tours de repos, accéléra non seulement le rythme des permissions, mais les trains de permissionnaires, qui obtinrent la priorité sur tous les trains descendant du front ...

201. La Boue des Flandres, op. cit. p. 16

202. Montbrison, Eleuthère Brassart, 1922, p. 341

203. Vie et Mort des Français 1914-18, op. cit. p. 316

204. Ibid. p. 317

Le poilu, qui cassait des vitres dans les gares, en criant: "Assassins!" est désormais convaincu de n'être pas, pour ses chefs, du "matériel humain", de la "chair à canon".²⁰⁵

205. Ibid. pp. 318-9

CHAPTER VI

The socialist's stand

a) Barbusse: LE FEU

i) Idealism in revolt

In Chapter IV we indicated that long before 1914, Henri Barbusse was a convinced socialist and humanist. Frank Field points out that, after the Dreyfus Affair, Barbusse felt alienated from the world of politics and "consumed with despair at the cruelty and meaninglessness of life."¹ Duclas and Fréville write:

A cette époque de sa vie, [1908], Barbusse est un idéaliste, un humanitaire, un pacifiste ... Il croit à la vertu de la prédication pacifiste pour empêcher les guerres!²

Paraf describes his first novel, l'Enfer, (1908), as:

... l'oeuvre d'un jeune écrivain, atteint en plein "bonheur 1900" d'un mal du siècle plus profond que le mal romantique, le mal de tous les siècles, aggravé par une vision prophétique de la guerre qui menace, de l'injustice sociale, de l'isolement de chaque être emprisonné dans son propre enfer.³

There does, however, appear to be a lack of consistency in his fundamental beliefs, as recognized in Chapter 4, shown by his spontaneous decision to volunteer for active service despite exemption due to ill health. In view of the later analysis of Le Feu, this somewhat illogical reaction requires a more detailed examination here. It would seem that Barbusse was proud of his voluntary actions. In June 1918, in response to criticism of Le Feu

1. Three French Writers and the Great War, London, Cambridge University Press, 1975, p. 9

2. Henri Barbusse, Paris, Editions Sociales, 1946, p. 8

3. "Henri Barbusse", Europe 477, January 1969, p. 7

and of his own lack of experience in the trenches, Barbusse wrote in a letter to a newspaper editor:

Je suis allé pendant vingt-trois mois sur le front en qualité de simple soldat d'infanterie. Et je l'ai fait volontairement: exempté du service militaire avant la guerre, je me suis volontairement présenté le jour de la déclaration, suis volontairement parti et suis volontairement resté sur la ligne de feu, ainsi qu'il est attesté dans une de mes citations. Ces citations ont été bien souvent publiées. Il est dit dans la dernière que je me suis toujours offert pour toutes les missions dangereuses.⁴

Even Barbusse felt the need to offer some explanation for his unprompted and questionably irrational behaviour. On the 9th August 1914, he wrote to the editor of L'Humanité:

Mon cher confrère,

Voulez-vous me compter parmi les socialistes antimilitaristes qui s'engagent volontairement pour la présente guerre? Appartenant

4. "Réponse à mes Calomniateurs", published in Paroles d'un Combattant, Paris, Flammarion, 1920, pp. 67-8. Barbusse enlisted 3rd August 1914 at the age of 41. He was placed as a "simple soldat" in the "35e Régiment Territorial d'Infanterie de Melun, 15e Compagnie, 7e escouade". He volunteered for active service with the "231e Régiment de ligne, 110e Brigade, 18e Compagnie, 3e Section", and was sent to the front 21st December 1914, where he joined the "55e Division". After fighting at Croucy, 8th-15th January 1915, he was nominated for promotion to "soldat de première classe". Having spent a further three months in the front lines between Izel and Condé-sur-Aisne, Barbusse refused promotion to "Caporal" and subsequent officer training, preferring to remain with the "231e" at the front. At the beginning of June 1915 his division spent five months to the south of Souchez in the sector of Albain, Saint-Nazaire, Carency, Comblain l'Abbé, Mont Saint Eloi and the road to Béthune. On the 8th June 1915, he received the "croix de guerre avec citation à l'Ordre de la Brigade" for retrieving wounded soldiers whilst under fire. He became company stretcher bearer, 10th June 1915, taking part in the September offensive and establishing casualty clearing stations near the front lines under intense enemy shellfire. 15th October 1915, he received his second "citation", this time "à l'ordre de l'armée". In November 1915, having spent eleven of seventeen months in the front lines, Barbusse fell ill and was transferred to the "8e Régiment Territorial" in the reserve lines. By January 1916 he had become secretary to the "Etat Major du XXIIe Corps d'Armée" in the Verdun sector. Throughout 1916 his service at the front was punctuated with numerous hospitalisations and finally, against his will, his active war service ended due to ill health, 1st June 1917.

au service auxiliaire, j'ai demandé et obtenu d'être versé dans le service armé et je pars dans quelque jours comme simple soldat d'infanterie. Si je vous signale ce menu fait banal et pour ainsi dire imperceptible dans le grand élan actuel, c'est pour me permettre de dire que, loin d'avoir renié les idées que j'ai toujours défendues à mes dépens, je pense les servir en prenant les armes. Cette guerre est une guerre sociale qui fera faire un grand pas - peut-être le pas définitif - à notre cause. Elle est dirigée contre nos vieux ennemis infâmes de toujours, le militarisme et l'impérialisme, le Sabre et la Botte, et j'ajouterai: la Couronne ... Si j'ai fait le sacrifice de ma vie et si je vais avec joie à la guerre, ce n'est pas seulement en tant que Français, c'est surtout en tant qu'homme⁵

In a letter to Barbusse, upon the publication of *Le Feu*, Edmond Rostand remembered that Barbusse had been to see him before enrolment in the army and that he had explained:

"... je m'engage parce que je hais la guerre. Plus on a mes idées, plus on doit prendre un fusil. Cette fois il faut que ce soit la dernière".⁶

There was almost a sense of duty, as Jean Relinger points out,⁷ in Henri Barbusse's initial decision to go to war, an irresistible desire to participate directly in and to make a substantial contribution towards the destiny of his fellow comrades, to the emancipation of society and to the establishing of a "communion humaine".⁸ This original optimism was gradually eroded during his experience at the front, as can be seen by a brief examination of some of the letters written to his wife during 1915-1916.⁹ In a letter dated 13/14th January 1915, he complains of the irregularity

5. Ibid. pp. 7-8

6. Cited by A. Vidal, "Barbusse et le Feu", *Europe*, November-December, 119-120, 1955, p. 46

7. "Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse: Une Epopée réaliste?", *La Pensée*, vol. 107, Paris, February 1963, p. 67

8. See E. Carassus, "Avant Le Feu", *Europe*, vol. 483-4, Paris, July-August 1969, p. 206. "Il [Barbusse] avait mieux à faire: à protester contre cette tuerie qu'il affrontait avec un courage lucide, à essayer de guider les hommes vers la "clarté".

9. *Lettres de Henri Barbusse à sa femme 1914-17*, Paris, Flammarion, 1937

of meals and lack of food; 24th February 1915, he writes "Il y a tant et tant d'embusqués!"; 22nd April 1915, he expresses his hatred of war, "cette chose monstrueuse, et surtout stupide", "une seule grande armée qui se suicide"; 30th May 1915, he reveals hatred of the "touristes de tranchées ... des journalistes conduits par des officiers d'Etat-major"; 20th June 1915, he admires "l'énorme, écrasant et terrible labeur du simple soldat" and realises "ce que ce pur et simple travail signifie de misères, de souffrances, de sacrifices et d'abnégation réelle". In the same letter he writes of the appalling sight of the wounded and dead "... tout ce charnier de la guerre est terrible ... tout ce qui touche à cet envers de la bataille est ineffaçablement sale et souillé: Pauvres êtres, pauvres accessoires de la lutte et de la vie ... La guerre est une chose dont on ne peut soupçonner l'horreur lorsqu'on ne l'a pas vue". He adds his determination that mankind should never again be subjected to such monstrosity. The following month, 13th June 1915, Barbusse makes reference to preliminary negotiations which were to culminate the following year with the publication of Le Feu. He writes: "Gustave Terry me demande des impressions (payées) pour un quotidien qu'il lance,¹⁰ et de Nouvion, un article ... pour Le Monde Illustré. Si mes loisirs continuent, je "voirai" à faire cela". The "loisirs" which permitted Barbusse to carry out his intentions in full were afforded him at the beginning of 1916 with his transfer to the duties of secretary to the "Etat-Major" of the "21e Corps d'Armée". However, in his capacity as stretcher bearer, towards the end of 1915, Barbusse still had sufficient freedom to write three articles which appeared in L'Oeuvre on 21st, 22nd and 25th September 1915,

10. L'Oeuvre

under the heading "Lettres du front".¹¹ In the first two he describes the horrors of trench warfare, the mud, the rain, the effects of bombardment upon the dehumanized and depersonalized occupants of the trenches; in the third article he writes about an aerial combat. The language in this final article becomes quite figurative in places and ends on an ideological note reminiscent of the closing chapter of Le Feu:

Ce qu'on n'oubliera pas, et qu'on n'oubliera jamais, c'est la majesté tragique de cette guerre de ténèbres, d'enfouissement et de fantômes; la longueur miraculeuse des nuits où l'on a peiné, patrouillé, attendu, souffert. On se rappellera aussi que, pour beaucoup d'autres raisons, cette guerre n'est pas une guerre ordinaire; que c'est une guerre de délivrance, une guerre d'idéal; que l'obscur, innombrable et invincible poussée du grand peuple des tranchées, trop souvent abandonné et laissé seul devant le feu par l'élite intellectuelle, s'est produite dans le sens du progrès et non dans celui de la tradition, vers l'avenir et non vers le passé.¹²

The "deux fleuves" which Meyer speaks of in his article "Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse",¹³ are already present in these articles written almost a year before the beginning of the serialization of Le Feu in L'Oeuvre.¹⁴ The first:

l'observation minutieuse et véridique du cadre qui entourait, et des conditions de vie, des sensations et des sentiments qui animaient le combattant ... l'effritement des vies dans l'usure des tranchées, du "grignotage" constant des attaques partielles décidées par Joffre ...

11. See E. Carcassus, "Avant Le Feu, Trois Articles de Barbusse sur la Guerre", Europe vol. 483-4, July-August 1969, pp. 192-206

12. Ibid. Article of 25th septembre 1915: "Un Duel aérien, vu de la tranchée", p. 200

13. Europe 477, January 1969, pp. 16-67

14. 3rd August 1916-9th November 1916

The second:

le fleuve d'un idéalisme en révolte contre la guerre et ses horreurs, le fleuve d'un pacifisme démocratique et socialiste, qui en attend la révolution et la création d'un monde meilleur.¹⁵

The best way that he could serve the cause of peace in 1915 was by expressing his sense of moral outrage at the events that were taking place in Europe by depicting, in as authentic a way as possible, the raw reality of life in the trenches. The letters written to his wife during the early months of 1916 bear witness to this dual purpose; on the one hand to portray the war in all its brutal simplicity, on the other to focus attention on the future and to stress the need for a collective effort from the people of all nations to work towards a peaceful society. On 19th March 1916, he wrote:

Mon livre sur la guerre n'est pas nouveau, oh non! Il s'agit de décrire une escouade de soldats à travers les divers phases et péripéties de la campagne.

The following month he contemplated the lesson of the war and concluded:

... elle sera, dans un temps donné - dans dix ans, dans vingt ans -, suivie d'une autre guerre qui achèvera la ruine en hommes et en argent du vieux monde - si d'ici-là les peuples qu'on mène à la boucherie ne prennent enfin la simple et logique résolution de se tendre la main les uns les autres à travers les préjugés des traditions et des races, malgré les désirs de gouvernants et à travers toutes les stupidités de l'orgueil belliqueux, de la gloire militaire et des malhonnêtes calculs commerciaux des nations pour prospérer en empêchant, par la force et le brigandage, l'expansion du voisin.¹⁶

In "Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse", Jacques Meyer draws attention to Barbusse's deep need to reveal the truth and an echo of internal

15. "Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse", op. cit. p. 29. See also J. King, "Henri Barbusse: Le Feu and the Crisis of Social Realism", in The First World War in Fiction, London, Macmillan, 1976 edited by H. Klein. King refers to Le Feu as a documentary and a poem about men at war. p. 46

responses which developed into the almost compulsory and didactic nature of his work.¹⁷ Vladimir Brett writes:

Barbusse ... est de plus en plus résolu à agir pour amener un changement efficace de cet état d'esprit. Les exemples de Victor Hugo et d'Emile Zola lui montrent combien une oeuvre d'art peut influencer l'opinion publique. Barbusse est avant tout écrivain et dès le début de la guerre, il songe à utiliser ses expériences de combattant en vue d'une oeuvre littéraire.¹⁸

The reaction of public opinion towards Le Feu, was, on the whole, most favourable. The ninety-three episodes which appeared in L'Oeuvre increased issues of the paper, according to Meyer,¹⁹ principally due to the reactions against the "bourrage de crâne" of papers such as Le Matin, L'Echo de Paris, l'Intransigeant. There was even greater acclamation when the work appeared in book form. The 81,000 copies printed by Flammarion towards the end of 1916, beginning of 1917, quickly sold. By mid-1917, 135,000 copies had sold; 1919 - 230,000; 1920 - 300,000.²⁰ On 15th December 1916 the Goncourt jury awarded Le Feu their prize ahead of Maurice Genevoix's Sous Verdun, Paul Lintier's Ma Pièce, Paul Géraudy's La Guerre, Madame and Guillaume Apollinaire's Le Poète assassiné.²¹ The following day Henry Bataille wrote in L'Oeuvre:

17. Op. cit. p. 28

18. Henri Barbusse: Sa marche vers la clarté, son mouvement CLARTE, Prague, Editions de l'Académie Tchèqueoslovaque des Sciences, 1963, p. 97

19. Op. cit. pp. 46-7. See also J. Relinger, "Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse: Une Epopée réaliste?", op. cit. p. 68 "Dès le début, malgré les mutilations de la censure et du journal lui-même, c'est un immense succès. Le tirage de L'Oeuvre augmente".

20. Ibid. p. 48

21. The other finalists considered were: M. Berger: Le Miracle du Feu; Mlle Harlor: Liberté, Liberté, chérie; G. Riou: Le Journal d'un simple soldat; J. des Vignes-Rouges: Bourru, soldat de Vanquois and F. de la Guérinière: Les Sillons de la Gloire. Le Feu received 8 votes, Les Sillons de la Gloire, 2 votes.

Le beau, l'admirable livre! C'est la première grande oeuvre que la guerre nous ait donnée. Elle dépasse tout ce qui a jamais été écrit jusqu'à ce jour, même d'excellent. Et pour ceux que désolèrent ... tant de faux poilus, de joyeuses Rosalies, les cartons-pâtes du lyrisme, la bonne humeur héroïque ... ah! quel soulagement de voir apparaître tout à coup le grand visage simple et auguste de la Vérité!"

Bataille goes on to compare Barbusse's style, in places, to the vision and realism of Tolstoy, his poetic qualities to those of Dante. Laurent Tailhade, literary critic of L'Oeuvre, praised Le Feu for its emphasis upon grief, justice and pity; Pierre Loti wrote to Barbusse, "C'est le plus beau de tous les livres de guerre"; Anatole France claimed that it was "un des plus beaux livres de la littérature française"; Romain Rolland acknowledged Le Feu as a "Miroir implacable de la guerre"; Maxime Gorki wrote of a "Livre sombre et terrible par sa vérité impitoyable, mais partout des flammes d'une conscience nouvelle brillant dans les ténèbres ..." ²² Paul Souday considered Barbusse, a realist and impressionist on the lines of the Goncourt brothers, Zola, Huysmans, Tolstoy and Gorki. ²³ From September 1916 onwards, Barbusse began to receive letters of congratulations from soldiers in the front lines. In a letter to his wife, 8th September 1916, he mentions having met an infantry soldier who enthused: "Enfin, vous dites la vérité sur les poilus!"; on the 28th October 1916, he noted: "Aujourd'hui, j'ai un gros courrier. Des lettres d'inconnus et de connus à propos du Feu. Ça marche, je crois bien". R. Grisel, of the "3e Mixte Zouaves et Tirailleurs", in a letter to Barbusse dated 3rd November 1916, wrote of "des

22. All cited by J. Meyer in "Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse", op. cit. pp. 50-1

23. "Les Livres", Le Temps, 15th December 1916

descriptions que je crois revoir en vérité";²⁴ J. Soeshoudt wrote on 9th November 1916, "Depuis quinze mois, j'ai devant les yeux le spectacle que vous décrivez, mais il a fallu que je lise votre oeuvre pour le voir dans sa surhumaine horreur ... En fixant ce souvenir, et cette horreur, vous avez fait une chose humaine et courageuse ..."²⁵ Barbusse was clearly delighted by such a reception. In a letter to Monsieur Lacombe of the "4e zouaves", dated 14th November 1916, he writes:

L'accueil que l'on a fait l'honneur de faire à mon roman, qui va bientôt paraître en volume avec des passages inédits, prouve qu'on ne se rendait pas assez compte de l'épouvantable et admirable existence du simple soldat, mais qu'on commence partout à le savoir et à lui rendre justice. Après la guerre, ce sera à la masse de faire valoir sa volonté qui seule peut faire cesser dans l'avenir la barbarie des guerres.²⁶

Throughout 1917 Barbusse continued to receive acclamation from his fellow soldiers.²⁷ On 21st March 1917 he wrote to his wife: "La vogue du Feu me donne la certitude d'être entendu".²⁸

Nevertheless, reactions to Le Feu were not all laudable. J. Relinger points out that the paper Action française launched "une

24. Cited by A. Vidal, Henri Barbusse soldat de la Paix, Paris, Editeurs Français Réunis, 1953, p. 54

25. Cited by J. Relinger, "Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse: Une Epopée réaliste?" op. cit. p. 89

26. Cited by J. Clemens, "Une lettre d'Henri Barbusse à un poilu agenais en 1916", Revue de l'Agenais, 97e tome 4e, Bulletin Oct/Dec 1971, pp. 309-12

27. See J. Relinger, "Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse: Une Epopée réaliste?", op. cit. pp. 87-90

28. Cited by J. Meyer in "Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse", op. cit. p. 51 See also "La Polémique de Feu", Le Populaire de Paris, 20th July 1918, p. 1; "Souvenirs de militants", L'Humanité, 28th March 1956, 26th April 1956; E. Dabit, "Ma découverte d'Henri Barbusse", Commune, 22, 1935; C. Vildrac, "Lorsque parut Le Feu", L'Humanité, 30th August 1936; G. Altmann, "La guerre, ses témoins et les pions", Le Monde, 11th January 1930; P. Paraf "Barbusse et ses amis", Les Lettres Françaises, 736, 1958

véritable campagne" against the novel.²⁹ "L'abbé" Sirech, "aumônier en chef des lycées de Lyon", condemned both author and work:

Si les Conseils de guerre collent au mur un pauvre soldat qui refuse à sa patrie le sacrifice de son sang, quel châtement méritez-vous, monsieur Barbusse?³⁰

In a French mission to the U.S.A., commander L. C. Eckenfelder of the French Army, introduced Le Feu as "un ignoble livre", Barbusse as "un ignoble individu", and his squad as "une bande d'apaches, de voyous internationaux".³¹ Ernest Lavisse wrote an article "Pourquoi nous nous battons" in Le Temps, 15th July 1917, in which, whilst he did not openly blame Barbusse for the demoralizing effect upon troops and for an anti-patriotic attitude, nevertheless, asked what effect the question "Pourquoi te bats-tu?" was having on the armed forces.³² In Carnets d'un Combattant,³³ published in 1917, Le Lieutenant E. R., (pseudonym of Charles Truffau), concludes:

Le livre de H. Barbusse est l'oeuvre d'un narrateur d'avant la guerre, qui n'a rien oublié, rien compris, rien appris même, car ce n'est rien apprendre que d'emmagasiner des impressions sans y répondre par une réaction équivalente de l'esprit et du coeur.³⁴

29. Op. cit. p. 69. Especially by L. Daudet, one of two Goncourt academics who had voted against Le Feu.

30. Cited by J. Meyer op. cit. p. 53. A proclamation made 11th July 1917

31. Cited by J. Meyer op. cit. p. 56. Barbusse's reply to this attack is published in Paroles d'un Combattant pp. 66-71

32. Barbusse's article "Pourquoi te bats-tu?" was originally published in Les Nations, June 1917. It is included in Paroles d'un Combattant, op. cit.

33. Paris, Crès, 1917

34. Cited by J. Meyer op. cit. p. 54. See also A. des Lys, A propos d'un livre. "Le Feu" de Henri Barbusse, Angoulême, G. Vincent, 1917. In this pamphlet des Lys points out that Barbusse remains true in the sense that he does not invent, does not distort or idealise, nevertheless, he considers his novel to be audacious, evil, even criminal (p. 1) and vehemently attacks Barbusse's anti-patriotism (p. 7), his blasphemy of God (p. 8), suggesting that he is "un traître à la Patrie". (pp. 12-14).

Field points out that like the vast majority of Frenchmen who were opposed to the war, Barbusse's motives were entirely honourable, and that despite the abuse that was hurled against him, he was not intent upon spreading enemy propaganda within the disaffected ranks of the French army.³⁵ Barbusse himself makes his aims perfectly clear in the preface to a special edition of Le Feu, September 1917. Entitled, "Aux soldats vivants", he writes:

Moi qui vous connaissais, je savais que seule la vérité était digne de vous ...

Certes, je ne vous apprendrai rien ... Du moins ... je vous aiderai à vous rappeler ce que vous avez été. Je vous aiderai à garder en vous l'enfer que vous avez hanté: les cycles sinistres où se creuse la guerre, les champs de bataille ... Je vous empêcherai d'oublier de quel rayon de beauté morale et de parfait holocauste s'éclaira là-bas, en vous, la monstrueuse et dégoûtante horreur de la guerre.

Avec l'image des jours actuels pieusement enfermée dans vos coeurs, vous entretiendrez toujours, camarades, comme je le fais, depuis que j'ai la gloire de vous connaître, une haute notion de la loi morale et l'irrésistible besoin de la vérité ... C'est par elle que plus tard notre fraternité luttera pour la justice et que vous referez le monde après le déluge.³⁶

It is now our purpose to analyse Barbusse's portrayal of "truth" in Le Feu. In the opening pages Barbusse refers to the mud of the western front:

... des formes sortent de la plaine, qui est faite de boue et d'eau, et se cramponnent à la surface du sol, aveuglées et écrasées de fange, comme des naufragés monstrueux ... ce sont des soldats. La plaine, qui ruisselle, striée de longs canaux parallèles, creusée de trous d'eau, est immense et ces naufragés qui cherchent à se déterrer d'elle sont une multitude ...(Feu p. 4)

From the very beginning Barbusse employs an imagery and a vocabulary which are highly figurative in order to convey the horror of war. The soldiers are compared to castaways, forgotten by mankind and left

35. Three French Writers and the Great War, op. cit. p. 42

36. Published in Les Paroles d'un Combattant, op. cit. p. 43

to dwell in the depths of the earth. The fact that they emerge together and cling to the earth's surface, almost suggests that we are not dealing with ordinary man but a kind of beast of the soil, which is unearthing itself in great numbers. The reference to canals and shell holes full of water, emphasizes the wet conditions and the image of the shipwrecked men, surrounded by water with no immediate help. The appalling state of the terrain and constantly bad weather is emphasized at the beginning of chapter XI, "Le Chien":

Il faisait un temps épouvantable. L'eau et le vent assaillaient les passants, criblaient, inondaient et soulevaient les chemins.

... A travers la pluie épaisse, le paysage de ce matin-là était jaune sale, le ciel tout noir - couvert d'ardoises ... Le long des murs, des formes se rapetissaient et filaient, pliées, honteuses, en barbotant.

... Les hommes serrés là, dos à dos, formaient, de loin, comme une vaste éponge grouillante.(p. 130)

Again the vocabulary which Barbusse uses is highly figurative. The wind and the rain become apocalyptic forces as they sweep across the countryside. The soldiers, at the mercy of the elements, are totally overwhelmed. The use of the verb "se rapetisser" and the adjectives "plié" and "honteux", the fact that the troops become almost anonymous, "des formes", beneath the oppressive sky, and that they huddle together for protection like "une vaste éponge", indicates their powerlessness against the elements. A night fatigue party has a similar experience in chapter XXIII:

La pluie fait rage. Son bruit de ruissellement domine tout. C'est une désolation affreuse. On la sent sur la peau; elle nous dénude ...

Le vent glace sur nos figures les larmes de la sueur. Il est près de minuit. Voilà six heures qu'on marche dans la pesanteur grandissante de la boue.(p. 311)

There is a powerful contrast between the adjectives and verbs used to describe the rain and mud and their victim, the infantryman. "Faire rage", "dominer", "glacer", "pesanteur grandissante" are used to depict the appalling conditions; "désolation affreuse", "dénuder" "larmes de la sueur" refer to the soldiers. The rain becomes so torrential, at times, that trench walls collapse and are replaced by a vast sea of mud:

Les ténèbres étaient si épaisses que les fusées n'éclairaient que des tranchées nuageuses, rayées d'eau, au fond desquelles allaient, venaient, couraient en rond des fantômes désemparés ...

N'restez pas là, les gars, crièrent ces fuyards, ne v'nez pas, n'approchez pas! C'est affreux. Tout s'écroule. Les tranchées foutent le camp, les guitounes se bouchent. La boue entre partout. Demain matin y aura plus d'tranchées. C'est fini d'toutes les tranchées d'ici!(pp. 320-21)

Again the soldiers are portrayed as the weak, "des fantômes désemparés", "ces fuyards", as the all-conquering rain and mud encompass everything. By the following morning nothing remains of the trenches:

Où sont les tranchées?

On voit des lacs, et, entre ces lacs, des lignes d'eau laiteuse et stagnante. Il y a plus d'eau encore qu'on n'avait cru. L'eau a tout pris; elle s'est répandue partout, et la prédiction des hommes de la nuit s'est réalisée: il n'y a plus de tranchées, ces canaux ce sont les tranchées ensevelies. L'inondation est universelle. Le champ de bataille ne dort pas. Il est mort.(p. 323)

The repetition of "eau", "lacs", "canaux" emphasizes that the water has firmly taken control of the situation. The battlefield is similarly personified. It has yielded to the force of the rain. Barbusse's description of the horrific conditions along the western front almost turns to symbolism here. Water, along with the earth and sky, becomes one of the three fundamental elements which

determine man's existence in the trenches, "un monde perpétuellement égal à lui-même, et dont les seules variations sont dans les rapports changeants que ces éléments entretiennent entre eux ..."37 It liquefies everything, even the sky appears muddy and dark. There is little doubt that the privileged position attributed to water and mud is justified. In a letter written to his wife, 1st January 1915, Barbusse exclaims: "Quelle vie! La boue, la Terre, la Pluie! On est saturé, teint, pétri". In an article written from the front and dated 21st September 1915, Barbusse writes of "une désolation diluvienne".38 In addition to historical justification, however, the opaqueness and turbidity of the water corresponds to the author's desire to emphasize a unique atmosphere of infinite desolation. Water therefore becomes a symbol of hostility against which the soldiers of the trenches must perpetually struggle and, in so doing, accentuate their status as "martyrs". Barbusse's protagonist concludes:

"A une époque, je croyais que le pire enfer de la guerre ce sont les flammes des obus, puis j'ai pensé longtemps que c'était l'étouffement des souterrains qui se rétrécissent éternellement sur nous. Mais non, l'enfer, c'est l'eau".(pp. 326-7)

The symbol of hell for the infantryman is water. Barbusse describes the horrors of marching through the swamp-like trench lines:

On marche ... La pluie ne cesse pas et l'eau ruisselle dans le fond de la tranchée. Les caillebotis branlent sur le sol devenu mou: quelque-uns penchent à droite ou à gauche et on y glisse...

Quand il n'y a plus de caillebotis, on piétine dans la boue épaisse ...

Le sac tire et fait mal aux épaules, secoué dans cette course houleuse sous l'assaut des éléments ... On est obligé d'arracher ses

37. J. Relinger, "Comment Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse révèle un grand romancier", *Beiträge zur Romanischen Philologie*, XIV, 1975, p. 8

38. "Dans la Tranchée", *Europe* vol. 483-4 op. cit. p. 194

pieds de la terre molle et adhérente, en les levant très haut à chaque pas. Puis, ce passage laborieusement franchi, on redégringole tout de suite dans le ruisseau glissant. Les souliers ont tracé au fond deux ornières étroites où le pied se prend comme dans un rail, ou bien il y a des flaques où il entre à grand flocc. Il faut, à un endroit, se baisser très bas pour passer au-dessous du pont massif et gluant qui franchit le boyau ... On est forcé de s'agenouiller dans la boue, de s'écraser par terre et de ramper à quatre pattes pendant quelques pas. (pp. 164-5)

Throughout the passage the troops are gradually subordinated to the rain and the mud. At first they are able to march; then, as the rain continues, their footsteps become heavier; "on piétine dans la boue"; until, it is with a great effort, that they pull their feet out of the mud which clings to their boots with every footstep. Barbusse almost invites a comparison with beasts as they leave behind them narrow ruts where their boots have sunk deeply into the earth. Finally, there is the greatest ignominy of all as they are forced to kneel in the mud and progress, like animals, on all fours. Rest and sleep become almost impossible in such conditions:

Une détresse grandissante tombe sur ce groupe de soldats fatigués et transis, qui souffrent dans leur chair et ne savent vraiment pas quoi faire de leur corps.

Nom de Dieu, c'qu'on est mal!

Ces abandonnés crient cela comme une lamentation, un appel au secours. (p. 139)

Barbusse's graphic description is again charged with figurative language designed to puncture the absurd romanticizing of the "poilu" which went on in civilian circles. The distress of the troops is growing all the time; they are not merely "froids" but "transis"; their entire body suffers. The outburst of pain is representative of the discomfort of soldiers all along the front; there is almost the sense of the epic as these poor men, whom society has abandoned, lament their plight and cry out for help, only to resign themselves,

again, to their miserable existence. Cocon dare not change his underwear due to weakness brought on by the damp and cold conditions;(p. 140) in chapter XX, Barbusse is at pains to emphasize the extremely low temperature in winter:

Il fait un froid tel qu'on ne peut rester immobile malgré l'enchaînement de la fatigue. On tremble, on frissonne, on claque des dents, on larmoie ... Tout est glacé, incolore et vide; un silence de mort règne partout. Du givre, de la neige sous un fardeau de brume. Tout est blanc. Paradis remue, c'est un épais fantôme blafard.(p. 260)

The generous use of adjectives creates the feeling of intense cold. Nevertheless, one feels that Barbusse employs perhaps too many conventional literary images, here, in his desire to convey the horrific conditions of winter in the trenches. Soldiers tremble, shiver, their teeth chatter, their eyes water, amidst a deathly silence. Paradis is compared to a pale, ghostly-like figure, because of the snow which has rested on his coat and helmet.

Lack of rest leads to excessive fatigue. Barbusse describes faces which have turned a yellow colour, eyelids which have become reddened, men who appear to have been crying, who seem to have aged considerably in a matter of days.(p. 230) Marching becomes more and more difficult due to adverse weather conditions and shortage of sleep:

Les jambes ont une raideur ligneuse, les dos sont engourdis, les épaules meurtries ... On marche mécaniquement, les membres sont envahis d'une sorte de torpeur pétrifiée; les articulations crient et font crier.(pp. 60-1)

At the beginning of chapter XVI, after a particularly gruelling night's liaison work, Paradis acknowledges:

"De vrai ... tu m'croiras si tu voudras, mais j'suis éreinté, j'suis surmonté ... J'ai jamais eu marre d'une marche comme j'ai de celle-là".(p. 190)

Barbusse emphasizes the pain and misery of the troops: "une raideur ligneuse", "engourdis", "meurtries"; soldier's joints are personified, limbs are paralyzed with fatigue. It is the elements, the cold, the rain, the mud which reveal the tenacity of the troops, rather than authorial intervention. Relinger points out:

Barbusse . . a gardé la distance nécessaire pour savoir regarder, pour être à la fois participant et spectateur. Ce double rôle, il le doit à son âge, à son expérience, à son métier surtout.^{38a}

Nevertheless, there are instances in the novel, where the devastation of the battlefield and the weariness of the soldiers is described, when the narrator's ability to articulate what the simple infantrymen express in minimal form can clearly be detected. In chapter XXIV, "L'Aube", as Paradis surveys the desolation of the open countryside, one morning, his simple comment is "Voilà la guerre". Barbusse explains to the reader, however, what he really means and what the narrator understands by the comment:

Il veut dire, et je comprends avec lui:

Plus que les charges qui ressemblent à des revues, plus que les batailles visibles déployées comme des oriflammes, plus même que les corps à corps où l'on se démène, en criant, cette guerre, c'est la fatigue épouvantable, surnaturelle, et l'eau jusqu'au ventre, et la boue et l'ordure et l'infâme saleté ... c'est cela, et non pas la baïonnette qui étincelle comme de l'argent, ni le chant de coq, du clairon au soleil!(p. 330)

It would appear that Barbusse and Paradis share the same fundamental view of war but that there is a vast difference which lies precisely in the forms of expression. Paradis uses the spoken word when confronted with the obvious; the narrator, the written word, with a

38a. "Comment Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse révèle un grand romancier", *Beiträge zur Romanischen Philologie*, XIV, 1975, p. 6

need to evoke. Barbusse therefore is fulfilling his twofold aim in writing Le Feu; to portray the truth via Paradis, and to emphasize this in such a way that it might never be forgotten by future generations.

The increase in the number of flies and vermin, due to the growing casualty figures and deteriorating sanitary conditions, adds to the misery of the soldiers:

On traverse des multitudes de mouches qui, accumulées sur les murs par couches noires, s'éploient en nappes bruissantes lorsqu'on passe.

Ça va recommencer comme l'année dernière! ... Les mouches à l'extérieur, les poux à l'intérieur ...

Et les microbes encore plus à l'intérieur ...

... Les bestioles, rares il y avait quelques jours encore, multipliaient partout les murmures de leurs minuscules et innombrables moteurs.(pp. 74-5)

Barbusse's use of language is again highly expressive. The use of the verb "s'éployer" is particularly figurative; the categorizing of "mouches", "poux" and "microbes" in relation to the body, ironically scientific as is the description of the noise of the insects' "engines". As Volpatte and the narrator survey the battlefield and the dead in chapter XX, "Le Feu", they see the strange sight of corpses moving, new wounds appearing in the most skeleton-like of figures. Volpatte explains:

C'est un rat ... Les macchabées sont anciens, mais les rats les entretiennent ... Tu vois des rats crevés - empoisonnés p'têt' bien - près ou d'ssous chaque corps. Tiens, c'pauv' vieux va nous montrer les siens.

Il soulève du pied la dépouille aplatie et on trouve, en effet, deux rats morts enfoncés là.(pp. 268-9)

The squalor of the situation is enhanced by the total lack of respect for the dead, referred to as "macchabées" and finally "la dépouille

aplatie", whilst the rats are described as carrying out a seemingly praiseworthy task, that of looking after the corpses. Due to inadequate sanitary provision, the stench in the trenches becomes appalling. Barbusse describes the "couche visqueuse" at the bottom of the trenches and the vivid smell of urine;(pp. 5-6) a night fatigue party which becomes lost stumbles into the latrines without realizing:

Une odeur nauséabonde se dégage du boyau ...

Bon gré, mal gré, il faut passer par là puisqu'on ne peut pas revenir en arrière.

En avant dans la merde! crie le premier de la bande.

On s'y lance, étreints par le dégoût. La puanteur y devient intolérable. On marche dans l'ordure dont on sent, parmi la bourbe terreuse, les fléchissements mous.(p. 312)

There is a gradual build-up to the appalling nature of the scene. At first the soldiers are only aware of an "odeur nauséabonde"; as they enter the trench they are "étreints par le dégoût"; the "puanteur", much stronger than "odeur", becomes intolerable; finally, they are aware of a sinking feeling as they step into the excrement and waste. There is almost the feeling of the "epic" as Barbusse points out that they have no choice but to carry on and the mock heroic cry rings out: "en avant ..." not into battle, but "dans la merde!"

At the end of the march the troops are exhausted, incapable of further movement. Barbusse's emphasis of the negative again stirs the reader's admiration for them, but there is a clear implication that the soldiers are very much "existing" in the front lines, that much of the meaning of life has disappeared, that they have become almost depersonalized:

On serait peut-être tués un jour, ou prisonniers. Mais on ne pensait plus à rien. On ne pouvait plus, on ne savait plus.(p. 322)

The theme of "dehumanization" recurs throughout *Le Feu*. The beast becomes the symbol for the degeneration of man. In "L'Aube", as the shelling stops, soldiers begin to unravel out of their rolled-up shapes, covered in mud and slime. Barbusse writes:

... j'en distingue d'autres, recroquevillés et collés comme des escargots le long d'un talus arrondi et à demi résorbé par l'eau. C'est une rangée immobile de masses grossières, de paquets placés côte à côte, dégoulinant d'eau et de boue, de la couleur du sol auquel ils sont mêlés.(p. 324)

The image used is that of snails, dripping with water and mud, and the colour of the soil in which they mingle. The troops are inert masses, placed side by side, reabsorbing water and becoming more and more a part of the mud that surrounds them. At the beginning of Chapter II, the troops are referred to as enormous masses, bear-like in their ways, who growl and splash in the mud;(p. 6) Fouillade is described as "maigre comme un insecte" as he washes;(p. 131) the silhouettes of stretcher bearers and fatigue parties at work during the night, as they shrink to avoid enemy fire, then become larger, only to shrink again, are compared to those of worms;(pp. 257-8) the image of cattle is used in chapter II, when the soldiers, unable to make themselves comfortable in the intense cold, constantly sway from side to side like beasts in pens,(p. 26) and in chapter XXIII, as they prepare to move out of the front lines and give way to a relief of telephonists, they step aside "comme un bétail malaisé";(p. 308) in the final chapter, Barbusse compares the grunting and spluttering of the angry and confused men with the behaviour of deer.(p. 334) The image of the beast is intensified by the description of the soldiers' shape which becomes more and more distorted, as they begin to wear

more clothing of different size and texture in order to combat the extreme cold:

Peaux de bêtes, paquets de couvertures, toiles, passe-montagnes, bonnets de laine, de fourrure, cache-nez enflés, ou remontés en turbans, capitonnages de tricots et surtricots, revêtements et toitures de capuchons goudronnés, gommés, caoutchoutés ... recouvrent les hommes, effacent leurs uniformes presque autant que leur peau, et les immensifient.(p. 12)

Physically, they begin to lose all identity. Their uniforms which act as a link to the real world, disappear, and their human figure becomes perverted and unnatural. In chapter XIV, "Le Barda", Barbusse points out that everything which is manufactured for the soldier is common and ugly, of poor quality, and that this in itself has an adverse effect on his self-esteem.(p. 178) Jacques Meyer admires Barbusse's description and points out:

Les descriptions de l'habillement hétéroclite des soldats de l'hiver 14, comme de la pouillerie de leurs abris, sont la vérité même.³⁹

It is noticeable, however, that when Barbusse returns to this theme in the closing chapter, his protest against the stripping away of the individual's dignity becomes fervent and dramatic:

On est fait pour vivre, pas pour crever comme ça!
Les hommes sont faits pour être des maris, des pères - des hommes, quoi! - pas des bêtes qui traquent, s'égorgent et s'empestent.(p. 334)

There is a strong element of the rhetoric of impassioned "colloquial speech" present. Barbusse mixes the popular; "on", "crever", "ça", "quoi" with supposedly higher forms of diction: attempts at maxims, antithesis, climax, repetition. There is a contrast between "vivre"

39. "Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse", op. cit. p. 30

and "crever"; between "maris", "pères", "hommes" and "bêtes". Again we see Barbusse's vocabulary becoming increasingly figurative in this final chapter, tending away from the everyday speech of the men at the front, as he strives to convey the closing, powerful message to his reader. During several passages of *Le Feu*, Barbusse does not use the animal image to convey the degeneration of man, but makes the comparison with man's primitive ancestors.(see p. 17) He writes:

Ce sont de simple hommes qu'on a simplifiés encore, et dont, par la force des choses, les seuls instincts primordiaux s'accroissent: instinct de la conservation, égoïsme, espoir tenace de survivre toujours, joie de manger, de boire et de dormir.(p. 45)

In chapter II, "Dans la terre", he describes one soldier as resembling a savage, or a savage's tent, due to the fact that he is wrapped almost entirely in a blanket;(p. 7) later, in the same chapter, soldiers who gather around "le père" Blaire as he makes a ring, from aluminium that he has found, for his wife, are referred to as looking more savage and primitive than in any other situation;(p. 41) a procession of troops moving away from forward positions, are compared to "troglodytes sinistres émergeant à moitié de leurs cavernes de boue".(p. 43)⁴⁰ Not only do soldiers physically deteriorate, the way in which they are treated deteriorates also. For the most part, they have little idea of where they are being

40. See Barbusse's article written on 21st September 1915, "Dans la tranchée", *Europe* vol. 483-4, op. cit. p. 195. He uses practically the same words to describe these cave men type figures:

"Ces hommes sortis de terre, hirsutes, la figure grimaçante d'attention, occupés à limer et à polir l'humble bijou, font penser aux premiers artistes troglodytes qui, émergeant des cavernes antédiluviennes, s'extasiaient à graver un os à l'aide d'un autre os plus dur...!"

sent, or for how long, or for what reason.(p. 218)⁴¹ Tirette admits that he has stopped wondering and that he has ceased to think;(p. 27) Barque comments:

"... quand on y pense, qu'un soldat - ou même plusieurs soldats - ce n'est rien, c'est moins que rien dans la multitude, et alors on se trouve tout perdu, noyé, comme quelques gouttes de sang qu'on est, parmi ce déluge d'hommes et de choses".(p. 26)

The vocabulary Barbusse attributes to Barque is again highly figurative. The individual is almost drowned in a deluge of men, materials, activities. The image here is that of blood, which flows freely along the western front and to which each individual contributes but only a few drops. On another occasion the troops are described as merely grains of dust that blow across the open plains.(p. 18) One soldier concludes:

"On est des machines à oublier. Les hommes, c'est des choses qui pensent un peu, et qui, surtout, oublient. Voilà ce qu'on est".(p. 333)

Man is comparable to a machine, he has few feelings, thinks little and soon forgets.⁴² Clearly this is not what they perceived themselves to be but what politicians and army commanders in the rear wanted to believe.

Troops were at their most vulnerable during the hours of bombardment. In "La Descente" Barbusse describes the decimation of the eighteenth company: eighteen killed, some fifty soldiers

41. See also p. 233 "... on n'avertit jamais le soldat de ce qu'on va faire de lui; on lui met sur les yeux un bandeau qu'on n'enlève qu'au dernier moment."

42. Meyer finds this very realistic. He writes: "L'homme est devenu, à la guerre, d'après Barbusse, et ce fut bien vrai, d'abord une machine à attendre ..." and "Pour les mêmes raisons d'incohérence et de durée, le soldat est aussi, et heureusement pour lui, une machine à oublier. Il en a trop vu". op. cit. p. 36 and pp. 36-7

wounded, one out of three, in only four days at the front, casualties due solely to shell-fire. Chapter XIX is entitled "Bombardement". An early morning march is stopped abruptly as shells begin to fall:

Un autre obus. Un autre, un autre, plantent, vers le haut de la colline, des arbres de lumière violacée dont chacun illumine sourdement tout l'horizon.

Et bientôt, il y a un scintillement d'étoiles éclatantes et une forêt subite de panaches phosphorescents sur la colline: un mirage de féerie bleu se suspend légèrement à nos yeux dans le gouffre entier de la nuit.(p. 207)

Barbusse concentrates very much on the visual effect in this passage. There are many literary images. Exploding shells are compared to trees of purplish-blue light, sparkling stars, a forest of glowing plumes and a fairyhood illusion. As the bombardment becomes heavier the luminous "trees" become hazy parachutes, jelly-fish with tails of fire, white and grey ostrich plumes can be seen on hill 119, which appear suddenly then vanish without trace.(see p. 208)⁴³ Barbusse makes no reference to the devastation, fear or inhumanity of the barrage. His highly imaged vocabulary forces the reader away from reality to abstraction, from destruction and decimation to admiration and wonder. As the noise intensifies and the shelling draws nearer Barbusse describes "des sifflements aigus, tremblotants ou grinçants, des cinglements".(p. 209) It is extremely difficult to be precise

43. The style is reminiscent of Apollinaire's "Fête", published in *Calligrammes* (Poèmes de la Paix et de la Guerre), 1918, which begins:

Feu d'artifice en acier
Qu'il est charmant cet éclairage
Artifice d'artificier
Mêler quelque grâce au courage

and closes:

L'air est plein d'un terrible alcool
Filtré des étoiles mi-closes
Les obus caressent le mol
Parfum nocturne où tu reposes
Mortification des roses

about the sound of the shells as they fall, and almost impossible to convey this sound in everyday language. Barbusse uses conventional vocabulary, but as Genty points out in *La flamme victorieuse*⁴⁴ shells and bullets did not "whistle" but this was simply the traditional, everyday expression. "Tremblotant" conjures up an image of wings, "grinçants" of a door, "cinglements" of a whip, which clearly belong to the day to day existence of life in the rear but which are inevitably misplaced in the new environment which modern warfare has created. Barbusse continues:

Un bruit diabolique nous entoure. On a l'impression inouïe d'un accroissement continu, d'une multiplication incessante de la fureur universelle. Une tempête de battements rauques et sourds, de clameurs furibondes, de cris perçants de bêtes s'acharne sur la terre toute couverte de loques de fumée, et où nous sommes enterrés jusqu'au cou, et que le vent des obus semble pousser et faire tanguer. (p. 210)

Again Barbusse's vocabulary tends to move away from pure description towards the figural becoming almost apocalyptic and visionary.⁴⁵ The noise is now diabolical, an unparalleled growth of incessant, universal fury. In trying to destroy each other, it is almost as if the armies are also destroying the world. This observed reality can be most readily conveyed by hyperbolic and inspired description. The noise is "continu", "incessante", "universelle". Faced with the inexpressible Barbusse has recourse to analogy. The image of the storm at sea and the ship in distress, implied in the verb "tanguer", is not merely ornamental but an explanatory device aimed at rendering

44. Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1917, p. 71 "... à la vérité les balles ne sifflent pas. Elles font un bruit d'ailes métalliques, un bizarre froissement d'élytres".

45. See J. King "Henri Barbusse: *Le Feu* and the Crisis of Social Realism" in *The First World War in Fiction*, op. cit. p. 47. He writes: "The reality of this war was a grotesque mixture of the apocalyptic and the banal ..."

the unparalleled more intelligible. Van Rutten writes in "Le Style du Feu de Barbusse:"⁴⁶

... parfois une métaphore peut ouvrir la porte de l'imaginaire et donner à la vision une signification plus profonde.

In this particular description of the bombardment, the metaphor facilitates the reader's appreciation of the unknown, helping to capture the "truth" which can be nothing less than an "impression inouïe".^{46a} Again it is the image of a ship in distress, together with animal images, which are used to convey the noise of the shells:

Meuglements, rugissements, grondements farouches et étranges, miaulements de chat qui vous déchirent féroceement les oreilles et vous fouillent le ventre, ou bien le long hurlement pénétrant qu'exhale la sirène d'un bateau en détresse sur la mer ... La campagne, par places, se lève et retombe; elle figure devant nous, d'un bout de l'horizon à l'autre, une extraordinaire tempête de choses.(pp. 212-3)

"Meuglements" conjures up the image of cows, "rugissements" that of lions, "grondements" of wild beasts, "miaulements" of cats; the comparison is then made with the distress signal of a boat at sea and finally an extraordinary hurricane. There is even use of hyperbole as the countryside appears, in places, to move up and down, due to the impact of the gun-fire. A similar idea is expressed in chapter XXI "Le Poste de Secours". Barbusse's protagonist comments:

"... Nous avons été lancés violemment les uns sur les autres par le secouement effroyable du sol et des murs. Ce fut comme si la

46. La Pensée 172, December 1973, p. 128

46a. Barbusse acknowledges this in his article "Dans la tranchée", 22nd September 1915, op. cit. p. 197. He writes of the bombardment:

Celui qui n'a pas subi cela ne peut se faire une idée des heures que l'on passe courbé sous la rafale infernale qui vous souffle à la figure et vous brûle, qui hache et fracasse autour de vous les choses et les hommes, vous entoure et vous soulève dans du tonnerre et de l'avalanche ...

terre qui nous surplombait s'était effondrée et jetée sur nous".(p. 294)

The earth's surface appears to be breaking up and showering the troops with debris and mud, even the dead:

"De la nuque aux talons on vibrait, mêlés profondément aux vacarmes surnaturels. La plus hideuse des morts descendait et sautait et plongeait tout autour de nous dans des flots de lumière".(p. 319)

The devastation and desolation caused by bombardment is almost as difficult to picture as the bombardment itself. At the beginning of chapter XII, "Le Portique", Waterloo and the narrator survey the battlefield around the town of Souchez. The road leading to the town has been completely obliterated:

"Et maintenant, qu'est-ce que c'est? Regarde-moi ça: une espèce de longue chose crevée, triste, triste ... Regarde-moi ces deux tranchées de chaque côté, tout du long à vif, c'pavé labouré, troué d'entonnoirs, ces arbres déracinés, sciés, roussis, cassés en bûchers, jetés dans tous les sens, percés par des balles - tiens, c't'écumoire, ici! - Ah! mon vieux, mon vieux, tu peux pas t'imaginer c'qu'elle est défigurée, cette route!"(pp. 145-6)

The build-up of adjectives emphasizes the extent of the destruction; hardly anything remains standing. The bombardment is compared to a skimmer, moving across the surface of the land and destroying all

that protrudes. The town of Souchez itself has disappeared.⁴⁷ The narrator explains:

"Jamais je n'ai vu une pareille disparition de village ... plus rien n'a de forme: il n'y a pas même un pan de mur, de grille, de portail, qui soit dressé ...

On dirait un terrain vague et sale, marécageux, à proximité d'une ville, et sur lequel celle-ci aurait déversé pendant des années régulièrement, sans laisser de place vide, ses décombres, ses gravats, ses matériaux de démolitions et ses vieux ustensiles: une couche uniforme d'ordures et de débris parmi laquelle on plonge et l'on avance avec beaucoup de difficulté, de lenteur".(pp. 150-51)

Again literary technique is used in order to convey the scene of chaos and upheaval. The framework of a town which has, for many years, regularly deposited waste and debris outside its perimeter, is constructed. The dumping ground symbolizes the town itself, razed to the ground and completely destroyed by bombardment. In the final chapter, "L'Aube", Paradis and the narrator awake, one morning, only to discover a nightmarish world around them:

Devant nous renaît la plaine désastreuse où de vagues mamelons s'estompent, immergés, la plaine d'acier, rouillée par places, et où reluisent les lignes et les plaques de l'eau - et dans l'immensité, semés, çà et là comme des immondices, les corps anéantis qui y respirent ou s'y décomposent!(p. 329)

The open countryside is metaphorically coated with steel, as destroyed weaponry and used shells lie everywhere; again there is the comparison to a refuse camp as casualties and corpses appear

47. See J. Relinger, "Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse: Une Epopée réaliste?" op. cit. pp. 76-7. Relinger points out that the topography in the novel is precise, that Barbusse knew the area around Souchez well. He writes:

"Il y a vécu ou il les a visités: le boyau de l'Arbre isolé, le bois du Pendu, la route des Pylônes, le Chemin Creux, le bois de Berthonual, ainsi que la côte 119, la ferme des Alleux, le Cabaret Rouge, le Boyau International, etc ... Il connaît bien également les villes et les villages environnants: Liévin, Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, Lens, Vimy, Mingoal (devenu Argoval dans le roman), Gauchin le Gal et Camblin-l'Abbé (devenus Gauchin-l'Abbé) ..."

superfluous, "comme des immondices". Despite the literariness of the description, there is little superfluous detail or picturesque presentation. The style is a mixture of fact and familiar inflection. Barbusse describes what he sees of the countryside and what he feels:

les yeux de l'intelligence et du coeur prenant le relais de la vision directe.⁴⁸

In chapter III, "La Descente", Barbusse describes the mutilation of the 18th Company: Barbier has had his back sliced off as if cut by a razor; Besse has had his stomach pierced with shrapnell; Codefroy has had the middle of his body cut out and instantly bleeds like an overturned bucket; Vigile has his head flattened like a "galette" and his body has become so dark in colour that he resembles more a shadow than a human being. Chapter XXI, "le Poste de Secours", is devoted to the wounded. Van Rutten points out that the description of the descent into the makeshift hospital attains Dantesque proportions.⁴⁹ The depths of the casualty station, beneath the ground, are comparable to the depths of Hell, the whole scene assumes nightmarish qualities. One patient cries so much with pain that he showers those next to him with his tears; another is described as bleeding like a fountain; a young soldier complains of the burning sensation and is compared with a funeral-pyre (p. 280); stretchers which bear lifeless objects have the look of coffins. (p. 282) Barbusse's description is visionary in nature. The use of simile, here, however, tends to poeticize the horror of the casualty station, to detach the reader

48. J. Relinger, "Comment Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse révèle un grand romancier", op. cit. p. 9

49. "Le Style du Feu de Barbusse", op. cit. p. 129

from the anguish and torment and provide him with a more ornate even "mythical" version of the truth. In another passage, Barbusse describes the wounded as:

Eclopés, balafrés, difformes - immobiles ou agités - cramponnés sur cette espèce de barque, ils figurent, cloués là, une collection disparate de souffrances et de misères.(p. 282)

Again the vision continues. "Cette espèce de barque", recalls the boat of Charon, who, in Greek legend, was the ferryman of the souls of the dead over the river Styx which surrounded the underworld. The use of the five adjectives enhances the pain and suffering of the troops; "une collection disparate de souffrances et de misères" attempts to summarize the appalling wounds and nauseating agony. One young airman, who has been badly burned and whose temperature is dangerously high, appears almost to be on fire, due to the heat of his body. Again Barbusse uses figurative language to portray his suffering, with a constant emphasis on burning and heat:

Il a des brûlures sur un côté du corps et à la figure. Il continue à brûler dans la fièvre, et il lui semble qu'il est encore mordu par les flammes aiguës qui jaillissaient du moteur.(p. 283)

The heat and flames add to the overall vision of Hell. One soldier cries out bitterly:

"J'suis gangrené, j'suis écrasé, j'suis en morceaux à l'intérieur ... Pourtant, jusqu'à la semaine dernière, j'étais jeune et j'étais propre. On m'a changé: maintenant j'n'ai plus qu'un vieux sale corps tout défait à traîner".(pp. 283-4)

Another protests

"Moi ... hier j'avais vingt-six ans. Et maintenant, quel âge j'ai?"(p. 284)

Van Rutten compares the wounded to "les ombres des enfers" and likens their futile protests to those of the characters of Dante's *Inferno*.⁵⁰ Nothing is explicit, but, by allusion to myth, Barbusse hopes that the horror of what he saw and experienced in the trenches will assume a significance that a purely factual description could never attain. As Van Rutten points out:

La stylisation générale de l'oeuvre est d'ailleurs conçue pour générer ce dépassement du réalisme. L'oeuvre est encadrée de deux visions qui l'illuminent, celles des premières pages "Vision", et les dernières intitulées "Aube".⁵¹

Barbusse's use of imagery is also apparent in his pictorial representation of the dead. *Le Feu* abounds with descriptions of corpses and the aftermath of battle. In chapter XX, "Le Feu", the narrator describes a horizontal mass as resembling a wood pile. A closer look reveals that these are not tree trunks but corpses: (p. 225)

On les a posés tant bien que mal; ils se calent s'écrasent, l'un sur l'autre. Celui d'en haut est enveloppé d'une toile de tente. On avait mis sur les autres figures des mouchoirs, mais en les frôlant, la nuit, sans voir, ou bien le jour, sans faire attention, on a fait tomber les mouchoirs, et nous vivons face à face avec ces morts, amoncelés là comme un bûcher vivant. (p. 226)

Barque's stomach is hollowed out like a wash-basin, his head rests slightly raised on a pile of mud and therefore gives the impression that he is surveying all that goes on around him. Thick crusts of blood are sculptured around his face, and his eyes appear to have

50. Ibid. p. 129

51. Ibid. p. 130. Van Rutten continues: "Bien des rapprochements sont à faire entre ces deux chapitres. Des aristocrates malades dans un Sanatorium ... sont pourtant lucides et voient les malheurs de la guerre; le soir descend sur la vision. Après la terrible épreuve révélatrice de la situation réelle de l'homme, l'aube se lève sur les soldats surgissant de la boue ... l'espoir de progrès".

been boiled in water. Eudore's face is so white that it resembles that of "Pierrot" and acts as a striking contrast, like a ball of white paper, to the tangle of greyish, bluish bodies that surround him.(pp. 228-9) There is something incongruous about Biquet's corpse:

... il a l'air d'essayer de soulever le brouillard; cet effort profond déborde en grimace sur sa face bossuée par les pommettes et le front saillant, la pétrit hideusement, semble hérissier par places ses cheveux terreux et desséchés, fend sa mâchoire pour un spectre de cri, écarte toutes grandes ses paupières sur ses yeux ternes et troubles, ses yeux de silex; et ses mains sont contractées d'avoir griffé le vide.(p. 229)

With his prominent features and painful grimace, his hair standing on end, his jaw set as if to let out the most horrific cry and his eyelids wide open revealing his flint-like eyes, he has the appearance of a macabre demon rather than a man who has just been killed. A similar abominable presence can be seen with the death of Bertrand in chapter XX. He has been transformed from a handsome and gentle man to a grotesque figure:

Les cheveux éparpillés sur les yeux, la moustache bavant dans la bouche, la figure bouffie, il rit. Il a un oeil grand ouvert, l'autre fermé, et tire la langue. Les bras sont étendus en croix, les mains ouvertes, les doigts écartés ... Une lugubre ironie a donné aux derniers sursauts de cette agonie l'allure d'une gesticulation de paillasse.(p. 269)

Again Barbusse's imagery dominates the passage as Bertrand with one eye open, one eye closed and tongue protruding, is given the semblance of a clown. In other passages, the style becomes almost visionary. When a shell bursts in front of the narrator and Poterloo in chapter II, the former explains:

"Je me souviens bien pourtant: pendant cette seconde où, instinctivement, je cherchais, éperdu, hagard, mon frère d'armes, j'ai vu son corps monter, debout, noir, les deux bras étendus de toute leur envergure, et une flamme à la place de la tête!"(p. 167)

The presentation of Poterloo's death is reminiscent of a biblical ascension to heaven, it borders on the irrational, the imaginary.⁵² It has the effect of striking the reader and making him aware, to some extent, of the horrific impact of shell-fire, that a straightforward factual revelation might not achieve. Towards the end of "L'Aube", the revolting details of the mutilation of a soldier by shrapnel, again shock the reader with the vividness with which they are expressed. Barbusse writes:

On contempla dans un silence terrible, ce dos vertical que nous présentait la dépouille disloquée, ces bras pendants et courbés en arrière, et ces deux jambes allongées qui posaient sur la terre fondante par la pointe des pieds.(p. 338)

The distortion of the corpse is unbelievable. The facts speak for themselves. It is not clear, however, to what extent the image portrayed is a replica of the real or an exaggeration as part of the overall unrelieved protest of the novel. Certainly the dead are present everywhere as if to intensify the author's revolt against war. In one passage the battlefield is compared to a cemetery where the dead have been exhumed;(pp. 265-6) in the chapter entitled "Le Feu", the slope known as the "Alvéoles des Zouaves" leads to an unbelievable scene of carnage:

La terre est tellement pleine de morts que les éboulements découvrent des hérissements de pieds, de squelettes à demi vêtus et

52. See J. Meyer "Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse", op. cit. p. 44. He writes: "Souvent le visionnaire poétique s'élève au-dessus de la réalité et l'évoque ..."

des ossuaires de crânes placés côte à côte sur la paroi abrupte, comme des bocaux de porcelaine.

Il y a dans le sol, ici, plusieurs couches de morts, et en beaucoup d'endroits l'affouillement des obus a sorti les plus anciennes et les a disposées et étalées par-dessus les nouvelles ...

Les tranchées qui courent dans ce vallon ont l'air de crevasses sismiques, et il semble que sur les ruines d'un tremblement de terre on ait déversé des tombereaux d'objets hétéroclites. Et là où il n'y a pas de morts, la terre elle-même est cadavéreuse".(pp. 270-1)

There is an element of exaggeration in the first paragraph as the crumbling of the land reveals skeletons and heaps of skulls which are left side by side on the trench walls like china jars; in the second paragraph the idea of several different layers in the society of the dead as with the living appeals to the imagination. In the final paragraph it is the land itself which is seen as cadaverous. It would be unfair to criticize Barbusse for artistic distortion, at this point. Not only is it inevitable once an author begins to use words to convey the "real", but as Ducasse, Meyer and Perreux point out in Vie et Mort des Français 1914-18,⁵³ of the eight million Frenchmen mobilized during the war, over 1,300,000 were killed and a further three million wounded. These figures indicate an enormous proportion of dead and wounded in comparison to the actual numbers of men serving at the front at any one time. Relinger acknowledges:

Pour les "poilus", les charniers, l'horreur anatomique des soldats éventrés par la baïonnette, percés par la mitraille, écartelés par les bombes et les mines constituaient une réalité quotidienne.⁵⁴

He concludes that Barbusse exaggerates no more than any other writer, but that his powers of description, his temperament and motivation are more highly charged than most.⁵⁵ There are other instances where

53. Paris, Hachette, 1959, p. 508

54. "Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse: Une Epopée réaliste?" op. cit. p. 82

55. Ibid. pp. 84-5

Barbusse, quite conversely, does not portray the dead grotesquely, but serenely, yet which have a similar effect. In chapter XII, "Le Portique", a stretcher bearer shows the corpse of a sergeant of the 405th regiment to the narrator and Paterloo. Both are struck by the sweetness of death:

... il est tout jeune et a l'air de dormir; seulement, la prunelle est révulsée, la joue est cireuse, et une eau rose baigne les narines, la bouche et les yeux.(p. 148)

Apart from the greyness of Cocon's eyes, he appears quite content and relaxed in death;(p. 267) a German sergeant rests in seated position with only a small hole beneath his eye where a bayonet has nailed him to the wall of the trench;(p. 272) one enemy soldier sits with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands as if thinking, but closer inspection reveals the top of his head sliced off "comme un oeuf à la coque";(p. 272) another remains leaning against the wall of the trench, sliced horrifically in two from head to pelvis like a human post;(p. 272) other enemy troops can be seen kneeling as if praying for deliverance, but who have been impaled in the back;(p. 272) Mesnil André, who has been dead for four days, although horribly pale, seems almost to smile at his rifle;(p. 236) on a night march the narrator is forced to pass through a trench of corpses, one still with a pipe in his mouth.(p. 321) In chapter XXIV Barbusse describes corpses which float gently like reefs in shell holes filled with water, their hair standing out like aquatic grass. One lies face upwards:

Les yeux sont deux trous blancs; la bouche est un trou noir. La peau jaune, boursouflée, de ce masque apparaît molle et plissée, comme de la pâte refroidie.(p. 325)

In all these instances there is a strong atmosphere of peace and tranquillity. The dead are portrayed as unruffled, unagitated. Barbusse comments upon what had been a frightful zone, the previous day:

C'est maintenant un surnaturel champ de repos.(p. 325)

Many corpses cannot be identified. Their clothes, covered in mud and slime do not reveal whether they are German or French. They have no weapons or other forms of identification. They join together in peaceful anonymity. Barbusse reflects:

C'est la fin de tout. C'est, pendant un moment, l'arrêt immense, la cessation épique de la guerre.(p. 326)

In chapter XII the grotesque and the serene come together in a passage artistically designed by the author to have the maximum appeal to the reader's emotions. Waterloo and the narrator arrive at a depression in the land where the dead are aligned, awaiting to be transferred to cemeteries in the rear:

Ils sont serrés les uns contre les autres; chacun ébauche, avec les bras ou les jambes, un geste pétrifié d'agonie différent. Il en est qui montrent des faces demi-moisies, la peau rouillée, jaune avec des points noirs. Plusieurs ont la figure complètement noircie, goudronnée, les lèvres huméfiées et énormes ...

D'autres sont des larves informes, souillées ... Plus loin, on a transporté un cadavre dans un état tel qu'on a dû, pour ne pas le perdre en chemin, l'entasser dans un grillage de fil de fer qu'on a fixé ensuite aux deux extrémités d'un pieu. Il a été ainsi porté en boule dans ce hamac métallique, et déposé là.(p. 147)

Clearly, the horror of these details of human mutilation have a profound effect upon the reader. This, however, is enhanced by the brutal contrast of the paragraph which follows, where Barbusse

describes the letters, received from the rear, which have fallen from the pockets of the corpses as they were set out on the ground:

Sur l'un de ces bouts de papier tout blancs, qui battent de l'aile à la bise, mais que la boue engluée, je lis, en me penchant un peu, une phrase: "Mon cher Henri, comme il fait beau temps pour le jour de ta fête!"(p. 147)

Barbusse tells us of this particular corpse:

... il a les reins fendus d'une hanche à l'autre par un profond sillon; sa tête est à demi retournée; on voit l'oeil creux et sur la tempe, la joue et le cou, une sorte de mousse verte a poussé.(p. 147)

The striking difference between the cheerful letter and the receiver's death, and the poeticizing of his death (there is no mention of facial agony or dismembering of the corpse, only a deep wound in the lower abdomen and "une sorte de mousse verte" which has developed across one side of his head and which appears to mask the true horror) in comparison with the horrific description of the corpses in the previous passage, intensifies the author's protest at, and the reader's reaction to, the barbarity and outrageousness of war. Towards the end of chapter XIX, Barbusse's tone becomes almost visionary. As, yet again, the narrator surveys a scene of death and putrefaction, there is a philosophical intervention as the author analyses, then looks into the future

... on est ébloui par ce poudrolement d'hommes aussi petits que les étoiles de ciel. Pauvres semblables, pauvres inconnus, c'est votre tour de donner! Une autre fois, ce sera le nôtre. A nous demain, peut-être, de sentir les cieux éclater sur nos têtes ou la terre s'ouvrir sous nos pieds, d'être assaillis par l'armée prodigieuse des projectiles, et d'être balayés par des souffles d'ouragan cent mille fois plus forts que l'ouragan.(p. 221)

In an article "Les Ecrivains et l'Utopie", published in Le Pays, 2nd June 1917, Barbusse examined the role of the writer. He remarked:

Il faut que les écrivains voient clair et voient loin, et qu'ils disent la vérité.⁵⁶

A year later, in response to the attack on Le Feu by Eckenfelder,⁵⁷ Barbusse replied:

J'affirme que tout ce qui a été écrit par moi est l'exacte vérité.

Il s'agit ou de choses que j'ai vues ou faites (et c'est la plus grande partie) ou de choses qui m'ont été racontées par des camarades que je savais sincères.⁵⁸

Jacques Meyer, writing from a privileged position as a former front line soldier himself, claims that Barbusse describes all the calamities that afflicted the troops: mud, water, rain, pestilence, bombardment, and so on.⁵⁹ Brett agrees, pointing out that the "realism" of Le Feu, the truthfulness of the characters, of their psychology and of their environment, was the very essence of its originality in comparison to previous novels dealing with war.⁶⁰ Barbusse achieves all this through a juxtaposition of factual documentation and a vocabulary which, in places, encroaches upon the visionary and the mythical, through scenes of banal concern set against those of epic violence and destruction. To convey the physical horrors of trench warfare, Barbusse employs an imagery and

56. Published in Paroles d'un Combattant, op. cit. p. 29

57. See p. 223 (this thesis)

58. "Réponse à mes Calomniateurs", published in Paroles d'un Combattant, op. cit. p. 66

59. "Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse, Europe 477 op. cit. p. 29

60. See Henri Barbusse: Sa marche vers la clarté, son mouvement CLARTE, op. cit. pp. 114-15

vocabulary which become increasingly figurative as he strives to do justice to the unprecedented levels of suffering and turmoil, and as the narrative is gradually transformed from a story of simple soldiers at war to their struggle against forces of cataclysmic propensity. For the most part the figurative language comprises conventional literary images which help the reader to come to terms with the unknown, the unparalleled. The emphasis placed upon the elements, lightness and darkness, the earth, fire and water - archetypal images of disaster and punishment - lends to the descriptions an intensely apocalyptic tone, which enhances, in turn, the desperate plight of the troops. It is to this that Meyer is surely referring when he writes:

... dans Le Feu, entre les tranches de réalisme photographique, de "débouillage" systématique de crânes, le poète apparaît constamment.⁶¹

It is precisely the culmination of all these characteristics of Barbusse's treatment of horrors of trench life - factual accuracy, vision, the ability to create the apocalyptic chaos of a countryside flooded by water and choked by mud, the use of figurative language to facilitate the discovery of a tragic scenario - which contributes to what Relinger calls "une vérité humaine impérissable". We share his conclusion:

Le Feu est la création romanesque d'un monde vrai, original, spécifique, possédant ses propres lois: c'est parce qu'il intègre toutes les ressources de la création artistique pour créer un monde à la fois réel et romanesque, dans son milieu physique, dans sa durée, dans l'homogénéité de ses personnages, qu'il est resté et restera vrai.⁶²

61. "Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse" op. cit. p. 44

62. "Comment Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse révèle un grand romancier", op. cit. p. 12

ii) Intellectual protest and prophetic vision

In this section, we shall focus attention on Barbusse's analysis of the significance of human existence in *Le Feu*. As early as 1908 in *L'Enfer*, Barbusse's tone was almost existentialist in nature. The novel centres around the death of a patient from cancer. Barbusse writes of the cancer gradually penetrating and destroying society as a whole. He identifies the disease with nationalism and militarism, propagated in France, at the time, by Barrès and Maurras. By 1916 he was advocating equality as the great human formula for success, viewing the prolongation of the war in order to defeat Germany as entirely unnecessary and absurd. In a letter to his wife, dated 23rd March 1916, he writes that a quick ending must be brought to the war and a firm programme established as swiftly as possible in order to avoid future conflicts. These will be inevitable, unless:

... si d'ici là les peuples qu'on mène à la boucherie ne prennent enfin la simple et logique résolution de se tendre la main les uns les autres ... malgré les désirs des gouvernants ...⁶³

He points out, in the same letter, that the only political doctrine that can help to bring this about is socialism. As early as January 1916, he advocated the socialist approach in a letter to his wife from the front. He wrote of:

... Les socialistes en qui je vois, mathématiquement, fatalement, le seul recours possible contre les guerres futures.⁶⁴

63. Letter of 23rd March 1916

64. 26th January 1916

By April 1916, his idealism and militant pacifism of the pre-war years had begun to dominate, once again, the early enthusiasm of August 1914. On the 14th April, he wrote to his wife:

Je vois de tous côtés l'effort immense qu'on fait, en dépit de l'union Sacrée ... pour enrayer et annihiler les efforts du socialisme, la seule doctrine ... cependant où il y ait, au point de vue international, je ne dis pas seulement une lueur d'humanité mais ... de raison.

Behind his despair was an ardent desire for human brotherhood. Field points out that it was only during the First World War, that Barbusse was able, both as a human being and as a writer, to break out of the isolation to which he felt himself to be condemned in the years before 1914 and to urge mankind to emancipate itself from its selfishness and greed.⁶⁵ Relinger believes that *Le Feu* is an indirect translation of Barbusse's gradual revolutionary progression, which did not stop with the publication of the novel but continued long afterwards.⁶⁶ He writes:

La réalité dans *Le Feu* est donc mise en oeuvre par un écrivain et homme social. C'est ce qui donne de la profondeur à son réalisme. Il correspond bien à un dessein, mais non prémédité. Ce n'est pas de parti pris qu'il condamne la guerre; sa certitude s'est construite au contact de la réalité que le livre dépeint.⁶⁷

For Carassus, it is this ideological amplification, this visionary and prophetic side of *Le Feu* which adds to the novel's greatness, enabling it to attain "l'ampleur d'un mythe poétique".⁶⁸

65. *Three French Writers and the Great War*, op. cit. p. 32

66. It was not until 1923 that Barbusse joined the Communist Party.

67. "*Le Feu* d'Henri Barbusse: Une Epopée réaliste?", op. cit. pp. 94-5

68. "*Avant Le Feu*: Trois articles de Barbusse sur la guerre", op. cit. p. 203

In chapter VI "Habitudes" and chapter VII "Embarquement", attention is drawn to the isolation of the soldier in the trenches and the lack of information and explanation supplied from commanding officers. One soldier remarks:

"Voilà dix-sept jours qu'on est là! Et on croyait qu'on allait s'en aller du jour au lendemain!

On n'sait jamais! dit Paradis, en hochant la tête et en claquant la langue".(p. 85)

As the squad is ordered to a different sector, Barbusse's use of the impersonal "on" emphasizes the indifference of the military hierarchy in the rear:

... on nous lançait ailleurs. On avait disparu de Gauchin à la faveur des ténèbres, sans voir les choses et les gens, sans leur dire adieu du regard, sans en emporter une dernière image.(p. 89)⁶⁹

The repetition of "sans" intensifies the feeling of unconcern on the part of the commanding officers and the use of "adieu" and "dernière image" suggests an inevitability about the soldiers' destiny over which they have no control. During the build-up of troops in "L'Embarquement" long, unbroken passages of narrative stress the fact that the soldier is very much an onlooker in matters about which he knows very little. They grow accustomed to the large numbers of troops which congregate in the railway stations whose destination is unknown and which finally becomes too tiresome for their imagination. They lose all interest and quickly resign themselves to their lack of knowledge. After the troops have received notification of a change in manoeuvres in "Bombardement", Barbusse's narrator comments:

69. See Van Ruten, "Le Style du Feu de Barbusse", op. cit. p. 131 "... le on est plus souvent présent que le nous pour décrire le groupe. Ce pronom impersonnel confond tous les hommes en une seule masse sans identité".

Il est impossible de démêler le sens de l'immense manoeuvre où notre régiment roule comme un petit rouage. Mais, perdus dans le lacs de bas-fonds où l'on va et vient interminablement, fourbus, brisés et démembrés par des stationnements prolongés, abrutis par l'attente et le bruit, empoisonnés par la fumée - on comprend que notre artillerie s'engage de plus en plus et que l'offensive semble avoir changé de côté. (p. 218)

He wishes to stress the lack of regard on behalf of those in higher command for the thousands of soldiers who were so often manipulated at will.⁷⁰ The comparison of the regiment to a small train of wheels in a much larger movement which is impossible to understand, emphasizes the hopelessness of their situation. This is heightened by the liberal use of adjectives, "perdus, fourbus, brisés, démembrés, abrutis, empoisonnés ..." and the rather anticlimatic ending where the troops meekly accept the uncertainty of their

70. In a letter to his wife, dated 1st April 1915, Barbusse writes: "Le "chef" ne vient jamais en première ligne dans les tranchées. Il est bien habillé et bien astiqué, bien vernissé comme une belle faïence, mais comme la belle faïence, il ne va pas au feu".

In letters of the 6th and 8th April 1915, he emphasizes the stupidity of some commanding officers during rest periods in the reserve lines. On 18th April, Barbusse refused promotion to corporal for the second time. Meyer comments: "C'est le colonel qui prescrit des exercices imbéciles; mais c'est bien plus haut qu'on ordonne des offensives inutiles et terriblement coûteuses ..." and adds that Barbusse had no inclination to take even the first steps to such heights. ("Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse", op. cit. p. 42). Meyer also remarks that unlike most novels dealing with the war, *Le Feu* mentions few soldiers of rank. There is no captain, lieutenant or sub-lieutenant described, and yet these ranks would most certainly have been living in the front lines with the troops at some point. He writes:

"Sans doute n'a-t-il voulu décrire que la vie d'une escouade prise isolément, on devrait dire abstraitement. Mais il est impossible qu'une escouade n'ait jamais eu le moindre contact avec un officier de sa compagnie".

He points out that *Le Feu* deals with humble soldiers yet mentions officers and concludes that in suppressing them, on the whole, from his work, Barbusse gives an incomplete, if not partially false view of life in the trenches:

"... elle laisserait croire que des soldats n'avaient pas besoin - ni même envie - d'être commandés, à condition que ce fût justement". (pp. 45-6)

future: "on comprend que ... l'offensive semble avoir changé de côté".

Barbusse draws attention to the infrequent leave and poor food received by those in the lines. Cocon points out that the squadron has spent up to sixteen days in the trenches without relief and that the troops have been lodged in forty-seven different villages;(p. 186) in "L'Oeuf", a group of soldiers in the reserve lines, bemoan the poor quality and quantity of their rations. The narrator explains:

On était désespérés. On avait faim, on avait soif et dans ce malheureux cantonnement, rien!

Le ravitaillement, d'ordinaire régulier, avait fait défaut, alors, la privation arrivait à l'état aigu.(p. 187)

Their plight is worsened by the fact that they have no more matches and therefore cannot even smoke to relieve their hunger. Barbusse has his narrator comment:

Ça, c'est dur, en effet, et il est pitoyable de voir les poilus qui ne peuvent pas allumer leur pipe ou leur cigarette, et qui, résignés, les mettent dans la poche et se promènent.(p. 188)

Barbusse is at pains to point out that the majority of the men in the trenches are not professional soldiers but simply ordinary civilians, "des civils déracinés", who have been caught up in the conflict and who are prepared to give their best but who, in the last analysis, are "simplement des hommes".(p. 243) Clearly, there is the feeling that man was not created to tolerate such hardships and horrors. In "L'Aube", one soldier claims that he will never be able to forget the misery of the trenches:

"... chaque chose qu'on a vue était trop. On n'est pas fabriqué pour contenir ça ..." (p. 332)

During the hours preceeding an attack and during the attack itself, Barbusse illustrates the absurdity of the human predicament. He writes:

Chacun sait qu'il va apporter sa tête, sa poitrine, son ventre, son corps tout entier, tout nu, aux fusils braqués d'avance, aux obus, aux grenades accumulées et prêtes, et surtout à la méthodique et presque infaillible mitrailleuse - à tout ce qui attend et se tait effroyablement là-bas - avant de trouver les autres soldats qu'il faudra tuer. (p. 243)

There is a vivid contrast between the fragility of the human body and the powerful impact of modern technology. The enumeration of "tête, poitrine, ventre, corps" is complemented by the enumeration of "fusils, obus, grenades" and "mitrailleuse". The absurdity of the situation is enhanced by the fact that once the soldier has exposed his body to the all destructive capacity of modern science, he must then find other human beings to kill with similar fears and worries. Again, Barbusse provides the reader with a precise comment:

C'est en pleine conscience, comme en pleine force et en pleine santé, qu'ils se massent là, pour se jeter une fois de plus dans cette espèce de rôle de fou imposé à tout homme par la folie du genre humain. (p. 243)

Authorial intervention is quite strong at this point. There is little doubt about his humane shock at the folly of war. Mankind has clearly become insane; individuals accept their "rôle de fou", "en pleine conscience", "en pleine force", "en pleine santé". The contrast again emphasizes the protest. The absurdity of the attack itself is vividly recounted. The soldiers themselves undergo a physical transformation:

On se regarde. Il y a de la fièvre aux yeux, du sang aux pommettes. Les souffles ronflent et les coeurs tapent dans les poitrines.

On se reconnaît, confusément, à la hâte, comme si dans un cauchemar on se retrouvait un jour face à face, au fond des rivages de la mort.(pp. 248-9)

Their features become distorted as their tension and emotion heighten. Barbusse draws the comparison with the distortion and general confusion of a nightmare. The narrator continues with his description of the advance:

Une salve terrible nous éclate à la figure, à bout portant, jetant devant nous une subite rampe de flammes tout le long de la bordure de terre. Après un coup d'étourdissement, on se secoue et on rit aux éclats, diaboliquement ...(p. 252)

The months of contact with mechanized violence and with appallingly costly military action, resulted in excessive strain which, clearly, required release. This temporary "battle madness" was almost a yielding to complete despair. Barbusse's protest is again achieved via a contrast. The violent, superhuman perspectives of war are laughed at, uncontrollably, by the troops. The adverb "diaboliquement", however, suggests that their constant isolation and moments of intense loneliness and terror, have rendered them susceptible to madness. As they advance amongst the dead and wounded, the narrator describes their demoniac behaviour:

Des groupes ont l'air de danser en brandissant leurs couteaux. Ils sont joyeux, immensément rassurés, féroces.(p. 255)

After the attack subsides, Bertrand admits that he fought "comme un fou".(p. 258) In "L'Aube", Barbusse analyses how the psychological

strain of war gradually develops evil instincts within the soldiers' minds, and how these, in turn, manifest themselves:

... la méchanceté jusqu'au sadisme, l'égoïsme jusqu'à la férocité, le besoin de jouir jusqu'à la folie.(p. 335)

He is at pains to show that war is an overwhelming force, greater than the individual and past simple understanding. It leads to a deeper self-awareness, self-knowledge; an intensification of existence and, at the same time, an acknowledgement of the inevitability of death. It was this acknowledgement and the powerlessness of the individual against the impersonal force of events, that brought about a new kind of heroism, sheer physical and psychological endurance. Nevertheless, constant confrontation with death, grotesque suffering, horrific violence and the daily discomfort of trench warfare, all taxed the individual's inner resources. In "Volpatte et Fouillade", Volpatte celebrates his good fortune upon receiving a "bonne blessure", which he hopes will result in evacuation to the rear, perhaps even home. He imagines the future:

"On va m'attacher une étiquette rouge à la capote, y a pas d'erreur, et m'mener à l'arrière ... Pis l'ambulance, pis l'train sanitaire avec des chatteries des dames de la Croix-Rouge ... pis l'hôpital de l'intérieur. Des lits avec des draps blancs, un poêle qui ronfle au milieu des hommes ... Et dans les grands hôpitals, c'est là qu'on est bien logé comme nourriture! J'y prendrai des bons repas, j'y prendrai des bains; j'y prendrai tout c'que j'trouverai".(p. 55)

In order to stress the value of a "bonne blessure" and therefore to emphasize further the astonishing malaise of civilisation, Barbusse has Farfadet reply in a thoughtful, almost intellectual manner. His rational, articulate tone contrasts with Volpatte's abruptness:

"Au commencement ... je trouvais drôle quand j'entendais désirer "la bonne blessure". Mais tout de même, quoi qu'on puisse dire, tout de même, je comprends, maintenant, qu'c'est la seule chose qu'un pauvre soldat puisse espérer qui ne soit pas fou".(p. 56)

Barbusse, himself, directly intervenes in the narrative at this point, in order to convey part of the novel's protest. He writes:

Comment ne pas l'envier? Il allait s'en aller pour un, ou deux ou trois mois et pendant cette saison, au lieu d'être exposé et misérable, il serait métamorphosé en rentier!(p. 56)

Again the use of contrast helps to stress the absurdity of the situation. "Métamorphosé" suggests the physical change that Volpatte will undergo once he returns back to civilian surroundings. In chapter X, "Argoval", Barbusse shows the repercussions of events when individuals are driven to the extreme. Sergeant Suilhard takes the narrator to see the grave of Cajard, executed for attempting to avoid trench duty. Suilhard explains:

"on a amené le bonhomme à l'aube, et ce sont les types de son escouade qui l'ont tué. Il avait voulu couper aux tranchées; pendant la relève, il était resté en arrière, puis était rentré en douce au cantonnement. Il n'a rien fait autre chose; on a voulu sans doute, faire un exemple".(p. 128)

One soldier remarks that Cajard was basically a good man, only a little lazy at times. It was this kind of writing, as early as 1916, that provoked a hostile reaction amongst certain sections of the public. They believed that such incidents might prove harmful for French morale; they were deemed as ignoble, false, demoralizing and even anti-patriotic, serving the needs of the enemy.⁷¹ Barbusse, however, believed that the novel was the best way by which he could

71. See Chapter III

serve the cause of peace, by depicting, as best he could, as authentically as possible, the reality of life at the front. One subject about which little is said, however, is fear. During four pages of description of bombardment in chapter XIX "Bombardement", there is no mention of this painful emotion.(pp. 207-10) A gas attack in the same chapter is treated almost light-heartedly. Barque points out that in comparison with the horrific wounds rendered by shell-fire and shrapnell, gas seems quite a decent means of warfare.(p. 213) The thunder and devastation of heavy artillery fire is described vividly but with no reference to the apprehension of the troops.(p. 217) The order to attack in chapter XX, "Le Feu", is accepted with almost stoic resignation:

Ensuite, les paroles s'arrêtent. On est devenu muets ... Les mâchoires sont serrées. On avale ses réflexions.(p. 242)

Barbusse allows himself the briefest of comments:

On voit ce qu'il y a de songe et de peur, et d'adieu dans leur silence, leur immobilité, dans le masque de calme qui leur étreint surhumainement le visage.(p. 243)

The poetic nature of these lines tones down the state of alarm caused by the impending danger as the troops prepare to go over the top. The inclusion of the words "songe" and "adieu" idealizes the situation; the emphasis of "silence", "immobilité", "masque de calme" draws attention to the heroic nature of these ordinary men, who have no choice but to resign themselves to the inevitable. During the actual assault, Barbusse portrays a vivid picture of bursting shells and piercing noises, but there is no mention of the inner emotions of the troops. The narrator informs:

... nous qui ne sommes pas encore atteints, nous regardons en avant, nous marchons, nous courons, parmi les jeux de la mort qui frappe au hasard dans toute notre chair.(p. 251)

Again the colourful language used, the personification and the poeticizing of death, masks the incongruity of war which pitches man against the impersonal forces of technology. Even the sight of the dead and wounded in chapters XX "Le Feu" and XXI "Le Poste de Secours", fails to instill any feeling of apprehension into the troops. Towards the end of "La Corvée", when a night fatigue party loses its way, having been disorientated by shell-fire and heavy bombardment, the sound of voices from a nearby trench apparently signifies the French lines and fills the soldiers with relief:

Des voix! Ah! des voix!

Elles nous ont semblé douces, ces voix, comme si elles nous appelaient par nos noms. On s'est réunis pour s'approcher du fraternel murmure d'hommes.(p. 321)

In one of the most potentially frightening scenes of the novel, as the fatigue party discovers it has, by chance, wandered into the enemy lines, there is only the minimum allusion of fear. For the most part, Barbusse maintains a calm and controlled atmosphere. The narrator claims:

La stupéfaction et l'horreur nous clouèrent d'abord sur place.

Où sommes-nous? Tonnerre de Dieu! où sommes-nous?

On a fait demi-tour, lentement malgré tout, alourdis par plus d'épuisement et de regret, et on s'enfuit, criblés de fatigue comme d'une quantité de blessures, tirés vers la terre ennemie, gardant juste assez d'énergie pour repousser la douceur qu'il y aurait eu à se laisser mourir.(p. 322)

The emphasis is on the weariness of the troops and their disappointment at not reaching their own lines. Apart from the

initial surprise, the sudden calamity is not allowed to provoke a state of alarm. It is almost as if the soldiers in *Le Feu* have been deprived of most of their feelings and emotions due to the barbaric nature of war. The protest against the absurdity of war does not come from deep within themselves, as much as from the author, himself. In the opening chapter, Barbusse makes an impassioned plea for an end to all wars;(p. 3) in chapter XX, he has Bertrand indulging in high-sounding phrases, condemning military action and placing all faith in the future:

"L'avenir! L'avenir! L'oeuvre de l'avenir sera d'effacer ce présent-ci, et de l'effacer plus encore qu'on ne pense, de l'effacer comme quelque chose d'abominable et de honteux ... Honte à la gloire militaire, honte aux armées, honte au métier de soldat, qui change les hommes tour à tour en stupides victimes et en ignobles bourreaux".(p. 259)

However, such an articulate and intellectual statement is untypical of the unthinking men who form the squad which Barbusse presents in the novel, not one of whom is capable of grasping the meaning of the conflict in such a manner. Similarly, in chapter XXI, a group of wounded soldiers in the casualty clearing station debate, not only the significance and folly of war, but of life in general. One Zouave proclaims profoundly:

"C'est la vérité des choses qu'est folle".(p. 285)

Another wounded soldier questions the very nature of God. He points out that the Germans believe that God favours them and shout out, "Gott mit uns", and yet the French think exactly the opposite and claim confidently, "Dieu est avec nous". He continues:

"Figurez-vous ces deux masses identiques qui hurlent des choses identiques et pourtant contraires, ces cris ennemis qui ont la même forme. Qu'est-ce que le bon Dieu doit dire, en somme? Je sais bien qu'il sait tout; mais, même sachant tout, il ne doit pas savoir quoi faire".(p. 285)⁷²

An airman challenges the sincerity of God:

"... à quoi pense-t-il, ce Dieu, de laisser croire comme ça qu'il est avec tout le monde? Pourquoi nous laisse-t-il tous, tous, crier côte à côte comme des dératés et des brutes: "Dieu est avec nous!"(p. 286)

Another wounded soldier debates the very existence of God:

"Je sais qu'il n'existe pas, - à cause de la souffrance. On pourra nous raconter les boniments qu'on voudra, et ajuster là-dessus tous les mots qu'on trouvera, et qu'on inventera toute cette souffrance innocente qui sortirait d'un Dieu parfait, c'est un sacré bourrage de crâne".(pp. 286-7)

These philosophical passages misrepresent the average French soldier, who, in the midst of so much devastation and suffering, had neither the patience nor the interest to indulge in theological discussion. He did not share pronounced tendencies to escape from the unpleasant nature of war by seeking refuge in high-sounding, complex debates, as Barbusse would have us believe. Clearly, he is using the soldiers as mouthpieces to convey his own points of view, and there is the feeling that once they have defeated Germany, they might turn their attention to the problems of peacetime society and bring to an effective conclusion the French Revolution of 1789 which is mentioned

72. See A. Dupin, *Guerre Infernale*, Paris, Société mutuelle d'édition, 1920, p. 176. Dupin quotes Le Pasteur Janvier of Paris: "Quand nous implorons de Dieu la victoire, Dieu sait que nous sommes les soldats de la justice", and Cardinal Hartmann, the Catholic Archbishop of Cologne: "Dieu a été, il est avec nos héroïques soldats, à l'Est et à l'Ouest, sur mer et dans l'air. Il a été, il est avec notre peuple allemand qu'embrase la détermination de tenir jusqu'au bout, et la confiance dans la victoire finale".

in chapter I.(p. 3) Barbusse's passionate outbursts come together in the final chapter of the novel, "L'Aube", in one concerted, intellectual protest and general prophetic vision. The group of soldiers who gather round to debate the absurdity of war enable the author to give vent to his feelings. Paradis and a "chasseur" survey the desolation of the battlefield and reflect upon the pointlessness of it all. They envisage thousands of kilometres of devastation and putrefaction which only those who have seen and experienced can begin to imagine. They vow that there should be no more wars:

Les exclamations sombres, furieuses, de ces hommes enchaînés à la terre, incarnés de terre, montaient et passaient dans le vent comme des coups d'aile:

Plus de guerre, plus de guerre!

Oui, assez!(p. 334)

One soldier philosophises:

"Deux armées qui se battent, c'est comme une grande armée qui se suicide!"(p. 335)⁷³

The group discusses how the unrelenting contact with death has changed them physically and mentally; how the lack of rationale for war, the fact that they appear to be caught up in circumstances over which no-one seems to have control and for which the responsibility remains constantly impersonal, has driven them to psychological disillusionment. Barbusse intervenes directly to explain:

On dirait qu'ils font effort pour sortir de l'erreur et de l'ignorance qui les souillent autant que la boue, et qu'ils veulent enfin savoir pourquoi ils sont châtiés.(p. 335)

73. This statement is taken directly from the author's own thoughts. In a letter to his wife, 22nd April 1915, he wrote:

"Il semble .. qu'il ne puisse pas y avoir de guerre ... ni de batailles, qui, d'un peu loin, doivent faire l'effet de ce qu'elles sont en réalité: une seule grande armée qui se suicide".

In actual fact, whether any society was worth being killed for, whether national institutions were so valuable and valid that life should be sacrificed for them, were questions that were rarely discussed and asked in the trenches. Soldiers were only concerned with the immediate present and the very near future, the daily problems of survival in the trenches, the discomfort, a far more narrow perspective than Barbusse conveys in this final chapter.

There is clearly the feeling, within the group, that they are sharing the same predicament as the enemy, that both sides confront a similar impersonal force, other than merely men, that they are in the haphazard control of whatever powers manipulate their collective will. One soldier claims:

"C'est avec nous seulement qu'on fait les batailles. C'est nous la matière de la guerre. La guerre n'est composée que de la chair et des âmes des simples soldats. C'est nous qui formons les plaines de morts et les fleuves de sang, nous tous - dont chacun est invisible et silencieux à cause de l'immensité de notre nombre".

Another agrees and adds:

"C'est les peuples qui sont la guerre ... Mais c'est pas eux qui la décident. C'est les maîtres qui les dirigent". (p. 339)

The absurdity of the situation is apparent. Against their will, without explanation, ordinary men are manipulated and exploited by a "blind" and irrational body of politicians and military leaders. One soldier makes a comparison with sacrificial offerings to ancient gods:

"On sera bien forcé de voir que si chaque nation apporte à l'Idole de la guerre la chair fraîche de quinze cents jeunes gens à déchirer chaque jour, c'est pour le plaisir de quelques meneurs qu'on pourrait compter; que les peuples entiers vont à la boucherie, rangés

en troupes d'armées, pour qu'une caste galonnée d'or écrive ses noms de princes dans l'histoire ..." (p. 342)

At this point, the squad becomes gradually part of the background, as the author's impassioned convictions dictate. He writes:

Ah! vous avez raison, pauvres ouvriers innombrables des batailles, vous qui aurez fait toute la grande guerre avec vos mains, toute-puissance qui ne sert pas encore à faire le bien, foule terrestre dont chaque face est un monde de douleurs, - et qui, sous le ciel où de longs nuages noirs se déchirent et s'éploient échevelés comme de mauvais anges, rêvez, courbés sous le joug d'une pensée! - oui, vous avez raison. (p. 344)

Barbusse's style has changed from precise analysis to a more general prophetic vision. As his sympathy for the plight of the soldiers slowly transforms itself into his own emotional beliefs, the rhetoric becomes more figurative and emotive. Soldiers become "ouvriers innombrables des batailles"; their weary expressions bequeath "un monde de douleurs". Barbusse condemns the wealthy financiers, the profiteers, those who make their fortune from the war and do not wish to see it end; he chastises the traditionalists who still refuse to view war as anything other than military music, brightly coloured tunics and the sparkling sight of sabre bearing down upon sabre; he criticizes priests, lawyers, economists, historians. He believes that the world has been blighted with "la maladie de l'esprit humain". (p. 345) He attacks nationalism, which has grown out of all proportion from the respectable concept of patriotism, referring to it as a cancer which absorbs all living entities and gradually leads to the destruction of all ideals of an armed peace. (p. 346) He urges all soldiers to pay heed to his warnings:

... tous ces gens-là qui ne peuvent pas ou ne veulent pas faire la paix sur la terre; tous ces gens-là, qui se cramponnent, pour une

cause ou pour une autre, à l'état de choses ancien, lui trouvent des raisons ou lui en donnent, ceux-là sont vos ennemis!

Ce sont vos ennemis autant que le sont aujourd'hui ces soldats allemands qui gisent ici entre vous, et qui ne sont que de pauvres dupes odieusement trompées et abruties, des animaux domestiques ... (p. 346)

He shows utter contempt for those who speak of military glory, of heroic deeds, who regard the work of a soldier as a supreme and praiseworthy sacrifice for his country. On the contrary, Barbusse depicts the soldier as a murderer; he views killing as despicable regardless of the context. One soldier points out:

"Ce serait un crime de montrer les beaux côtés de la guerre ... même s'il en avait". (p. 347)

Another adds:

"... la gloire du soldat est un mensonge comme tout ce qui a l'air d'être beau dans la guerre". (p. 347)

The absurdity of the situation as a whole, however, was that troops continued to endure what many of them so poignantly despised. As one wounded soldier raises himself from the ground to make this point, rather melodramatically he contemplates the ground and all the blood which he has sacrificed for his country. (p. 348) Barbusse believes that the answer to the problem lies in equality, that the aim of any political action should be to acquire the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. He explains:

... l'égalité, c'est la grande formule des hommes. Son importance est prodigieuse ... il amènera tous les progrès, tous, avec une force vraiment divine. (p. 341)

Rather dramatically, he suggests that the word "égalité" is on the lips of every soldier, that nothing can prevent its success:

C'est une réponse à tout, un mot sublime. Ils tournent et retournent cette notion et lui trouvent une sorte de perfection ...

"Ce s'rait beau! dit l'un.

Trop beau pour être vrai! dit l'autre.

Mais le troisième dit:

C'est parce que c'est vrai que c'est beau".(p. 341)

The closing lines of the novel foresee hope and optimism for the future. The symbolic ending as the storm clouds pass by overhead and the sun's rays threaten to break through, heralds a world where capitalism will, perhaps, no longer flourish and constitute a threat to world peace, where man will, perhaps, no longer live in a world of illusions. King refers to the ultimate chapter of Le Feu as a "statement of faith". He believes that Barbusse, in order to clinch his belief in the possibility of historical and evolutionary progress, is forced away from people towards an image drawn from nature, from reality to abstraction, from observation to prophecy.⁷⁴ It is not entirely accurate, however, to suggest that the final chapter, symbolically entitled "L'Aube", differs so greatly from the rest of the novel. Van Rutten points out that the general stylisation of Le Feu is designed to go beyond the boundaries of realism.⁷⁵ He continues:

L'oeuvre est encadrée de deux visions qui l'illuminent, celles des premières pages "Vision", et les dernières intitulées "Aube" .. Ces deux chapitres sont si reliés que la fin du premier introduit la vision du dernier et ainsi les deux chapitres deviennent complémentaires dans leur interprétation et fonctionnels vis-à-vis du récit majeur de l'oeuvre.

Between the introductory and closing chapters, Le Feu combines a great deal of indisputably authentic and realistic detail with

74. "Henri Barbusse: Le Feu and the Crisis of Social Realism", op. cit. p. 51

75. "Le Style du Feu de Barbusse", op. cit. p. 130

passages of undisguised rhetoric which gradually increase in size and force in order to enhance the impact of the author's message. Brett writes:

Si les premiers chapitres du Le Feu sont un témoignage documentaire véridique, caractéristique du point de vue littéraire surtout par leur "réalisme large et intégral", comme le dit Barbusse lui-même, les derniers chapitres contiennent, à côté de ce témoignage, un réquisitoire et un manifeste politiques des prolétaires des batailles et de leur porte-parole: Henri Barbusse.⁷⁶

The day after the Goncourt prize had been awarded to Le Feu, Henry Bataille drew a comparison, in L'Oeuvre, between the final pages of "L'Aube" and the "pitié visionnaire et réaliste" of Tolstoy;⁷⁷ more recently, Jones has suggested that Barbusse's portrayal of the poilus involvement in global war against a background of natural and gnostic imagery, recalls the Natural and Symbolist traditions of the nineteenth century.⁷⁸ Whilst we cannot entirely agree with his view that Le Feu is first and foremost an ideologically didactic novel "with virtually no value as an accurate portrayal of the war",⁷⁹ nevertheless, the apocalyptic imagery of the last chapters and the theme of retribution and the coming of social justice already prefigured in the opening pages of "La Vision", would suggest that it cannot be viewed purely as a "war novel". It is a work in which Barbusse succeeds in not only painting the visible horror of war but also in seeding the revolutionary socialist perspectives of contemporary society. The latter was clearly of integral importance

76. Henri Barbusse: Sa marche vers la clarté, son mouvement CLARTE, op. cit. p. 120

77. Cited by J. Meyer in "Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse", op. cit. p. 50

78. "Mythic Vision and Ironic Allusion: Barbusse's Le Feu and Zola's Germinal", Modern Fiction Studies, Vol. 28, No. 2, Summer 1982, p. 221

79. Ibid. p. 216

to the author. In the original serialization of the work in L'Oeuvre, 2,000 lines of the final chapter and the entire opening chapter were omitted due to Barbusse's intense fear of the censor. In retrospect, however, censorship proved kinder than he had imagined. In a letter dated 25th October 1916, he wrote to his wife:

Décidément, Anast(h)asie est atteinte d'hémiplégie.⁸⁰

Both "La Vision" and "L'Aube", in full, were included in the first publication of Le Feu in novel form. They form a gradual ideological process which does not end at the close of the book but which is continued and brought to a climax in Clarté. As Brett points out, Barbusse is not merely "un écho passif", but a "crieur", "l'apôtre de l'humanité nouvelle, le guide montrant le chemin vers la société et la vie nouvelles, l'ingénieur des âmes humaines".⁸¹ Literature for Barbusse is "une nécessité, une action, une arme de classe qui servira à libérer les hommes".⁸² By the end of the war Barbusse had become a vehement supporter of Lenin, maintaining that it was the duty of all those who denounced war to support the Bolsheviks. By 1919, with the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, he had become convinced that something more drastic than socialism was needed to bring mankind to its senses and was already moving towards Communism. Much of this process finds its way into the pages of Clarté.

80. "Anastasie" was the name given to the French censor during the war

81. Henri Barbusse: Sa marche vers la clarté, son mouvement CLARTE, op. cit. p. 160

82. J. Duclos and J. Fréville, Henri Barbusse, op. cit. p. 43

- b) Barbusse: CLARTE
- i) Interpretation and reflection

Towards the end of 1916 Barbusse's views on the prolongation of war with Imperial Germany were becoming increasingly volatile. He maintained that if war had been possessed of any significance at all, it had shown that Reason alone was the force that could save the world and that the life of man as a collective being must now take precedence over his life as an individual. On 13th October 1916, he wrote to his wife:

C'est l'heure de parler haut et grandement.

During a period of hospitalization at this moment in time he embarked upon a campaign of open propaganda. He sympathized with the ideals of Paul Vaillant-Couturier and Raymond Lefebvre who wanted to establish an organization for war victims and for grouping together intellectuals, provided with a review as a weapon against militarism. Their plans had the backing of Anatole France and Romain Rolland, and Barbusse soon became instrumental in this work. In March 1917 the "Association Républicaine des Anciens Combattants" was established. In the meantime, Barbusse became more and more determined to register his protests publicly. As early as 13th November 1916, he wrote to his wife about a new novel; 6th March 1917 he wrote:

J'arrive avec une idée fixe, invincible: écrire le plus tôt possible...

He was convinced that he had a duty to accomplish, to convince Socialists in all warring nations that they should unite in common action in favour of peace. He hoped that German Socialists too might

rebel against the military regime which had seized control of their country and that the conflict might therefore be brought to a speedy conclusion and the lives of millions of men spared. On 21st May 1917, he explained this sense of duty in a letter to his wife:

Ce devoir m'a toujours tenu à coeur, mais il m'apparaît maintenant beaucoup plus que jamais impérieux et important, d'abord parce que les grands événements actuels rendent toutes les réformes possibles, et ensuite parce que la vogue du Feu me donne à présent la certitude d'être entendu.

Throughout 1917 Barbusse wrote articles recommending soldiers to revise their reasons for fighting, to revolt against passive obedience, to be aware of imperialism and nationalism, and to strive for justice, freedom and equality. His ideal was a popular democracy based on equality, friendship and the solidarity of the people. In "Pourquoi te bats-tu?" published in Les Nations, June 1917, he implores society to reject the traditional rhetoric of politicians, supposedly learned men, historians, lawyers, diplomats, who distort isolated facts:

Ce sont des mots vides de sens, des mots funestes ... Révolte-toi contre l'obéissance passive, aveugle, sourde et muette au passé ... Apprends à haïr le mot de tradition. Tu comprendras un jour que c'est la maladie profonde de la société.⁸³

In "A Propos de la société des nations",⁸⁴ he advocates the urgent need for an international socialist movement;⁸⁵ in "Résurrection",⁸⁶

83. Published in Paroles d'un Combattant, op. cit. p. 11

84. Published in Le Pays 24th June 1917. Included in Paroles d'un Combattant, op. cit. p. 37

85. The French Socialist party was slowly growing again: 1914-70,000 (60% mobilized); 1915-24,636; 1916-24,854; 1917-28,069; 1918-31st August-34,151; September 1919-100,000. See V. Brett, Henri Barbusse: sa marche vers la clarté, son mouvement CLARTE, op. cit. footnote 28, p. 140.

86. Published in La Vérité, 31st January 1918. See Paroles d'un Combattant, p. 53

the need for truth, for a new France. In "Les Ecrivains et l'Utopie",⁸⁷ he affirmed his belief that writers should occupy themselves with the future, that it was their public responsibility to lead mankind to future peace and stability. He writes:

Il n'y a pas deux vérités ... Que les écrivains s'occupent de la vérité unique et multiforme, qu'ils s'occupent de l'avenir et le délivrent, qu'ils remplissent ainsi leur rôle insensibles à l'attrait des éloges, et même à celui des haines glorieuses qu'ils pourront mériter .

Brett points out that under the revolutionary spirit of the masses spurred on by the after effects of the Russian revolution, "une avant-garde révolutionnaire" developed in France with reviews and papers such as Sebastien Faure's Ce qu'il faut dire, Léon Werth's Le Journal du Peuple, La Vague Rouge, Les Humbles and Le Populaire de Paris at the forefront.⁸⁸ Barbusse himself contributed several articles to the latter and on the 8th December 1918, published chapter XXI of Clarté, his new novel. On the 31st December 1918, Le Populaire de Paris announced that it would be serializing the entire book.⁸⁹ On 4th September 1919, the first constitutional meeting of the group "Clarté" was held in the "salle des Jeunesses républicaines du IIIe",⁹⁰ and on 11th October 1919 the Clarté review published for the first time, sub-titled Bulletin français de l'Internationale de la Pensée. In an article published in L'Humanité, 1st May 1919, Barbusse explains the significance of the name "Clarté":

87. Published in Le Pays, 2nd June 1917. See Paroles d'un Combattant, p. 36

88. Henri Barbusse sa marche vers la clarté, son mouvement CLARTE, op. cit. pp. 141-2, 143-4

89. The first episode appeared Sunday 12th January 1919 until 4th April 1919.

90. See Chapter II, p. 32

Les adhérents ont choisi pour le groupement, ainsi que pour la revue qui en sera le premier organe, le titre de "Clarté" afin d'indiquer que la mission qu'ils assument est de combattre les préjugés, les erreurs trop habilement entretenues et surtout, l'ignorance qui séparent et isolent les hommes et ont permis jusqu'ici de les jeter aveuglement les uns contre les autres.⁹¹

A similar line of thought runs through the novel, *Clarté*, in which Barbusse's main aims are to outline the lessons that he himself learned between 1914-18. Field describes the book as "openly propagandist writing";⁹² Brett writes:

[c'est] un roman social à thèse, un roman de guerre (un roman antimilitariste) et en même temps une confession morale, philosophique et politique.⁹³

Simon Paulin, the narrator, is a victim of the soullessness that characterized bourgeois society before 1914. His war experience forms his socialist creed; in chapter XVI, he faints, becomes delirious and has apocalyptic visions of past and future wars. During his fever, his thoughts and ideas clarify into what Brett terms "une conscience révolutionnaire".⁹⁴ We shall examine this aspect of the novel in more detail later, for now, we must concentrate upon the physical conditions of trench warfare which Barbusse portrays.

There are few passages devoted to the rain and mud of the western front, a few lines serve to set the scene. At the beginning

91. Le Groupe "Clarté". Published in *Paroles d'un Combattant*, op. cit. p. 103

92. *Three French writers and the Great War*, op. cit. p. 47

93. Henri Barbusse: *sa marche vers la clarté, son mouvement* CLARTE, op. cit. p. 147. See also M. Rieuneau, *Guerre et Révolution dans le roman français de 1919 à 1939*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1974. He writes of *Clarté*: [c'est] un roman à thèse présenté comme un roman d'apprentissage p. 169

94. Ibid. p. 152

of chapter XI, "Au bout du monde", Barbusse briefly describes the area around the Aisne:

Une averse coulait ... De chaque côté de la route, des déserts flasques et plats, sans borne, avec des hampes d'arbres, qui se reflétaient dans les champs liquides et plaqués de boue verte.(p. 102)

In a few words the desolation of the front is conveyed. Barbusse appears totally unpreoccupied with the miseries of life at the front: with the changes in temperature, the squalor and discomfort, the disease and vermin. He does, however, emphasize the fatigue and pain of the frequent and seemingly never ending marches. Paulin, the narrator comments:

Mon sac si ingénieusement dense, mes cartouchières féroce-
ment pleines, mes musettes sphériques aux sangles coupantes, me
bousculaient puis me neutrirent le corps à chaque pas. Cette douleur
devint vite aiguë, impossible à supporter. J'étais suffoqué, poigné,
aveuglé d'un masque de sueur, malgré la cinglante humidité, et je
sentis bientôt que je n'arriverais pas à la fin des cinquante minutes
de l'étape. J'y arrivai cependant ... Je sus dans la suite que c'est
là presque toujours la raison machinale qui fait que les soldats
accomplissent jusqu'au bout des efforts physiques surhumains.(p. 103)

Throughout the passage there is constant reference to the discomfort of the individual. The narrator's pack is "ingénieusement dense", his cartridge-pouches "féroce-ment pleines"; his haversack's straps cut into his shoulder and weigh heavily on his back. The use of "suffoqué", "poigné" and the metaphor "aveugle d'un masque de sueur", emphasize the physical pain of marching with a heavy load. There is evidence, too, that Barbusse has had time to reflect, a little, since Le Feu, as he offers an explanation why, despite the intense suffering, soldiers rarely succumbed to the unbearable physical pain. The answer, he believes, lies in the "raison machinale", the

spontaneous determination within each individual to carry his duties out to a successful conclusion. In chapter XII, "Les ombres", Barbusse emphasizes the difficulty in responding to the order "En avant!" after rest spells;(p. 129) gradually the troops become oblivious to fatigue and pain:

On l'avait oubliée, comme on avait oublié le nombre des jours et même le nom des jours. On faisait toujours, toujours, un pas de plus.(p. 140)

For the infantry, marching becomes a way of life:

Ils sont lentement blessés, petit à petit, par la longueur du temps, la répétition incalculable des gestes, la grandeur des choses. Ils sont écrasés par leurs os et leurs muscles, par leurs poids d'humanité.(p. 140)

It would appear that Barbusse is at pains to extol the virtues of the soldier and to indicate his heroic response to the appalling nature of war. The repetition of "oublié", in the first passage, suggests the terrible strain on the infantry; in contrast, the repetition of "toujours" suggests the grandeur of their response, as they march on regardlessly. In the second passage, not only do the physical burdens weigh heavily on the troops, but their own bodies turn against them, such is their exhaustion. Nevertheless, the response is always positive. In chapter XII, "Où vas-tu?", Barbusse's vocabulary becomes increasingly figurative:

En avant! Allons, debout! Allons, marchez! Surmontez votre chair rebelle, inerte, levez-vous du sommeil comme d'un cercueil, recommencez-vous sans cesse, donnez tout ce que vous pouvez donner, en avant, en avant! Il le faut. C'est un intérêt supérieur, une loi d'en haut ... Plus moyen d'échapper aux événements et aux rouges, plus moyen de se détourner de la fatigue, du froid, du dégoût et de la douleur. En avant! Il le faut! L'ouragan du monde pousse droit devant eux ces aveugles terribles qui tâtonnent avec leurs fusils.(p. 153)

The soldiers' weariness is compared to death, nevertheless it must be overcome. There is a religiosity about the passage and use of grandiose imagery towards the end, which suggests that the writing is no longer controlled by a firm documentary purpose. There appears to be some superior force driving the troops forward, demanding that they give everything in this barbarous struggle. It is as if they are blinded, yet still driven forward by "l'ouragan du monde".⁹⁵ During the hours of bombardment there is a similar apocalyptic tone:

Au milieu des rangées lilliputiennes, les fumées géantes bondissent comme des dieux infernaux. On voit les éclairs des obus qui entrent dans cette chair éparpillée sur la terre. Elle est écrasée et brûlée par places entières, et ce peuple s'avance comme un brasier.

... L'horizon fournit continuellement des vagues. On entend monter une vaste rumeur douce. Ils ressemblent, au loin, avec leurs illuminations déchirantes et leurs lueurs sourdes, à toute une ville en fête dans le soir.

On ne peut rien contre la grandeur de cet assaut, cette grandeur de chiffre.(p. 143)

With the use of "rangées lilliputiennes", "fumées géantes", "dieux infernaux"; the comparison of the troops advancing "comme un brasier"; the sound of "une vaste rumeur douce", and the simile of the shell fire and a town lit-up with festive spirit at night, Barbusse's preoccupation with "vérité", seen frequently in his letters and articles written during the preparation of *Le Feu*, would appear less intense as he strives to magnify the horrors of war with a social and political target in mind. Later, in the same chapter,

95. Barbusse uses the same image in "Appel aux anciens combattants de tous les pays", January 1920, in an attempt to establish an "Internationale des Anciens Combattants" to work in parallel with the "Internationale socialiste" and the "Clarté" movement. See *Paroles d'un Combattant*, op. cit. p. 217. Barbusse urges: "Il faut que notre nombre de jour en jour s'enfle comme un ouragan. La vérité doit peupler le monde".

he speaks of "un tumulte de lames" produced in the sky, "des monuments de fer" exploding in the air, a "rangée de shrapnells pareils à des volcans sans bases", and the entire earth which trembles as much as the sea.(p. 154) He concludes:

Les fumées qui passent, et aussi l'heure qui passe assombrissent l'enfer.(p. 155)

In Chapter XV, "L'Apparition", the narrator becomes delirious as he dreams of the futility and horror of war. Barbusse creates a most hallucinatory picture of bombardment:

Les nuées se couronnent de faisceaux étoilés. C'est une volière de feu, c'est un enfer d'argent et d'or. Des cataclysmes sidéraux font tomber autour de nous d'immenses parois de lumière. Des palais fantasmagoriques d'éclairs hurleurs, avec des arceaux de fusées, se créent et s'évanouissent au milieu de forêts de lueurs pâles.(. 171)

There is a constant play on words denoting "light". Later, it is "un coup de lumière", as a shell bursts, that fills the narrator with light, as he sleeps, allowing him to see the full horror of war.(pp. 171-2) We are reminded, at this point, of the symbolic title of the novel Clarté. Barbusse is more concerned with prophetic pretensions than a realistic description of the horrors of trench warfare. He employs an imagery and a vocabulary which are highly figurative, tending away from description towards symbolism, when describing the effects of bombardment on the open countryside:

Des lagunes illimitées de plaines. Les grandes campagnes mêlées d'eau avec leurs étangs battus et leurs flots fumeux d'arbres, semblaient n'être que le reflet du ciel livide embourbé de nuages ... Ces reliefs, ces canaux, formaient un réseau compliqué et innombrable: de près, maculé par des corps et des débris; de loin, triste et planétaire ... Au nord, toute une région, s'échouait, plus haute, hérissée de mâts comme un rivage, avec sa forêt envolée!(p. 130)

The entire battlefield seems like a reflection of the sky with its patches of blue and grey; as it stretches into the distance, it resembles, in certain parts, the landscape of a planet with its craters and barrenness; in other areas the branchless trees take on the form of ships' masts amidst the water and mud. Later, a devastated village is compared to a burial ground, with the walls of the buildings scattered around like bones, due to the effects of the shelling. Barbusse comments rather philosophically:

La guerre salit la campagne comme les figures et comme les âmes. (p. 152)

In the article "Henri Barbusse: Le Feu and the Crisis of Social Realism", Jonathan King claims that Barbusse's "commitment to realism surrenders almost totally to prophetic pretensions".⁹⁶ He points out that not only does the hero of Clarté have a vocabulary and a sensibility all too easily in tune with his surroundings but that the cataclysm is no longer perceived as alien, but accepted and almost revelled in as Barbusse sacrifices verisimilitude to visionary proclivities.⁹⁷ Rieuneau shares a similar view. He writes:

... le visionnaire avait étouffé le réaliste. Et par là-même le témoignage perdait de sa force.⁹⁸

In Le Feu, Barbusse was content to show the depersonalizing effect of war upon man by comparing him with the beast, the insect, the machine, the savage; in Clarté, however, he goes much further.

96. In H. Klein (ed.), The First World War in Fiction, op. cit. p. 48

97. Ibid. p. 51

98. Guerre et Révolution dans le roman français de 1919 à 1939, op. cit. p. 171

He acknowledges in chapter X that, by the very fact that all men wear the same uniform, they are dehumanized, their individuality stripped from them. As the narrator contemplates his civilian life, he is left to reflect:

... moi qui suis quelque chose et pourtant ne suis rien, comme une goutte d'eau dans un fleuve.(p. 99)

Paulin soon becomes exhausted with the boredom and waiting in the trenches, the lack of information about what is happening around him, about what is expected of him. As he notices the changes in personality of others who surround him, he gradually realizes that he too is no longer the same:

Quelques autres incidents me montrèrent que je ne m'appartenais plus.(p. 100)

As the narrator's squad moves to the front, the troops are described as dogs, attaching themselves to people that they know; they are lodged in a stable with openings in the walls which make it resemble more a cage. Paulin comes to the conclusion:

Je compris que la gloire, c'est de faire ce que d'autres ont fait, et de pouvoir dire: Moi aussi.(p. 104)

Barbusse, here, reflects on the profound meaning of glory in times of war. Glory is not, as tradition would have, the killing and maiming on the battlefield, but, for the many soldiers who lose all identity due to the impersonality of hostilities, the passive ability to do as others have done. By the end of the war he had come to abhor such a negative attitude. In a speech pronounced at the National Congress

of the "Association républicaine des Anciens Combattants, 7th September 1919, he affirmed:

Celui qui ne travaille pas pour le changement travaille pour le mal régnant.⁹⁹

In Clarté, he continues to indulge in interpretation and reflection:

On réquisitionne de ta personne ... On t'emprisonne dans des casernes. On te met nu comme un ver et on te rhabille avec un uniforme qui t'efface; on marque ton cou d'un numéro ... C'est une existence de misère, d'humiliation et de rapetissement où tu tombes de jour en jour, mal nourri et mal traité, assailli dans toute ta chair, fouetté par les ordres des gardiens.(p. 180)

The contrast with the impersonal "on" and the familiar "tu" emphasizes the gulf that separated the ordinary soldiers who obeyed, from those who manipulated them as they desired. Writing with hindsight and having had time to reflect, Barbusse is no longer merely content to portray, but wishes to indicate also the absurdity of the situation. In chapter XV, "Au bout du monde", the narrator, Paulin, admits that he has often tried to assemble his own ideas on war, but without success. He confesses that he is like the rest of the soldiers:

Au delà des choses immédiates et surtout des questions personnelles, ils ont sagement conscience de leur ignorance et de leur impuissance.(p. 117)

In a discussion with Pinson and Termite, the war is simplified in terms of kings and slaves. Termite declares:

"Tu n'es qu'un pauvre petit animal domestique comme les millions d'camarades. I's nous réunissent mais i's nous séparent. I's nous

99. "Ce que veulent les Anciens Combattants", included in Paroles d'un Combattant, op. cit. p. 130

disent c'qu'ils veulent ou i's nous l'disent pas, et tu l'crois. I's t'disent: "Voici c'qu'i faut qu'tu aies dans ton coeur!"(p. 118)¹⁰⁰

When asked who are the "i's", he replies, "les rois". Here, again, the dehumanization of man becomes part of a more general and more important concept, the absurdity of war. Observation becomes secondary to speculation.

Unlike Le Feu there are very few passages which graphically describe the horrific mutilation of soldiers and the endless fields of dead. Chapter XVII, "Matin", takes place, for the most part, in a military hospital, but the author avoids a macabre description of the wounds and suffering:

Le concert rauque des poumons et des gorges se multiplie et s'étend. Il en est qui lèvent des bras de fantoches hors de la boîte de leur lit. D'autres restent enterrés dans la couverture grise. De temps à autre, des spectres chancelants traversent la salle, se penchent entre deux lits et on entend le bruit d'un seau de fer.(p. 200)

Barbusse appears unconcerned with the realism of the situation. The coughing of the patients is compared with a hoarse-sounding concert; one of them coughs like a lion, and the narrator is so close to him that he feels "l'odeur de sa plaie intérieure".(p. 201) As another patient splutters, he makes the noise of an underground stream:

Il tousse, siffle, ravale et rend des filaments de blanc d'oeuf et de jaune d'oeuf. Son crachoir est toujours plein.(p. 201)

When the day arrives for changing the bed linen, a range of wounds can be seen:

100. See also p. 127

On entrevoit sur les peaux nues, des balafres, des trous, des parties couturées, rapiécées, d'une autre nuance. Il y a même un amputé, bronchiteux, qui montre un moignon neuf, rose, comme un nouveau-né.(p. 204)

In none of these instances, however, can we see the anger and unrestrained condemnation as in Le Feu. This applies also to the pages of Clarté which depict the dead. In chapter XII "Les Ombres", Barbusse describes the enemy troops who have been killed in an attack on the French lines and who lay prone on the barbed-wire fortifications. They are compared to flies, decomposed with the passing of time:

L'un émergeait et se balançait à la brise plus nettement que les autres comme un écran troué cent fois de part en part, avec du vide à la place de son coeur. Un autre spectre, tout près, se désagrégait sans doute depuis longtemps, soutenu par ses vêtements. Au moment où l'ombre du soir commençait à nous saisir avec sa grandeur, le vent s'éleva, le vent secoua l'être desséché, et il se vida d'une masse de terreau et de poussière ... le soldat fut emporté par le vent en fragments immenses, enterré dans le ciel.(pp. 132-33)

There are no detailed accounts of gruesome wounds, only one soldier is buffeted around by the wind like a screen with holes and has "du vide", where he has been shot, in the place of his heart. The ghost-like figure who is blown away in fragments by the wind is certainly horrific, but seems to belong to the spectral world rather than to the real. Towards the end of the chapter Barbusse makes reference to the ground which is "dépecé", the interior of which is stained red with blood. There is massacre as far as the eye can see.(p. 141) This rather symbolic description is neither substantiated with a detailed examination of the corpses nor with references to their wounds. In "Où vas-tu?" the troops pass through plains and trenches of dead as they march along the front. In shell-holes they notice

"des formes de dormeurs ou même des hommes en tas", they come across "un carrefour plein de monde"; they see stretchers swollen with the dead;(p. 149) in one particular trench limbs and torsos protrude from the soil. Barbusse writes:

C'est la porte de l'enfer; oui, c'est l'entrée du dedans de la terre.(p. 150)

Again the swift conventional literary image quickly replaces the extended pages of horror of *Le Feu*. A trench of corpses is referred to as "une file de veilleurs tués", their heads horribly mutilated:

... l'une est cassée et brouillée; l'autre émerge comme un pic, toute une moitié écroulée dans le néant. A la fin de la rangée, le ravage a été moindre, les yeux seulement sont crevés. Les têtes de marbre aux orbites creuses regardent devant elles avec de l'ombre desséchée. Les plaies profondes et ténébreuses des faces font des effets de grottes et d'entonnoirs, de grands trous de terre bouleversés, des effets lunaires ...(p. 157)

These are perhaps the most horrific lines in the whole of the novel that refer to the dead. The author's excessive use of visionary imagination, which is poetic rather than documentary, tends to detract from the overall hideousness of the situation. Far from the conventional and beneficial imagery of *Le Feu*, the rather fantastic description, here, tends to deform rather than evoke the "truth". Rieuneau writes:

Le contact direct avec la guerre, avec la souffrance, la camaraderie, est perdu dans ce second roman qui exploite maladroitement le considérable succès du premier.¹⁰¹

101. *Guerre et Révolution dans le roman français de 1919 à 1939*, op. cit. p. 171

The killing of an enemy soldier in hand-to-hand combat is quickly described;(p. 158) at the beginning of chapter XIV "Ruines", the sight of the dead merely provokes a somewhat aphoristic remark:

Les morts sont des spectres de vivants, mais les vivants sont des spectres de morts.(p. 160)

The philosophical pretensions are continued in chapter XV "Apparition", where the narrator, Paulin, falls asleep and dreams about the dead. In particular, one corpse emerges from the rest:

Les cheveux retombent semblables à des clous. Le nez est un trou rectangulaire ... Il n'y a plus de lèvres et les deux rangées de dents apparaissent comme des lettres ... Ce corps n'est que boue et pierres; cette face, devant la mienne, n'est plus qu'un miroir profond.(p. 165)

Clearly the "apparition" which Paulin sees is the image of himself. Barbusse is stressing that no man is immortal, that everyone ends up the same in the end. Later Paulin sees the German soldier whom he has killed. He realizes that whilst he hated him alive, now that he is dead, he can understand the value of his life. He is filled with regret and appreciates his own existence all the more:

... je sens pleurer en moi, se traînant sur quelque détail ancien, un regret tragique et neuf de mourir, un besoin d'avoir chaud encore dans la pluie et le froid, de m'enfermer en moi malgré l'espace, de me retenir, de vivre.(p. 168)

This is merely a part of the much greater protest that runs throughout the novel, that of the futility and absurdity of war, of the sacrifice of life. In Clarté, Barbusse has deviated from his original aims in Le Feu, which involved a "desperate determination that the unsayable be said, the unthinkable thought, the unbelievable

believed ...",¹⁰² to a more political viewpoint, advocating that the soldier's sufferings were symbolic of the misery of society as a whole and urging intellectuals of all nations to fight against militarism, in a positive fashion, so as to avoid another 1914-18. In Writers and Politics in Modern France, Flower points out that by 1919 Barbusse was all but a member of the Communist Party,¹⁰³ that it is not surprising, therefore, that Clarté, which describes a lower middle-class worker's gradual realization of the essential unity of the working class and the justness of its demands, should have its narrative qualities almost completely hidden by the moralizing and often sententious tone of Barbusse's frequent interventions.¹⁰⁴ A brief examination of Barbusse's polemical ideas at about this time would appear to confirm Flower's view. In "Appel aux anciens combattants de tous les pays", he writes:

Notre idéal exige le renversement du système social actuel¹⁰⁵

and

Notre idéal est fort parce qu'il est juste, parce qu'il est complet et harmonieux. Il est sage, puisqu'en face du chaos déséquilibré de la société actuelle, qui conduit le monde vivant, de batailles en batailles, jusqu'à la victoire de la mort, il est révolutionnaire.¹⁰⁶

He speaks of "l'ère des réalisations" that is about to begin and of "la règle lumineuse des esprits" which will soon rule mankind.¹⁰⁷ In the opening speech of the "Congrès International des Anciens

102. See J. Cruickshank, Variations on Catastrophe, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1982, p. 81

103. It was not until 1923 that he actually joined.

104. London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1977, p. 42

105. See Paroles d'un Combattant, op. cit. p. 214

106. Ibid. p. 215

107. Ibid. p. 216

Combattants", Geneva, 3rd April, 1920, at which delegates from France, Germany, Austria, England, Italy, Alsace-Lorraine were present, representing one million men, Barbusse proclaims:

Toute la civilisation s'écroule en ce moment autour de nous dans la misère, dans la douleur et dans le sang. Ceux qui veulent substituer la justice à l'injustice et les perspectives illimitées de l'Internationalisme à ce nationalisme qui n'est qu'une formule de suicide, se présentent comme les vrais sauveurs du genre humain.¹⁰⁸

The immediacy of the physical horrors of trench warfare during the Great War, so apparent in Le Feu, surrenders to an openly propagandist writing, which condemns the absurdity of sacrifice, and which becomes almost visionary in its overall outlook. Although Souday found the novel "bien composé", "criant de vérité", "un beau drame intellectuel, un récit réaliste et philosophique d'un puissant intérêt, qui parfois étonne, mais retient toujours l'attention",¹⁰⁹ although as Brett indicates, Clarté sold 90,000 copies between 1919 and 1920,¹¹⁰ we share a similar conclusion to Vandérem, who wrote in 1921:

Clarté achève donc de fixer la position adoptée par M. Henri Barbusse ... Il a pris définitivement posture de leader socialiste, et c'est, semble-t-il, au triomphe de son parti qu'il réserva dorénavant tout le meilleur de ses efforts. On ne saurait dire positivement qu'il a abandonné la littérature pour la politique, mais c'est visiblement au service de la politique qu'il a voué sa littérature.¹¹¹

108. Ibid. p. 234

109. "Les Livres", Le Temps, 20th February, 1919, p. 3

110. See V. Brett, op. cit. p. 159

111. Le Miroir des lettres, (deuxième série), Paris, 1921, p. 38. Cited by V. Brett, op. cit. pp. 156-7

ii) Towards a revolutionary consciousness

Although many of the novel's passages were still rigorously censored, Meyer describes the work as "la transposition romancée du Feu", and writes:

... sous la tendresse et la pitié qui marque les personnages, les idées révolutionnaires de Barbusse n'apparaissent que plus exactement.¹¹²

Several of his writings of the time have a strong revolutionary theme running throughout. In an appeal to realize an "Internationale des Anciens Combattants" to work in parallel with the "Internationale socialiste" and "Clarté" movement, January 1920, he wrote of the need to prepare for and ultimately effect "la Revanche des hommes".¹¹³ In his opening speech at the "Congrès International des Anciens Combattants", April 1920, he emphasized that the duty of every man who had served in the trenches was to remember the past, that to forget was sacrilege;¹¹⁴ he spoke of the need for a "patrie" without barriers, of a re-united worker's movement that would safeguard the future of mankind:-

Nous serons les vainqueurs parce que notre défaite serait celle de la raison, de la morale, de la vérité. Notre croyance s'apporte dans l'univers comme la jeunesse du bonheur futur, comme un printemps. La seule voix humaine qui s'harmonise avec la nature elle-même, la musique pensante de l'aube et du soleil, c'est le chant de l'Internationale.¹¹⁵

In the novel Clarté, it is perhaps almost inevitable that Barbusse's changing political viewpoint takes shape, and, that after Paulin's discovery of the truth of war and his conversion to pacifism, the

112. "Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse", op. cit. p. 61

113. See Paroles d'un Combattant, op. cit. p. 218

114. Ibid. p. 229

115. Ibid. p. 235

final part of the novel witnesses the advent of a revolutionary conscience. We shall analyse these three stages in turn. In chapter XII, "Les ombres", Paulin has his first glimpse of the divisional staff officers. The contrast they make with the soldiers in the squalor of the front lines is striking. Paulin describes them, placing emphasis on their resplendant appearance:

On eût dit, en cette vallée de nuit, une procession de princes surgissant d'un palais souterrain. Aux poignets, aux manches, aux cous, des insignes bougeaient et phosphoraient; des nimbes d'or encerclaient les têtes dans ce groupe d'apparitions.(p. 138)

There is almost a supernatural quality about their presence. The play on words denoting light enhances this feeling. They are the chosen ones; there is a mystic aura which appears to surround them and which the ordinary soldiers in the trenches find difficult to comprehend. One "poilu", however, brings the situation nearer to reality with his comment:

"En v'là un qui a fait tuer des hommes!"(p. 138)

In "Où vas-tu?", as the enemy advance stops, Paulin and his comrades are left to reflect upon the lack of provisions made by those in supreme command for the defence of their sector. It is as though the division has been completely overlooked by those at headquarters. One soldier points out:

"Des fils de fer les auraient arrêtés tout à l'heure. Mais nous n'avions pas de fils de fer".

Another asks in a provocative fashion:

"Et des mitrailleuses, donc! Mais où étaient-elles, nos mitrailleuses?"(p. 148)

Paulin expands:

On a nettement l'impression qu'il y a une faute énorme de commandement. Imprévoyance: les renforts n'étaient pas là: on n'avait pas pensé aux renforts. Il n'y avait pas assez de canons pour barrer le passage, ni assez de munitions d'artillerie; nous avons vu de nos yeux les deux batteries cesser le tir en pleine action: on n'avait pas pensé aux obus. Dans toute une zone, à perte de vue, il n'y avait pas de travaux de défense, pas de tranchées: on n'avait pas pensé aux tranchées.

C'est visible, même pour nos yeux simples de simples soldats.

Qu'y faire! dit l'un de nous. C'est les chefs.

The long flowing sentence construction and the accumulation of negatives contrast with the abruptness and starkness of the final few words: "C'est les chefs". In "Les Ombres" there is a similar conclusion reached by a German prisoner of war. When Margat asks sergeant Müller for a translation, the latter replies:

"Qu'la guerre, c'est pas de leur faute: c'est les grands".(p. 141)

Gradually, however, this direct quality and clarity of writing is overshadowed by Paulin's hallucinations and fantastic visions and Barbusse's pacifist passion which tends slowly to take hold of the narrative and to deform the truth. In "Apparition", one feels that the protest is coming directly from the author rather than via the mouth of his narrator. As Paulin slips into unconsciousness and begins to hallucinate on the battlefield, he considers the nature and effect of war:

Toutes ces batailles, qui naissent d'elles-mêmes, se nécessitent à l'infini!... Une seule bataille, ce n'est pas assez, ce n'est pas complet, il n'y a pas de raison. Rien n'est fini, rien n'est jamais fini. Ah! il n'y a que les hommes qui meurent! Personne ne comprend la grandeur des choses, et moi, je sais bien que je ne comprends pas toute l'horreur où je suis.(p. 170)

There are several indications here of the author's own move towards the ideas and principles of and behind communism. There is the suggestion that war is necessary and can have a purifying effect on society; that whilst men die, ideals never fade and remain attainable. Maurice Rieuneau writes:

Cette dernière partie n'est guère autre chose que l'exposé par des moyens romanesques (dialogues, réflexions intérieures), de la thèse révolutionnaire de Barbusse.¹¹⁶

It is during chapter XVI, "De Profundis Clamavi", that Paulin's own thoughts and ideas begin to unite into a strong feeling of protest. He admits that his search to find the truth, or at the very least, a meaning of war, fills his entire being like "une fièvre", "un besoin", "une folie". He is horrified at the barriers that exist between nations and people, and admits that whilst he searches to find a difference between victim and oppressor, he succeeds only in establishing closer ties:

Ils ne portent pas des vêtements semblables sur les cibles de leurs corps, ils parlent des langues différentes, mais au fond de ce qui en eux, est humain, sortent les mêmes simplicités, identiquement. Ils ont les mêmes griefs, les mêmes fureurs, autour des mêmes raisons. Ils se ressemblent comme leurs plaies se ressemblent et se ressembleront. Leurs paroles sont aussi pareilles que les cris que la douleur leur arrache, aussi pareille que l'affreux silence qui s'exhalera bientôt de leurs lèvres massacrées. Ils ne se battent que parce qu'ils sont face à face. Ils poursuivent les uns contre les autres un but commun. Obscurément, ils se tuent parce qu'ils sont pareils.(p. 178)

Throughout there is the constant emphasis that, whilst in physical terms the adversaries may be different, in terms of the quality of human existence, they are identical. Their aims are common, their

116. Op. cit. p. 170

expectations of life similar. Somehow, however, they have lost their way. It appears that, for the very same reasons that bind them together as a whole, they are mercilessly torn apart. The short sentences and frequent punctuation creates a logical, ordered approach, yet paradoxically there is little logic in what the narrator is saying. He lucidly acknowledges this in the final sentence. Having made this discovery, the remaining pages of the chapter offer a platform upon which he launches an attack against the evil antagonism of the world, his critical mind formulating against the politicians, businessmen, journalists, generals and the like, who perpetuate lies and errors and thus destroy the positive qualities of mankind. He laments the latter when he writes:

Soldat universel, homme pris au hasard parmi les hommes, rappelle-toi: il n'y a pas un moment où tu fus toi-même. Jamais tu ne cessas d'être courbé sous l'âpre commandement sans réplique: "Il le faut, il le faut".(p. 179)

The war now becomes merely a pretext for expressing a system of personal thoughts and ideas on society. The author/narrator can see no successful outcome of the war for those who are inevitably and irrevocably imprisoned by its devastating power. Either they will be killed, horribly mutilated, suffer severe mental strain, or if they survive reasonably intact, will find themselves rejected by that very same society which initially applauded their rush to arms and encouraged them to defend their country. It would appear that he is writing with the advantage of hindsight when he warns:

Même élu par le miracle de la chance, même indemne dans la victoire, toi, tu seras vaincu. Quand tu te remettras dans la machine insatiable des heures de travail, parmi les tiens ... la tâche sera plus dure qu'avant, à cause de la guerre qu'il faudra payer en toutes ses incalculables conséquences. Toi qui peuplais les

cachots des villes ou les granges, va peupler l'immobilité des champs de bataille, plus grands que les places publiques ...(p. 181)

He vehemently attacks the hierarchical structure of society which favours those who command rather than those who obey. He remains rigid in his criticism of the capitalist system, where those who rule are never seen, and where only their demands and the repercussions of these demands upon the working multitudes are noted. He condemns this "supernatural" type of power which transforms the ordinary individual into "l'esclave moderne", (p. 183) whose only conviction remains that there has always been war, therefore there always will be war and that established principles can never be changed. He chastises mankind for his docility and passivity, and looks forward to the day when he will be delivered from the constraints of "la vieille société", proclaiming the virtues of social freedom and truth:

... la seule cause de la guerre, c'est l'esclavage de ceux qui la font avec leur chair.

On leur dit: "Une fois la victoire obtenue au gré de tes maîtres, toute tyrannie aura disparu comme par enchantement, et il y aura la paix sur la terre". Ce n'est pas vrai: il n'y aura de paix ici-bas que lorsque le règne des hommes sera venu. (p. 187)

His view of the future, however, is anything but optimistic. Realism now gives way to the visionary as Paulin/Barbusse dismisses any notion of a lasting peace whilst wars are decided and controlled by those who do not fight. The passionate outbursts of Le Feu are transformed into an authoritative, almost doctrinal style, towards the end of the chapter. He remarkably, if not forcefully, predicts:

Il n'y aura plus sur la terre que la préparation à la guerre. Toutes les forces vivantes seront absorbées par elle, elle accaparera toutes les découvertes, toute la science, toutes les idées. La seule

maîtrise de l'air, la mise en coupe réglée de l'espace suffira à dilapider les fortunes nationales - puisque la navigation aérienne, agrandissement merveilleux et enchanté, est devenu à sa naissance au milieu des cercles jaloux, une riche proie que chacun a voulue, et qu'on s'est immensément déchirée.

Les autres dépenses se tairont avant celles de la destruction, et aussi les autres aspirations, et toutes les raisons de vivre. Tel sera le sens du dernier âge de l'humanité.(p. 189)

The constant juxtaposition of achievement and destruction offers a bleak and pessimistic outlook for the future. The narrator/author has moved a long way from a straightforward position of "témoignage". Instead of commenting and clarifying, he asserts in almost dogmatic fashion. The positive aspects which have materialized from the war years, "les forces vivantes", "les découvertes", "la science", "les idées", "la navigation aérienne", are categorically regarded as factors which will mitigate against mankind in the future. He is adamant in his conclusion:

Le spectacle de demain est un spectacle d'agonie ...

Tout est folie. Et il n'y a personne qui osera se lever et dire que tout n'est pas folie, et que l'avenir ne se dessine pas ainsi, aussi fatal, aussi interchangeable qu'un souvenir.(pp. 193-4)

Any idea of peace is mere utopia whilst man refuses to react and to protest. Without some form of commitment and determination to question and manifest personal thoughts and opinions, he is condemned to a life of isolation in a meaningless and absurd world. Even God appears to have forsaken him. Paulin bemoans the apparent loss of the latter:

La terre, le ciel ... Je ne vois pas Dieu. Je vois partout, partout, l'absence de Dieu. Le regard qui parcourt l'espace revient abandonné. Et je ne l'ai jamais vu, et il n'est nulle part, nulle part, nulle part.(p. 211)

He concludes that he has only just managed to reason in such fashion since having successfully rebelled against convention and tradition, since having freed himself from the rigidity of acceptance of the word of those in higher authority. It is ironic, however, that the manner in which he favours to advocate his beliefs, encourages anything but, a free and open approach. He affirms:

Il n'y a pas d'autre preuve de l'existence de Dieu que le besoin qu'on en a. Dieu n'est pas Dieu, c'est le nom de tout ce qui nous manque. C'est notre rêve porté au ciel. Dieu, c'est une prière, ce n'est pas quelqu'un.(p. 212)

In the penultimate chapter, "Clarté", Barbusse/Paulin seizes the opportunity to express more revolutionary ideas. Rieuneau has written that this particular chapter is the equivalent of a "manifeste" or a "programme socialiste". He considers that the author's dogmatism becomes so inflexible, here, that it considerably weakens the novel as a whole.¹¹⁷ There is a steady stream of imperatives which begin with a passionate plea for no half-measures. Man is implored neither to undertake reforms instigated by statesmen, nor to listen to official proclamations which very often mask the real truth, but, instead, to search for simplicity and fundamental reasoning. Clear strategies are recommended:

Pour être le juge des choses qui existent, remonte à leurs sources, et atteins à tous leurs aboutissements. La plus noble et la plus féconde opération de l'intelligence humaine est de faire table rase de toute notion imposée ... et d'aller chercher, à travers les apparences, les bases éternelles.(p. 267)

The author/narrator regards equality as a basic premise for any strong and successful society. He writes:

117. "La Postérité du Feu: Révolte et Pacifisme", op. cit. p. 171

Un homme en vaut un autre. Cela veut dire que nul homme ne porte en soi un privilège le mettant au-dessus de la loi commune.(p. 268)

He urges mankind to accept the socialist doctrine, to found a "république des républiques", (p. 269) a "république universelle". (p. 270) Countries should be disarmed, military barriers broken as well as economic and commercial, education should be re-organized in order to rebuild civilization, justice re-structured and human intelligence resurrected. Everything should be subjected to a rigorous pattern of reasoning. This should eventually give rise to a "grandeur internationale", (p. 273) a "nouvelle hiérarchie" determined to dispel deceit and crime, with its roots firmly embedded in sincerity and the truth. Towards the end of the chapter, Barbusse expresses his faith and certitude in the final realisation of his ideas. He writes:

On ne se doute pas de la beauté possible! On ne se doute pas de ce que peuvent donner tous les trésors gaspillés; de ce que peut amener la résurrection de l'intelligence humaine dévoyée, écrasée et tuée jusqu'ici à mesure, par l'esclavage infâme, par les basses nécessités contagieuses des attaques et des défenses à main armée, et par les privilèges qui dégradent le mérite ... (p. 274)

He believes that mankind has reached the dawn of a new era and places confidence in the three principles that he considers form the basis of everything: justice, logic and equality. He places complete trust in the victory of truth, in an ordered revolution led by those who uphold the highest concepts of law and duty. In the final chapter, "Face à Face",¹¹⁸ Paulin, aware of all these truths, prepares to reshape his life, to find happiness and true love, by facing up to the truth of life. He acknowledges:

118. The original title of the novel, 6th March 1917. See Brett, op. cit. p. 252

Ce qui est venu à notre secours, c'est simplement la vérité. C'est la vérité qui nous a donné la vie ... Comprendre, s'égaliser à la vérité, c'est tout, et aimer, c'est la même chose que connaître et comprendre.(p. 289)

The importance that the concept of truth holds for the author is illustrated by the final sentence of the novel and the ultimate word upon which he concludes the work. He writes:

... il y a une divinité, dont il ne faut jamais se détourner pour guider l'immense vie intérieure, et aussi la part qu'on a dans la vie de tous: la vérité.(p. 290)

It seems more than likely that it is the "Clarté" to which the book owes its title, the great revolutionary theme behind the Russian Socialist revolution of 1917 that Barbusse supported so intrepidly in France and in the capitalist countries of the western world. It is perhaps with these views in mind that Brett sums up Clarté as:

... une sorte de manifeste socialiste s'adressant non seulement au peuple de la France, mais au peuple du monde ...¹¹⁹

119. Ibid. p. 154

CHAPTER VII

Testimony of an army surgeon

- a) Duhamel: VIE DES MARTYRS 1914-16 - The pathos of war: an appeal to the emotions

By the outbreak of war in 1914, Georges Duhamel was a promising poet, dramatist and critic. His first published work, Des légendes, des batailles, a volume of poetry, was followed by more volumes between 1909-1912. His first play, La Lumière, which dealt with the psychology of the blind, appeared in 1911, and two more were written in the years preceding the declaration of war, (Dans l'ombre des statues and Le Combat). Between 1912-14 three works of criticism were published, Propos critiques (1912), Paul Claudel (1913) and Les Poètes et la poésie (1914). Having obtained a medical degree in 1909, however, Duhamel automatically became a member of the military reserve at the declaration of hostilities, August 1914 and enlisted despite exemption. He was stationed close to the front in a mobile surgical unit from which he performed over 2,000 operations and treated over 4,000 soldiers during the war years. Clark Keating writes in Critic of Civilization: Georges Duhamel and his writings:

Amputations, gangrene, infected wounds, stenches, groans, and ever-present death were for more than four years Duhamel's daily experience. Few who endured such a life remained unchanged by it and Duhamel was stirred to his innermost core.¹

Knapp points out that the ghastly sights which Duhamel saw about him, coupled with the constant toil required of an army surgeon, had a traumatic effect upon his sensitivity. She writes that Duhamel was deeply moved by his enormous capacity for compassion, his feelings

1. Kentucky, University of Kentucky Press, 1965, p. 26

for humanity, and that he needed an outlet to express his shock and revulsion at the daily horrors that he witnessed.² Vie des Martyrs 1914-16 and Civilisation 1914-17, published in 1917 and 1918 respectively, are expressions of his protest against the cruelty of war, presented in the form of short stories or sketches. In these books Duhamel addresses himself to those who were oblivious to the repugnance and barbarity of war, in the hope that they might share the horror and the frightfulness of the western front, of the pain the soldiers endured. Santelli writes:

Son but est clair: il ne s'agit pas d'écrire sur ces corps souffrants des phrases bien balancées et des pages de bravoure. Il s'agit de nous contraindre à donner forme à nos pensées les plus secrètes, à nos sensations les plus fugitives, il s'agit de nous imposer les visions dont nous nous détournons volontiers, d'assassiner en nous le sommeil, selon la forte expression de Macbeth.³

Duhamel himself expresses scepticism at the accounts of battles and campaigns written by historians who have never participated in or seen the events about which they write. He applauds, on the other hand, "la littérature de témoignage", produced by those who witnessed and experienced the suffering and misery of war at first hand:

La vérité tient plus de place que l'invention dans les récits de cette sorte. Ce ne sont pas des romans, ce sont des contributions à la connaissance des âmes.⁴

2. Georges Duhamel, New York, Twayne, 1972, p. 46

3. "Adieu à Georges Duhamel", in Georges Duhamel 1884-1966, Paris, Mercure de France, 1967, pp. 132-3

4. "La juste idée de ma conception littéraire", La Table Ronde, no. 131, November 1958, p. 35

In Anniversaire, he envisages future wars and conflicts and makes it clear that he holds no hopes that his writings will reform the world. Nevertheless, he adds:

... j'entends me réformer moi-même, refouler mes impulsions pures et simples, fonder raisonnablement mon désaveu de la guerre, de toute guerre, sans distinction, sans pieux sophismes.⁵

The effects of his war experience and motivation behind Vie des Martyrs and Civilisation can be seen in an article written by his eldest son, also a doctor, which appears in Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 6th-13th September 1979. He writes about his father:

L'expérience vécue comme médecin pendant la Première Guerre l'a marqué pour le reste de sa vie. Après la guerre, il a voulu témoigner pour la paix, pour la liberté des peuples, pour l'amitié des peuples. Il a voulu montrer que la civilisation est dans le coeur de l'homme, et a prophétisé contre les dangers de la civilisation machiniste et du développement excessif de la "société de consommation", terme dont il est l'inventeur.

He goes on to stress:

Mon père a voulu être un témoin parmi les hommes, il a voulu réaliser une littérature de témoignage.⁶

Duhamel jotted his ideas and impressions of life as an army surgeon on paper, recopied these "vignettes", giving them order and form, before sending them to his wife who would copy them and send them to Alfred Vallette, editor of "Mercure de France". Clark Keating comments that there was little immediate public reaction. He writes that Vie des martyrs created a slight stir but that it was not until Civilisation had appeared and been identified as a work by the same

5. Paris, Champion, 1925, p. 265

6. "Le Témoignage Humaniste de Georges Duhamel", no. 2702

author,⁷ was widespread notice taken of Duhamel's achievement. Civilisation was awarded the "Prix Goncourt" in 1917. Clark Keating points out that in peacetime to have won such a critical victory would have seemed a just reward, but that to the wartime Duhamel, the surgeon and witness of suffering, public recognition seemed less important than getting his message across.⁸ He continues:

... he found it distasteful and a little shocking to find himself mainly praised for the literary quality of his work. He had wanted all men to become eye witnesses to war's brutality, and he found it disconcerting to hear people say "What pathos! What wonderful writing!"⁹

Knapp claims that whilst the two works elicited articles in praise of his style, the exactitude of his descriptions, his depth of vision, they did not really arouse a depth of disgust and hatred for war that Duhamel had hoped. She claims that they rather accustomed people to the horrors of war and hardened them toward suffering. In the years following the armistice, Duhamel was to become increasingly pacifist and pessimistic regarding the world situation. In Guerre et Littérature and La Possession du Monde (1920) he questioned the purpose and meaning of life, criticizing the aims and achievements of science. During the Second World War he remained an absolute pacifist but supported civilian resistance. Lieu d'asile (1940) denounced the enemy and contemplated the problems of civilization. In the 1950's he became disillusioned with the inevitable failure of post-war politicians to find a practical yet humane solution to Europe's position and in the years preceding his death in 1966, the

7. Initially Civilisation was published under the pseudonym of Denis Thévenin. Duhamel did not want his personality to intrude upon events. See Knapp, op. cit. pp. 49-50

8. Op. cit. p. 27

9. Ibid. p. 28

conflict between American and Russian political and economic systems disturbed him enormously. Santelli summarizes these preoccupations in his article "Adieu à Georges Duhamel", when he writes:

... la détresse humaine n'est pas seulement contemporaine des guerres. Même lorsque les armistices sont signés, même lorsqu'on cesse de blesser, de tuer et de mutiler, la détresse humaine ne cesse jamais d'assaillir les hommes ...¹⁰

Throughout Vie des martyrs, Duhamel is concerned to convey the full emotional impact of what he witnessed as a surgeon behind the front lines. The book takes the form of nine short stories, each an entity in itself, recounted by Duhamel, the author/narrator, with compassion and extreme empathy. In the opening lines of "A travers le territoire", he is at pains to stress the heroism of the dying and the wounded. A visitor to the hospital ward comments on the apparent good naturedness and good fortune of the patients. Their white bed linen and bandages suggest comfort; they do not complain or bemoan their plight. The war appears to have changed them little. Duhamel assumes the role of an eyewitness who, as an army doctor, had indeed participated in similar scenes which are enacted throughout the book. He is moved by devotion and sympathy for the 'martyrs' whose flesh has been tortured but who show few signs of distress. He speaks out:

Etes-vous sûrs de les reconnaître? Vous qui venez de les regarder, êtes-vous sûrs de les avoir vus?

Sous leurs pansements, il y a des plaies que vous ne pouvez imaginer. Au fond des plaies, au fond de la chair mutilée, s'agite et s'exalte une âme extraordinaire, furtive, qui ne se manifeste pas aisément, qui s'exprime avec candeur, mais que je souhaiterais tant vous faire entendre.(p. 10)

10. Published in Georges Duhamel 1884-1966, Paris, Mercure de France, 1967, p. 136

His lucid recognition of the heroic qualities of the mutilated soldiers as they stoically endure the pain and misery of their battle wounds, emphasizes the brutality and absurdity of war and thus strengthens his personal condemnation. Admiration for the courage and sacrifice of the troops is present in "Histoire de Carré et de Lerondeau". Their arrival in the hospital ward is compared to the arrival of parcels which have been battered about during their journey in the post, and to ancient mummies embalmed in bandages and sticking plaster. Nevertheless, the author's esteem for the two soldiers is clearly evident:

... dans ce séjour de la souffrance, ils sont les rois; leur couche est entourée d'un respect, d'un silence qui conviennent bien à la majesté.(p. 11)

Carré's strength contrasts with Lerondeau's fear of dying. Carré endures the pain of his wounds and the necessary treatment; Lerondeau often bewails his plight and makes no effort to hide his suffering. In an emotional scene supposedly witnessed by the author, Carré lectures Lerondeau on the virtues of courage and hope. Duhamel writes:

J'écoutais cette voix chevrotante, je regardais ce visage édenté, illuminé d'un sourire, et je sentais quelque chose de curieux se gonfler dans ma gorge ...(p. 14)

It would appear that his aim, here, is to appeal to the moral sensibility of the reader and to move him emotionally with his portrayal of what Cruickshank refers to as "the heroic manifestations of the human spirit".¹¹ Cruickshank points out that these qualities which suffering uncovers make it even more outrageous that human

11. Variations on Catastrophe, op. cit. p. 87

beings with such potential should be destroyed in such an appalling manner. In this way Duhamel's protest is strengthened all the more. As Carré's pain increases, he calls out more and more. Lerondeau, as if in admiration of his friend, begins to moan in similar fashion. The pathos of the situation is rendered even more acute as Lerondeau reminds the author that he remained with his unit's wagons even when the Germans had overrun the allied lines. Duhamel writes:

A coup sûr, Lerondeau a eu de la bravoure, et je veux qu'on le sache. Quand il vient des étrangers, pendant le pansement, je leur montre Marie, tout prêt à gémir, et j'explique:

"C'est Marie! Vous savez, Marie Lerondeau! il a la jambe cassée; mais c'est un homme qui a eu bien de la bravoure: il est resté seul avec les voitures!"(p. 19)

Whilst Duhamel was appalled by the horrors of scientific technology used in war and its effects on the individuals, his deep concern for the latter is evident in these lines. His instinctive reaction is one of sympathy and compassion more than hatred and anger. The simplicity of his writing shows that his initial commitment is to humanitarian goals rather than to launch a powerful indictment against the absurdity and brutality of war. It is with expressive understatement and economic brevity that he attempts to achieve his aims:

C'est bien heureux que Carré ait gardé tant de courage pour l'hôpital, car il en a grand besoin. Les opérations successives, les pansements, tout cela tarit les sources les plus généreuses ... Il sait, Carré, il sait que le courage non utilisé aujourd'hui ne vaudra peut-être plus rien demain.(p. 20)

In "Reality in war literature",¹² Williamson writes that "Duhamel is a master of simple prose".¹³ He goes on to claim that he has the "... divine power of fusing both spirit and letter of reality and casting the amalgam of truth into words".¹⁴ His purpose is not to challenge the reader's intellectual capacity but to stir his feelings, to stress the importance of certain fundamental moral values. Two economically sketched scenes illustrate the difference in values between the wounded soldiers and their visitors from the rear. One highly sophisticated lady whom Duhamel takes for a duchess seems completely devoid of any moral sensibility. He comments:

Elle exhalait un si violent et si suave parfum qu'elle ne pouvait certainement pas sentir l'odeur de la douleur qui règne ici.(p. 24)

She finds it highly amusing that all Carré should desire is a plate of veal and new potatoes. Similarly, an old man, who regularly visits the ward and proudly displays his medals from former campaigns, cannot understand why Carré should not want his family to know about the gallantry of his suffering.(p. 25) Through the latter's protests, Duhamel appears to be advocating a reassessment of human priorities and through the old man's reactions, the urgency of a rediscovery of truly humane values:

... le vieil homme s'incline, et toutes ses médailles pendent de sa poitrine comme de petites mamelles desséchées. Il s'incline en soufflant, sans quitter le képi chargé d'or, et, avec autorité, il applique sur le coeur de Carré une oreille sourde.(p. 25)

12. The Linhay on the Downs, London, Faber, 1934, pp. 224-62

13. Ibid. p. 233

14. Ibid. p. 235

Duhamel appears intent on pointing out that war and the courage of those who suffer from its abomination must serve as a warning to mankind to change direction; that humanism must dominate materialism. Both Carré and Lerondeau accept their mutilations positively and remain cheerful even in the most painful moments. Writing about Carré, Duhamel leaves us in no doubt as to his impassioned, though restrained, indictment of war:

Mais je ne veux pas que toute ta souffrance se perde dans l'abîme. Et c'est pourquoi je la raconte très exactement.(p. 28)

Clark Keating writes that "the pathos, anger and frustration, [Duhamel] made his readers feel as he described the agony of the wounded are unsurpassed in war literature. And the most terrible thing about the sketches is the reality of their horror ..."¹⁵ He continues: "He wished to show what went on at the front, to shock civilians out of their acceptance of war and the soldiers' part in it".¹⁶ Duhamel himself wrote in Essai sur le roman:

Le but suprême du romancier est de nous rendre sensible l'âme humaine, de nous la faire connaître et aimer dans sa grandeur comme dans sa misère, dans ses victoires et dans ses défaites. Admiration et pitié, telle est la devise du roman.¹⁷

The ending of the story appears deliberately ambiguous:

Carré est mort au petit matin. Lerondeau nous quittera demain.(p. 29)

It is difficult to assess whether Lerondeau recovers and is sent home or back to the front, or, indeed, whether he too dies from his

15. Critic of Civilization: George Duhamel and his writings, op. cit. pp. 28-9

16. Ibid. p. 29

17. Paris, Marcelle Lesage, 1925, p. 61

wounds. Nevertheless, the instinctive reaction of the reader is one of compassion and grief for the victims of war rather than one of hatred for its motivators. The very title of the leading story in the collection, "Mémorial de la Vie des martyrs", indicates Duhamel's admiration for the sacrifices which the soldiers make and the way they accept the demands made on their physical and moral strength. Duhamel provides the reader with a wealth of discreetly sketched scenes. The tone is one of intense pity and almost naïve admiration. Mouchon expresses extreme embarrassment about his lack of cleanliness and begs the medical staff not to remove his boots due to the smell;(p. 30) one patient urges the surgeon to pay no attention to the shell-fire but to carry on with the operation that he hopes will save his life - in return for which he promises a beautiful piece of porcelain ;(p. 31) Croin's patriotic loyalty, even though he suffers bitterly from the loss of an eye, is most moving. He is proud of the sacrifices he has made yet no longer seems to have an emotional response. When the author moves to examine Croin's mutilated eye, the patient recoils automatically, not out of fear but out of habit. Duhamel directly intervenes to explain:

... c'est vrai: l'homme n'a plus peur, mais la chair reste craintive.(p. 37)

No amount of sympathy can assuage Croin's suffering; nevertheless, he stoically faces the truth:

Il sourit, touche son bandeau, regarde son bras mutilé, semble s'égayer dans des souvenirs et murmure:

"C'est égal, les filles ... elles viendront plus comme avant ..."(p. 37)

Duhamel's brevity and minimization of the horrific consequences of Croin's wounds strengthen the emotional protest in this story against the barbarity of war whilst emphasizing the heroic suffering of the wounded. Derancourt who has suffered ignominiously at the hands of the enemy and seen his own father killed whilst trying to help him, never complains or speaks of his ill-treatment and misfortune. Admiration for his courage is apparent:

"De tout cela, Derancourt ne disait mot. Il ne savait, semblait-il, pas se plaindre, et promenait sur la misère environnante un regard grave, plein d'expérience ..." (p. 44)

It is only when preparations are made to operate on his damaged leg, and Derancourt is under the influence of chloroform, that he breaks down completely and yields uncontrollably to his desperate misery. The pathos of the situation is clearly expressed as Duhamel makes every effort to play down the dramatic aspects. Similarly in the account involving Bouchentou and Figuet, the inner agonies of the latter are clearly recognized without recourse to cumulative, colourful language. Duhamel draws attention to the full emotional impact of what he witnesses in the most economic and simple fashion:

... un jour ... le pauvre adjudant Figuet se mit à se plaindre avec une voix qui n'était plus que l'ombre de sa voix, comme son corps n'était plus que l'ombre d'un corps ...

Un courage, une endurance invraisemblables semblaient dans un désespoir que rien ne semblait plus devoir adoucir. (p. 51)

As Bouchentou momentarily forgets the pain in his own arm to reach out and take Figuet's hand in order to appease his suffering, attention is drawn to the heroism of human nature:

Tant que dura cette étreinte silencieuse, il cessa de se plaindre et peut-être de souffrir. Bouchentou laissa là sa main droite aussi longtemps qu'il fallut.(p. 52)

Duhamel directly expresses his own opinion at this stage but with minimal sentiment:

J'ai vu cela, Bouchentou, mon frère. Je ne l'oublierai pas. J'ai vu aussi pendre et peser comme une guenille inerte ce douloureux bras gauche qu'il t'avait bien fallu lâcher, pour avoir une main à donner.(p. 52)

The emotion and tenderness of the situation is left to the appreciation of the reader. Duhamel's intention is not to express bitterness or remorse but to portray the pathos of events in such a way as to stir the hearts of his audience. Little is said about his attitude towards war, yet his loathing for it is implicit. Clark Keating writes that "ultimately the reader feels less pity for the innocent victims of the monster than for himself as a member of a race so tender and brave yet so horribly uncivilized as to wage a modern mechanized, and fratricidal war".¹⁸ The episode involving the young artillery officer who pays his last respects to his dead brother, André, manifests a deep sense of moral sensibility and sensory perception. Again the author exerts a firm control over the written word in order to attain maximum effect:

... il laisse tomber son casque, se jette à genoux auprès de la couchette funèbre, saisit dans ses mains le visage du mort et l'embrasse doucement, doucement, longuement, avec un petit bruit des lèvres, comme quand on embrasse la main d'un bébé.(p. 59)

The repetition of "doucement", the direct contrast offered by using the simile of embracing a baby, together with the soldier's final

18. Op. cit. p. 31

lament of "Pauvre André! Pauvre André!" addresses the innermost feelings of the reader in an unprovocative manner. The death of Mercier is one of the most moving scenes in the book. The haunting repetition of "Vous me sauverez" emphasizes the slow and painful agony of death. Duhamel focusses on the final minutes of life with impressionistic brevity. He writes:

Voilà les narines qui battent. Il est dur d'avoir été malheureux pendant quarante ans et de renoncer pour toujours à l'humble joie de sentir l'odeur amère des genévriers.

Voilà les lèvres qui se contractent et retombent peu à peu, si tristement. Il est dur d'avoir souffert pendant quarante ans et de ne pouvoir étancher sa dernière soif avec l'eau merveilleuse des fontaines qui jaillissent sur nos montagnes ... Oh! qu'il est dur de quitter cette vie faite tout entière de travail et de douleur!(p. 64)

The repetition of "Il est dur ..." is again designed to draw the reader's attention to the heroic suffering of the wounded. They are clearly not regarded as beasts as with Barbusse and Dorgelès, but something much more special. There is almost a total absence of the brutality of the wounds here, of the condemnation of war in general; Duhamel is clearly more interested in conveying the full emotional impact of what he has seen in the hospitals along the western front. The bond between patient and doctor highlights the sentimentality and sincerity of the situation. Duhamel writes:

Je lui presse la main pour lui donner confiance, et je sens que sa dure main est heureuse dans la mienne. J'ai plongé mes doigts dans sa chair, son sang a coulé sur mes doigts, cela suffit à créer de forts liens entre deux hommes.(p. 63)

Even when Mercier dies, the author holds for several minutes the hand of his corpse.

In "A Verdun", Duhamel transports the reader away from the relative comfort of the reserve line hospitals to the casualty

clearing stations of the front lines. The overwhelming task of the medical teams is evident:

L'odeur et les plaintes de plusieurs centaines de blessés nous assaillirent aussitôt ... Les traits tirés par une nuit de travail désespéré, médecins et infirmiers allaient, venaient, choisissaient dans le tas des blessés, et en soignaient deux pendant qu'il en arrivait vingt.(p. 9)

In recognizing the positive qualities of the surgeons, the horror of the scene is enhanced and the author's protest strengthened. The conditions inside the casualty stations are appalling. Each room is filled with wounded soldiers, many of whom have been waiting several days for treatment. There is little space in the crowded environment and the stench of the wounds and poor sanitation is proof of the horrific spectacle of war. Duhamel writes:

Nous ouvrons une porte, et, aussitôt, les hommes qui gisaient là se mettaient à crier de toutes leurs forces. Certains, couchés sur leur brancard, au ras du sol, nous saisisaient par les jambes et suppliaient que l'on s'occupât d'eux. Quelques infirmiers affolés s'élançaient au hasard, mais n'arrivaient pas à satisfaire aux besoins d'une si vaste souffrance ...

Parfois, un homme tourmenté par le délire nous tenait au passage des propos incohérents. Parfois nous tournions autour d'un lit silencieux pour voir la figure du blessé, mais il n'y avait plus là qu'un cadavre.

Chaque salle inspectée montrait la même détresse, soufflait la même haleine d'antiseptiques et d'excréments ...(p. 70)

The language is far removed from that of total protest that Barbusse employs; almost like Dorgelès, Duhamel allows the facts to speak for themselves, but the tone is more rational, more sensitive. There is no excessive use of literary technique, imagery, figurative speech, to conjure up a scene of utter desolation and suffering. On the contrary, the author modestly portrays the immense torture and pain. The use of the verb "gésir" and "supplier", the rare use of

adjectives: "tourmenté, incohérents"; the few nouns indicative of pain: "souffrance, détresse" help to build up the atmosphere, but it is the brief, accompanying remarks, which Duhamel makes but refuses to dwell upon, which really express the horror of the spectacle of war: the patients who tug at the doctor's legs in the hope of some attention, the doctors who seem to over-exert themselves yet still not have sufficient time to treat their patients as they merit, the wounded soldier who has been waiting four days for a new dressing, the bed with the immobile figure which turns out to be a corpse. Duhamel writes:

Les cris de la souffrance nous masquaient une canonnade formidable. Après de moi, un homme que je connaissais pour énergique et résolu disait entre ses dents: "Non! Non! tout plutôt que la guerre!"

Mais il fallait d'abord mettre de l'ordre dans l'enfer.(p. 71)

His own writing can be seen to fulfil a similar function. In Positions françaises, he admits:

J'apprécie, sans nul doute, les ouvrages d'imagination, mais je donne toujours la préférence aux livres qui manifestent une épreuve personnelle, saignante, frémissante de la vérité humaine.¹⁹

In "War Books", Tomlinson writes about Duhamel:

You cannot read his stories without finding that pity and remorse diminish the glorious and ecstatic show of a war, and silence its trumpets and drums with the sight of a man in a bed, who, in a sense, is now no man at all.²⁰

The horror of the operating "theatre" is described with persuasive simplicity. There is neither dwelling upon the gravity of the patient's wounds nor upon the nature of the operations; the

19. Paris, Mercure de France, 1940, p. 161

20. Criterion, vol. IX, No. 36, April 1930, p. 413

economically sketched scene reflects the impassivity with which the incessant casualties were treated:

Devant le flot débordant de la besogne, il fallait, avant que de saisir le couteau, se recueillir profondément, et décider du sacrifice qui assurait la vie ou donner quelque espoir pour la vie. En une seconde de réflexion efficace, il fallait entrevoir et peser toute une existence d'homme, puis agir avec méthode et audace.

Dès qu'un blessé quittait la salle, un autre prenait sa place; pendant les préparatifs de l'opération, nous allions choisir par avance et classer les patients, car beaucoup n'avaient plus besoin de rien ...

... On évacuait les blessés susceptibles d'attendre encore quelques heures les soins nécessaires et d'aller les chercher plus loin. Mais, en entendant ronfler les automobiles, tous voulaient partir, et l'on voyait des hommes supplier qu'on les emportât et entrer dans l'agonie tout en assurant qu'ils se sentaient assez forts pour voyager. (pp. 71-2)

The impersonal, objective approach is emphasized swiftly yet forcefully. Duhamel writes of "le flot débordant" when referring to the never ending line of mutilated men; the use of the verb "se recueillir" and the adverb "profondément", the stark reference to "le couteau", expresses, with the minimum of language, the unadorned reality of the life and death situations and the subsequent decisions that were made daily in the casualty stations. The swiftness yet seriousness of these decisions is summed up concisely, thus underlining the absurdity and inhumanity of war: "En une seconde de réflexion efficace, il fallait entrevoir et peser toute une existence d'homme". The imbalance of the equation is clearly horrific. The clinical categorizing of patients into those who would die anyway and were therefore not worth operating on, those who would survive and did not require immediate attention or those whose wounds were too complicated for surgeons to waste time probing and those who could probably live on if granted immediate surgery, was both crude and unjust. The frugality of Duhamel's writing is an attempt to mirror

this. He describes with control and restraint man's continual ingenuity to inflict increasingly appalling injuries on fellow man:

Tous les médecins ont pu remarquer l'atroce succès remporté, en si peu de temps, par le perfectionnement des engins de dilacérations. Et nous admirions amèrement que l'homme pût aventurer son fragile organisme à travers les déflagrations d'une chimie à peine disciplinée, qui atteint et dépasse en brutalité les puissances aveugles de la nature. Nous admirions surtout qu'une chair aussi délicate, pétrie d'harmonie, créatrice d'harmonie, supportât, sans se désagréger aussitôt, de tels chocs et de tels délabrements.(p. 77)

The brutal contrast emphasized throughout these lines underlines the barbarousness and ferociousness of the impact of steel, travelling at a high velocity, upon human flesh. "Des engins de dilacération" are directly opposed to the "fragile organisme", which is their target; there is use of oxymoron in the expressions "atroce succès" and "nous admirions amèrement"; "chair ... délicate" contrasts with "chocs" and "délabrements". In this way Duhamel ascribes importance to his indictment of scientific rationalism and his conviction that such massacre cannot prepare the groundwork for moral progress in the future. The appalling degradation of man is constantly shown. Duhamel describes with clarity and simplicity the scraping away of mud, dirt and vermin by the surgeon's knife from infested wounds and dressings; casualties which follow after each other with such rapidity that, in many instances, decisions are taken and treatment administered without the consultation of the individuals concerned and without acknowledgement of their identity; the badly wounded who beg to be evacuated and live in fear of being labelled "intransportables";(p. 78 and p. 71) the gas victims, whose very appearance, with mask and glasses, abases and decivilizes their human attributes. One such affected soldier is described:

Ses yeux étaient complètement enfouis sous les paupières. Ses vêtements étaient si profondément imprégnés par le poison que nous fûmes tous pris de toux et de larmoiement et qu'il persista longtemps dans la salle une pénétrante odeur d'ail et de bonbons anglais.(p. 78)

There is a sense of proportion about Duhamel's writing which guards against the exaggerated and the melodramatic. Towards the end of "Verdun" he points out the importance of humour even in the midst of undeniable tragedy. He explains:

C'est peut-être une des particularités ou des grandeurs de notre race, c'est sans doute, plus généralement, un impérieux besoin de l'humanité entière.(p. 79)

One soldier, despite the complexity of his wounds, still manages to amuse the medical staff; Tailleur, a doctor, pokes fun at the bombardment:

"Je ne veux pas être tué par une brique, moi! Je vais dehors".(p. 80)

Another doctor becomes the centre of amusement after finding metal extracts in his pork, the pig having previously been killed by shrapnel. (p. 80) Lécolle, a former stenographer counts the number of seconds that it takes to remove his dressings. His first words after his operation are to ask how long he has been unconscious.(p. 42) Mathovillet, a former "bombardier-grenadier" who has become deaf due to a grenade wound, resorts to smiling all the time. These humorous anecdotes or satiric statements alleviate the progressively sombre notes. Knapp points out that Duhamel's personal style is never burdened with "glowing treatises or with attempts at artistic effects". Rather, he contents himself with "simple, energetic,

straightforward sentences into which he injects some dialogue ... altering, thereby, the rhythm, creating variety and increased interest".²¹

Towards the end of Vie des martyrs, in "Nuits en Artois", however, Duhamel clearly expresses his belief that civilization has failed to live up to the highest ideals, and that the misery and suffering to which man is subjected in war has been of his own creation:

La créature par excellence a reçu une grande injure: elle s'est adressée la plus grande injure.

... Dans la majesté tragique de l'heure, je contemple ces victimes innocentes, et je pense qu'auprès d'eux on a honte de vivre et de respirer librement.(p. 123)

Death is personified and omnipresent; "le chien fou de la maison", (p. 132) "intimement mêlée aux choses de la vie". (p. 133) The final chapter is an epitaph to the soldiers of the Great War. He claims that it is through their resignation and goodwill in the face of catastrophe that he can have confidence in the future inner moral sense of the world. His aim is to invite mankind to recognize fundamental humane values and to urge him to accept that these must at all times dominate industrial civilization. He promises to relate the suffering of the troops along the western front, in all its detail, in an attempt to ensure this. He continues:

Car il ne suffit pas de se donner tout entier au beau devoir d'assistance. Il ne suffit pas de porter le couteau bienfaisant dans la plaie, ou d'en renouveler les linges avec exactitude et adresse.

Il faut encore, sans rien en altérer, pouvoir retracer dans sa vérité et sa simplicité votre histoire de victimes émissaires, l'histoire de ces hommes que vous êtes pendant la douleur.

Si l'on ne faisait pas cela, vous guéririez certes aussi bien, ou n'en péririez pas moins; mais le plus pur de la majestueuse leçon

21. Op. cit. p. 49

serait perdu, mais le plus beau de votre courage demeurerait stérile.(p. 135)

The final lines, whilst a little melodramatic, are, nonetheless, optimistic and forward-looking. He envisages one day:

Union des coeurs purs pour l'épreuve! Union des coeurs purs pour que notre pays se connaisse et s'admire! Union des coeurs purs pour la rédemption du monde malheureux.(p. 136)

Knapp finds that "an earthy and authentic quality" permeates Vie des Martyrs.²² Clark Keating believes that the long and intimate association which Duhamel experienced with the environment and persons that he depicted was indispensable to his writing. He writes that the sight and sound of suffering caused Duhamel to blend deep feeling with unrivalled prose, and that the result was realistic literature in its finest expression.²³ Maurois pays tribute to his impressionistic brevity and choice of expression:

Il a beaucoup écrit sur la grammaire et attache une juste importance au choix comme à la place des mots. En toutes ces questions de métier, il a des scrupules de bon artisan. "Le principal, dit-il, est de se demander si ce que l'on vient d'écrire exprime exactement ce que l'on pense" ... On ne peut écrire plus honnêtement que Duhamel, ni avec plus de respect du langage.²⁴

Whereas Vie des martyrs concentrates on the immediate description of suffering and controlled protest, Civilisation, published one year later, becomes more bitter as it develops and allows the author to offer comments on the nature of civilized society.

22. Op. cit. p. 47

23. Op. cit. p. 53

24. "Un écrivain, un médecin, un Français", Paris, Mercur de France, 1967, p. 19

b) Duhamel: CIVILISATION - Towards an aesthetic humanism

Civilisation like Vie des Martyrs is a collection of scenes and sketches, sixteen in all, which relate the plight of some of the soldiers Duhamel knew, their psychological and emotional reactions to suffering, their heroism and optimism in the face of battle and death. Knapp recalls that Duhamel suggested Civilisation be looked upon as a social document to which society would pay attention, enabling it to understand the breach which would exist between the soldier returning from the front and the civilian who had not a notion of the meaning of human suffering.²⁵ In the final year of war, Duhamel had become more and more struck by the degradation and feeling of powerlessness when soldiers died, when he witnessed mass slaughter, disease. When he contemplated the slaughter and suffering on such a mass scale, he felt nothing other than contempt for those who had unleashed such fury and wondered what real purpose civilization served.²⁶ For the most part, he neither complains nor solicits pity in Civilisation, but strives to educate an ignorant public by acquainting them with the horrors of the modern battlefield.

"La Chambre de Revaud" is set in a base hospital and centres around Revaud, "un gentleman très malade".(.)p. 144) His constant repetition of "J'étais pas comme ça dans le civil", in order to excuse his lack of personal hygiene, becomes almost a leitmotif, and serves to emphasize the gulf that has developed between the soldiers at the front and civilian life in the rear. There is a hint of bitterness as Duhamel describes the amputation of Revaud's leg:

25. Op. cit. pp. 49-50

26. See Knapp, op. cit. p. 51

Il rit encore un coup; et personne n'a ri et ne rira plus jamais comme Revaud rit ce jour-là.

On lui coupa donc la jambe. Le plus beau sang de la France coula une fois de plus. Mais cela se passait entre quatre murs, dans une petite pièce blanche comme une laiterie, et personne n'en a rien su. (pp. 147-8)

It is ironic that on the day Revaud appears his happiest, his leg is removed. Duhamel relates the event with expressive understatement. His discretion and restraint intensifies the reader's response. The fact that no-one knows about his misfortune emphasizes the loneliness of war. His death scene is equally as briefly described:

... il pencha la tête sur le côté, il ouvrit la bouche peu à peu, et il mourut, sans faire d'histoires. (p. 148)

There is little emotion in the scene, apart from a "Pauvre Revaud" spoken by Madame Baugan, a nurse, and a kiss on his forehead before she begins to lay him out. Revaud is completely isolated. His wife does not write to him, his father never visits, even his hospital companions make no comment at his death. Duhamel writes:

Le plus souvent, il ne venait personne, absolument personne, et la journée, comme la viande du repas, ne passait qu'à la condition d'être coupée en une infinité de petits morceaux. (p. 147)

There is no direct condemnation of war here but indirect admiration for the achievements of mankind in adversity.

"Sur la Somme" combines fiction and "reportage", describing Duhamel's experiences as a stretcher-bearer. The episode is recounted in the first person which adds verisimilitude to events, nevertheless, there is much more figurative language used than in *Vie des martyrs*, designed to emphasize the horror of war. Returning from

compassionate leave, the narrator is forewarned of the horrors of "Hill 80" by a soldier he meets on the way:

Vous y verrez passer plus de blessés que vous n'avez de cheveux sur la tête, et couler plus de sang qu'il n'y a d'eau dans le canal.(p. 151)

There is similar use of literary technique in Duhamel's description of the dry conditions of life at the front. The soldiers live in "le royaume de la poussière"; dust is seen to be "la rançon des beaux jours", and it debases "la joie candide de respirer"; dusty roads are compared to "des fleuves paresseux"; all nature appears to be tainted:

La lumière en était offensée, comme était souillé le ciel par les grands vols d'avions, souillé et injurié le silence, souillées et mutilées la terre et sa fourrure végétale.(p. 152)

The repetition of "souillé" and the alliteration in this description almost renders it poetic, far removing it from the brutal reality of the western front. Later, in the chapter, the wounded are compared to beggars invited to a feast, as they rapidly consume their beef and cheese;(p. 155) those who are too badly injured to eat are likened to a mosaic of suffering, not only tinted with the colours of war but with the smells and cries. The hall appears to be swarming with a mass of human larvae.(p. 156) The description of an enemy bombardment is equally figurative:

Quel orage humain! Quelle explosion de haine et de destruction! On eût dit qu'avec des millions d'étincelles une troupe de géants forgeaient l'horizon de la terre en frappant dessus à coups redoublés. Faite d'une infinité de lueurs furtives, une immense lueur continue vivait, palpitait, bondissait, éblouissant le paysage et la rue. Des gerbes irisées fusaient en plein ciel, comme le marteau-pilon en exprime de la fonte incandescente.(p. 158)

There are two similes, one comparing the effects of bombardment to a group of giants at work, the second with a power-hammer; there is a constant play on light throughout with the nouns "étincelles", "lueurs" (twice), the verbs "forger", "fuser", "éblouir", and the adjectives "irisées" and "incandescente". At the end of the chapter the imagery is that of the sea: a tented village is compared to a sailing boat heading for distant lands; a cemetery in the midst of a desolate landscape, where the old furrowed fields are clearly seen as the waves of the sea, is compared to wreckage scattered at the bottom of the ocean.(p. 167) There is almost a feeling of the poetic as the desolation and devastation of the landscape of no-man's land is broken by the presence of:

le pâle sourire d'un géranium.(p. 160)

The episode "Le Lieutenant Dauche" set in October 1915, is prone to sentimentality in places. Dauche, whom the author befriends whilst he himself is recovering from a wound, has an incurable head wound. A doctor advises:

"... vous vous accoutumerez de vivre dans la compagnie de gens qui partagent encore notre univers, mais dont on sait indubitablement qu'ils sont déjà des morts".(p. 178)

Nevertheless, the author finds this extremely difficult to acknowledge. He describes a morning walk in the woods during which Dauche almost seems at one with nature, and tries to convince himself that the doctor must be mistaken. The dramatic nature of the situation is enhanced as he constantly hears voices which confirm the doctor's diagnosis:

Tout aussitôt, une voix me dit à l'oreille: "Cet homme qui est là est un homme mort".(p. 180)

At a concert of piano and violin music given by soldiers from a nearby regiment, again the author is inwardly tormented:

A plusieurs reprises, j'eus l'impression qu'une personne invisible et inconnue me posait une main sur le bras et murmurait:
"Comment, comment pouvez-vous oublier qu'il va mourir?"(p. 181)

The background music intensifies the atmosphere of sensation. There is pathetic fallacy, as, with the advent of autumn, the traditional season of incipient decay, the author's anxiety grows even more profound:

L'idée que cet homme allait mourir déteignait sur mes pensées jusqu'à leur retirer toute stabilité, tout courage, toute efficacité.(p. 183)

There is a sensationally dramatic scene when Dauche is bowling in the park and one of the bowls slips from his hands. As he puts a hand to his head, the author is convinced that he is going to faint. Dauche is both surprised and amused. He explains that he was merely re-adjusting his bandages.(p. 186) The actual scene during which Dauche collapses is calculated for effect:

Est-ce réellement un bruit anormal qui me fit retourner? N'est-ce pas plutôt un choc et comme un déchirement intérieur? Le fait est que, soudain, je sus qu'il se passait quelque chose derrière moi. Et alors mon coeur se mit à battre avec véhémence, car ce ne pouvait être que la chose, la chose effrayante que j'attendais.
C'était elle.(p. 188)

The suspense is clearly built-up with the opening questions, the imprecision of what has happened, the melodramatic beating of the heart and the reluctance to use the word "mort". The final words,

set apart from the rest, confirm the dramatic tone of the passage. The description of Dauche's body and the author's reaction is rather unusual. The dying soldier is hardly recognizable. His body trembles hideously and is compared to animals at a slaughter house. His feet and hands are distorted as in a convulsive spasm. His face is purplish-blue and bears a vacant look. Saliva streams from his mouth and is compared to the muzzles of oxen at work. The author feels powerless to act. Eventually he succeeds in bringing Dauche's body back to the hospital where he dies two days later. During this time the author remains in a state of semi-delirium, enquiring every hour: "Est-ce fini? Est-ce fini?"(pp. 188-9)

"La Dame en vert" is more notable for its narrative style and literary technique than for its condemnation of war. The chief characteristic of Rabot, the protagonist of the story, is the fact that he never laughs. The author writes:

Pauvre Rabot! Je ne sais ce que j'aurais donné pour le voir rire. Tout, au contraire, conspirait à le faire pleurer ...(p. 195)

The greater part of the story illustrates his misery and despair. The nature of his wounds, which are not described, restricts movement and prevents him from joining in the games and pastimes of his friends; an officer from the "Etat-Major" mistakes his identity and announces that Rabot has been awarded the "Médaille militaire" and the "Croix de guerre", only to return three hours later to retrieve the decorations, destined for a Monsieur Raboux; even when Rabot is finally awarded a medal in order to compensate for his previous disappointment, he shows little joy. The arrival of a mysterious "woman in green" enriches the story. The author portrays her as much

more beautiful and graceful than the normal, everyday woman in the street:

Elle faisait plutôt penser à ces fées, à ces images splendides que l'on voit sur les grands calendriers en couleur et au-dessous desquelles le peintre a écrit: "la Rêverie", ou "la Mélancolie", ou encore "la Poésie".(p. 197)

There is an element of fanciful imagination, of the exotic as she passes from soldier to soldier, emphasizing their courage and heroism. She admires the good fortune of Rabot:

"... tu connais déjà la plus grande récompense: la gloire! l'ardeur enthousiaste du combat! L'angoisse exquise de bondir en avant, baïonnette luisante au soleil; la volupté de plonger un fer vengeur dans le flanc sanglant de l'ennemi, et puis la souffrance, divine d'être endurée pour tous; la blessure sainte qui, du héros, fait un dieu!"(p. 198)

Her misconstrued ideas about war are exploited and exaggerated to the full. The inflation and distortion of the truth is very apparent: "L'ardeur enthousiaste" of the soldiers, "la volupté" of killing, "la blessure sainte" from which troops can suffer heroically without fear of dying, are misconceived ideals, representative, however, of many of those who remained at home, in the rear, and who still envisaged the traditional image of war: "l'angoisse exquise de bondir en avant", "[la] baïonnette luisante au soleil" and "la souffrance divine". The irony of the story is completed with the reaction of Rabot to his visitor:

Tous ses traits se crispèrent, se bouleversèrent d'une façon presque tragique. Un bruit enroué sortit, par secousses, de la poitrine squelettique et tout le monde dut reconnaître que Rabot riait.(pp. 198-9)

Whilst Duhamel does succeed in drawing attention towards the gulf that existed between civilians who had never seen battle and the soldiers who were constant witnesses of the horror and barbarity of life in the trenches, it would appear that this theme is subordinate to the overall incongruity of the story. This ends with the reader being informed that whenever Rabot appeared unhappy again, he was always reminded of the lady in green.

In "Régulatrice", Duhamel describes the death of Lemailleux who has been knocked down by a train and whose body has been severely mutilated by the wheels of sixty carriages. The war plays no major role in the story other than offering a backdrop to the events. Indeed the chief point of interest centres around the search for a place to keep Lemailleux's body for the night. A grotesque sense of humour arises from the incongruity of the situation. Duhamel writes:

Vraiment personne ne s'intéressait à mon mort. Je bougonnais en moi-même: "Pourquoi, pourquoi, Lemailleux, t'avises-tu de mourir dans un endroit où il n'y a pas de place pour les cadavres, et à une heure où l'on n'a pas le temps de s'occuper d'eux?" (pp. 209-10)

The episode ends melodramatically with Lemailleux's body resting next to the author's own bed, and the latter counting the drips of blood from the corpse as he tries to sleep. Amidst the bizarre nature of the story, however, lies the notion that civilization resides in the heart, in man's appeal to goodness. Duhamel's instinctive reaction of compassion rather than of anger emphasizes this feeling all the more.

"Les Maquignons" is an account of a similar nature, which tells the amusing story of an army medical board whose goal is to certify those men unfit and fit for active service. Duhamel explains:

Les hommes avancent par files, vers chacune des blouses blanches; ils marchent les uns derrière les autres, comme des suppliants à l'autel d'un dieu courroucé ...

Ce n'est pas la fleur de la race ...

Depuis longtemps il ne reste plus, sur le van du métayer, que la menue paille et la poussière; et c'est ça que, d'une main avide, il fouille encore pour y chercher quelques grains épars!;(p. 213)

There is an abundance of literary imagery here. The men who queue to be examined are likened to humble subjects before the altar of some ferocious god. Couched in literary connotation, Duhamel points out that these men are not amongst the best of their age group for those individuals have long since left for the front. He uses the simile of a share-cropper, sorting out the wheat from the chaff, in order to explain the task of the medical authorities. The actual interview is highly exaggerated:

"Vous n'avez pas que ça. Vous toussiez?

Oui.

Vous avez sans doute aussi des palpitations.

Oui, beaucoup de palpitations.

Et puis des douleurs articulaires?

Oui, surtout des douleurs articulaires.

Vous ne digérez pas bien?

Non, jamais je ne digère bien.

L'homme semble tout à fait rassuré. Il répond avec une sorte d'enthousiasme, comme quelqu'un qui est, enfin, compris. Soudain, le vieux médecin lève les épaules et dévoile le piège:

Vous avez tout, évidemment. Eh bien, vous serez versé dans le service armé ... Vous avez trop de maladies; en bien, vous n'avez rien du tout! Allez-vous en! Service armé!"(p. 214)

The medical-panel is compared to a group of Pontius Pilates as they judge every man, in spite of his infirmities, fit for active service. In a rather melodramatic outburst towards the end of the story, Duhamel apostrophizes the plight of those who pass before such committees:

Sainte chair humaine, substance sacrée qui sers à la pensée, à l'art, à l'amour, à tout ce qu'il y a de grand dans la vie, tu n'es plus qu'une pâte vile et malodorante que l'on prend entre les mains avec dégoût pour évaluer si, oui ou non, elle est bonne à tuer!(p. 217)

Duhamel's commitment to humanitarian goals can be seen in these final lines. As Cruickshank points out, it is, more emotional than intellectual, rooted in feeling than rational analysis.²⁷ His instinctive reaction is more one of compassion for the victims than of anger at the perpetrators.²⁸ Simon writes of Duhamel, in general terms, at the beginning of "Modernité de Salavin":

... devant l'horreur et l'absurdité de l'évènement, ni protestations désespérées, ni exaltations du lyrisme héroïque, mais soumission lucide aux fatalités de l'histoire, courage modeste, compassion à la simplicité plutôt qu'à la majesté des souffrances humaines, confiance rendue aux appels de coeur et à la vocation spirituelle de l'espèce.²⁹

"Amours de Ponceau" is set in a base hospital in January 1915 where the author is being treated for a broken arm and Ponceau for severe leg wounds. The episode is rather sentimental in the portrayal of a man whose life has become pitiful due to the barbarism of war. Duhamel's style is almost flippant in places. He describes the daily dressing of the wounds:

Assurément, mon bras n'était pas beau, mais il paraissait une chose charmante à côté de la cuisse de Ponceau. Elle portait une plaie ignoble, où vous auriez pu enfouir un képi ...

Inutile de vous dire ce qui se passait dans cette fameuse salle...(p. 220)

27. Variations on Catastrophe, op. cit. p. 90

28. Ibid. see p. 92

29. In Georges Duhamel 1884-1966, Paris, Mercure de France, 1967, pp. 85-6

The final line is ambiguous. It would appear that Duhamel's contained rage at society's lack of understanding, of appreciation of the inhumanity of modern battle, is entering the narrative and not that he cannot find the appropriate words to elaborate upon the suffering in general. At first Ponceau endures pain stoically. It is only after the spasm that he calls out uncontrollably with relief: "Ah! mon pauv' vieux! mon pauv' vieux!" Again, rather casually, Duhamel comments:

Vous avez remarqué que, lorsqu'on est très malheureux, on parle aux autres hommes en leur disant "mon pauvre ami", ou "mon pauvre monsieur", comme s'ils étaient eux-mêmes à plaindre.(p. 221)

When the visits of Ponceau's wife are limited to two per week, Duhamel paints the picture of a feeble and weak man whose reaction is immature and childlike.

[Il] pleura toute la matinée, de vraies larmes d'enfant qui gonflaient ses gros yeux, remplissaient son nez d'eau et le défiguraient complètement.(p. 225)

It is interesting to note that amidst all the pain and suffering, the wounds and mutilations, it is Ponceau's tears which disfigure him the most. The rest of the story is uneventful save for the visit home and return to hospital of Ponceau and the emphasis upon the feminine qualities of the nurses, of their body odour which is "précieux, puéril et enivrant".(p. 229) Pity is the controlling sentiment of the anecdote; the pathetic figure of Ponceau, reduced ultimately to a languid and unspirited individual, however, is almost too watery to challenge man's views of war and its monstrous effects upon the human race.

"Le Cuirassier Cuvelier" begins in a similarly casual tone:

Elle m'est restée sur le coeur, l'histoire du cuirassier Cuvelier. M. Poisson n'est pas un méchant homme, loin de là! Mais il est quand même un peu trop vieux, voyez-vous!(p. 273)

Duhamel is unworried about an objective, analytical approach. When he launches into a description of Tanquerelle, he completely forgets about his original aim in narrating the story of Cuvelier. He openly apologizes:

Mais je vois que je tourne à la philosophie. Motus! Je ne suis pas un philosophe pour me permettre de vous embêter.

Je crois que je vous parlais du cuirassier Cuvelier? Eh, bien, revenons à l'histoire du cuirassier Cuvelier.(p. 276)

There is a familiarity about the tone of Duhamel's writing which is not present in La Vie des martyrs. He speaks of his treatment of the wounded in a superficial, almost impassive manner:

Je vous affirme que je n'ai pas chômé ... Il m'en est passé des morts par les mains! Que leurs femmes et leurs mères soient tranquilles, les malheureuses: j'ai fait mon devoir à ma façon. Tous sont partis, la bouche fermée d'une mentonnière, les mains croisées sur la poitrine, chaque fois, bien entendu, qu'il leur restait une bouche et des mains ...(p. 277)

The mention of "philosophie" and the somewhat satirical tone in the description of those whose war service has left them faceless or without hands is a pointer towards Duhamel's own attitude towards war which he comes closest to summing up in the last episode, "Civilisation", grave concern about the growing development and application of science and technology without consideration for the humanity which it destroys. Throughout the sketches leading up to the ultimate anecdote, there are indications of this abhorrence. In "Sur la Somme", Duhamel describes a cemetery which has been newly dug and coffins at the ready, in preparation for a new assault on the

enemy. A group of workmen are cutting up trees for this purpose. They whistle and sing as they work, totally unaware of the debasement of human nature.(p. 153) The description of the multiplication of vermin and the spread of disease, due to the horrific conditions of the trenches in which the soldiers are constantly forced to take shelter against the hostility of modern weaponry, is equally sincere and poignant. They are powerless against the invasion of flies on the Somme during the summer of 1916. Duhamel writes:

J'ai vu à la cote 80, des plaies fourmillantes de larves ... J'ai vu des mouches se précipiter sur le sang et le pus des blessures et s'en repaître si gloutonnement qu'on pouvait les saisir avec des pinces ou avec les doigts sans qu'elles consentissent à s'enfuir, à quitter leur festin. Elles propageaient toutes sortes d'infections et de gangrènes. L'armée souffrit cruellement par elles ... (p. 159)

"Sur la Somme" also contains scenes which, as in Vie des martyrs, draw attention to the resilience of mankind and the eloquent challenge of the wounded and dying to the pessimism of the human race. Gambier, described as "un homme simple", suffers from a haemorrhage for two days before dying;(p. 161) Lalou, "un garçon de la campagne", is wounded in the spinal-cord which very soon manifests itself as meningitis. Very quickly he ceases to be part of the "monde raisonnable". On one occasion he tries to eat the rosary which a visiting chaplain has given him.(p. 162) One young soldier, with a severely perforated abdomen, begs clean linen:

"Ne me laissez pas", répétait-il, "mourir avec une chemise sale. Donnez-m'en seulement une blanche. Si vous êtes pressés, je la mettrai bien moi-même".(p. 163)

De Louba's face has been so badly distorted by shrapnel that all that remains is "une immense plaie barbare, un oeil dévié, déjeté, et le

front ..." (p. 165) Duhamel openly expresses his shame that civilization has allowed such barbarism to flourish, that the evils to which man is subjected during time of war are those created by man himself. As he contemplates the servicing of the big guns in the English sector he comes to the following conclusion:

... la guerre est devenue une industrie, une entreprise mécanique et méthodique de tuerie. (p. 163)

In "Les Maquignons" a few lines suffice to sum up the absurdity of any attempt to understand the values of industrial civilization and the dominance of technology over humanism. Duhamel writes:

A quoi bon réfléchir? Réfléchit-il, le tourbillon frénétique qui ravage en grognant le vieux continent? Non, en vérité, les temps ne sont pas à la réflexion. (p. 212)

In "Chiffres" there is a rare example of direct condemnation of war in the book as a whole, the author comments:

On fait la guerre ou on ne la fait pas. Et le malheureux monde la fait: il n'y a plus à en douter. (p. 250)

There is no powerful indictment of war, here, but an impressive use of tact and compassion. Cruickshank points out that whereas Barbusse is drawn towards the relative outrance of naturalism, Duhamel stands for classical mesure in his literary response to catastrophe.³⁰ Duhamel's position was that of the scientifically educated man who had begun, under the stress of war, to re-evaluate and to criticize the aims and achievements of science, particularly insofar as it had claimed to be a panacea for society's ills, and who had gradually come to realize that the role of science, far from building for the

30. Variations on Catastrophe, op. cit. p. 88

future, was destroying everything that man had worked for in the past, including man himself. By the final chapter of the book, "Civilisation", Duhamel's preoccupations have evolved into a kind of aesthetic humanism as he pronounces an anathema upon contemporary society:

Je hais le XXe siècle, comme je hais l'Europe pourrie et le monde entier sur lequel cette malheureuse Europe s'est étalée, à la façon d'une tache de cambouis.(p. 284)

He continues his angry tirade describing the "matériel humain" which is brought to the clearing-stations, victims of the "machine militaire". The brutal contrast is evident. The comparison is drawn with a "Moloch". War, for Duhamel, has become a tyrannical object of sacrifices. In the closing passages he addresses directly the inner moral sense of the reader, who, he believes, has been deprived of a truly positive Christian faith for centuries:

La civilisation, la vraie, j'y pense souvent. C'est dans mon esprit, comme un choeur de voix harmonieuses chantant un hymne, c'est une statue de marbre sur une colline desséchée, c'est un homme qui dirait: "Aimez-vous les uns les autres!" ou: "Rendez le bien pour le mal!" Mais il y a près de deux mille ans qu'on ne fait plus que répéter ces choses-là ...(p. 292)

It would appear that he is advocating that true human progress must be moral and spiritual rather than material; that hope for the future does not lie in technical and commercial competition, or that one should continue to rely upon surgeons to keep on repairing the damage done to humanity by such materialistic vicissitudes. The book ends with a declaration of the primacy of humane values:

La civilisation n'est pas dans toute cette pacotille terrible; et, si elle n'est pas dans le coeur de l'homme, eh bien! elle n'est nulle part.(p. 292)

Despite demands made by external agencies, Duhamel sees the only chance of rescuing fundamental moral values, essential for the regeneration of mankind, as coming from within man himself, from the heart. This, he believes, has^{been} and will continue to remain strong regardless of the misery and suffering of the world, and will enable man gradually to reassess human priorities and establish a "moral" civilization which will be superior to all others.

Clark Keating writes that "together with its companion volume [Vie des martyrs], Civilisation forms an unbreakable whole, a critique of war that is all the more powerful for being indirect".³¹ Whilst neither book is a novel in the strictest sense of the term, but fiction and reportage brought together to produce "souvenirs romancés", the welding together of these fragments of experience bare testimony to the gloomy unity of the author's life in the casualty stations behind the front lines, obsessed by so much suffering. Henri Peyre points out that to write a continuous novel would have been untrue to the author's purpose, that it would have been more vivid perhaps than reality and betrayed the stark horror of the impact of mechanized warfare.³² Duhamel himself wrote in Essai sur le roman:

... je tiens l'alliance mesurée du réel et de l'imaginaire comme la meilleure et la plus féconde forme d'art en matière de romans.³³

31. Op. cit. p. 28

32. French Novelists of Today, New York, Oxford University Press, 1967, pp. 49-50

33. Paris, Marcelle Lesage, 1925, pp. 65-66

In the same work, Duhamel examines the role of the author, in general, and considers that it is to "portraire nos contemporains" and to "témoigner devant l'avenir".³⁴ In Vie des martyrs his portrait centres around "la souffrance de l'âme, la détresse de l'homme au corps mutilé".³⁵ It is a direct response to the inhumanity of war as directly experienced by Duhamel during his daily work as an army surgeon. The overall atmosphere in the book is one of intense suffering and physical pain. In Civilisation, he describes less the actual suffering than the repercussion of this suffering on the individual who feels more and more humiliated and reduced to a state of passive existence. Santelli writes:

Il décrit moins la souffrance que ce qu'il appelle la détresse humaine, laquelle, comme nous le verrons, ne règne pas seulement sur les champs de bataille.³⁶

Whilst Duhamel never directly intervenes in the narrative to emphasize facts when the facts can "speak" for themselves, nevertheless, towards the end of Civilisation, his unrestrained protest stems out of fear rather than anger:

... sa crainte que tout cela n'ait été vain, sa crainte que toutes ces souffrances restent inconnues, mal connues ou inutiles ...³⁷

Roland Dorgelès and Maurice Genevoix, both contemporaries of Duhamel, both soldier-writers as he, pay glowing tributes to his work. In "Georges Duhamel et Vie des Martyrs", Genevoix admires what he refers

34. Ibid. p. 55

35. See C. Santelli, "Adieu à Georges Duhamel", op. cit. p. 132

36. Ibid. p. 132

37. Ibid. p. 134

to as "ce drame de la souffrance, de la chair martyrisée".³⁸ In "Une tâche d'homme", Dorgelès writes:

En pleine guerre, vos gants rouges de chirurgien à peine ôtés, vous avez eu le talent, la clairvoyance et le courage d'écrire ces livres magnifiques qui, avec Le Feu de Barbusse, devaient nous apprendre à ne pas désespérer de la conscience humaine .³⁹

38. In Georges Duhamel 1884-1966, op. cit. p. 23

39. Ibid. p. 165

CHAPTER VIII

Fulfilling the ambition

Dorgelès: LES CROIX DE BOIS

i) Testimony and compassion

Les Croix de Bois was not published until the 1st April 1919, the same day, by coincidence, that Dorgelès was demobbed from active service. In Souvenirs sur Les Croix de Bois he writes:

Avec quel soupir de soulagement j'ai retiré cette capote que j'avais endossée, plein de foi, cinquante-cinq mois auparavant. Mais le livre qui naissait semblait se lier mystérieusement par ce noeud d'une journée, à ma vie de soldat qui venait de finir. Comme si l'un voulait prolonger l'autre".¹

His war service began in Pélissier barracks, Paris, where Dorgelès was sent with the "74e Régiment d'Infanterie de Rouen", having enlisted voluntarily in August 1914. Earlier, he had shown anti-militarist tendencies and, as Flower points out, had once been arrested outside the "Gare de l'Est" for participating in a pacifist demonstration.² This attitude, however, was short lived. Dorgelès himself admits that he joined the army, like many others, on the wave of enthusiasm and patriotism which swept across France.³ In Bleu Horizon, he explains:

Pourquoi rougir de ses erreurs, renier ces enthousiasmes, mêmes absurdes? - Il faut au contraire l'avouer, la plupart des hommes qui, en août 1914, avaient l'âge et la force de se battre ont vu éclater la guerre dans une sorte d'exaltation; il semblait aux plus humbles qu'un événement fabuleux les grandissait tous, qu'ils allaient bouleverser le monde, et, tandis que les tambours du village entraînaient vers les gares la troupe chantante de ces nouveaux conscrits, il est peu d'intellectuels qui, classant leurs papiers et

1. Paris, La Cité des Livres, 1929, pp. 61-2

2. See "The Soldier's Stage: Roland Dorgelès, Les Croix de Bois" in The First World War in Fiction, (H. Klein ed.), op. cit. p. 53

3. Souvenirs sur Les Croix de Bois, op. cit. p. 11. "J'étais si impatient d'aller voir la bataille ..."

leurs livres, peut-être pour la dernière fois, n'aient songé avec un farouche orgueil que leur génération venait d'être élue pour une grande tâche et que c'était, après tout, sacrifier bien peu de chose qu'un petit bagage d'idées, quand on avait reçu la mission sacrée de défendre des siècles de grandeur et de retailler les empires avec plus d'équité.⁴

Towards the end of September 1914, Dorgelès was sent to the front lines with the "39e Régiment d'Infanterie" between Reims and Berry-au-Bac. In Souvenirs sur les Croix de Bois, he admits that during the first months of the war he saw little action and that life in the trenches was a pleasant experience. Hence the reason why many early accounts of the war are light-hearted in tone and atmosphere. He confirms that he destroyed his own early notes of the opening phase so as not to be wrongly influenced later.⁵ Although the inspiration for a novel about the war came to him during this early period, he points out that, as time passed by, the idea became more and more remote. He writes:

... nous étions trop écrasés par la guerre pour l'envisager comme une matière à littérature.⁶

During 1915, Dorgelès served with a machine gun team in Champagne and Artois where he was promoted to corporal, wounded, mentioned twice in despatches and later awarded the "croix de guerre". In 1916 he was transferred to the aviation section of the armed forces where, although he had more time to clarify his impressions, he still did not feel confident enough to express them in writing: He explains:

4. Paris, Albin Michel, 1949, pp. 127-8

5. Op. cit. pp. 18-19. In a letter to his wife, 5th November 1914, he writes: "La guerre est presque toujours gaie. Je l'ai vue ainsi et je suis content d'avoir vu tout ce que j'ai vu".

6. Ibid. p. 21

Je n'avais d'ailleurs pas trop de toute mon application pour apprendre ce nouveau métier. J'étais brusque, nerveux, souvent distrait: cela n'a jamais rien valu pour la bonne utilisation d'un matériel fragile.⁷

It was only after a period of convalescence following an accident involving a training plane, that he was offered a flying instructor's job by a lieutenant from the "1er groupe d'aviation", was sent to Longuic near Dijon and enjoyed his first position of stability during which the idea for Les Croix de Bois was to materialize:

Sans le savoir, cet officier venait de me permettre d'écrire les Croix de Bois.⁸

In an article on Les Croix de Bois,⁹ Jacques Meyer points out that the task would never have been possible had Dorgelès not continued to note down his involvement in and his impressions of the war, as the months went by. Dorgelès himself writes of his incessant note-taking:

Combien en ai-je noirci, de ces petits blocs-notes que je portais sur mon coeur, dans la poche extérieure de ma capote. Ici c'était une réflexion, là un court tableau, d'autres fois des vers, que je laissais en plan à la quatrième rime. Et, en griffonnant ces mots dans un coin de gourbi ou sur la table de cuisine de quelque cantonnement, j'étais bien loin de supposer que je les rassemblerais un jour pour émailler un livre.¹⁰

As early as 31st January 1915, he wrote to his wife Madelon of his intentions to write:

7. Ibid. pp. 39-40

8. Ibid. p. 44

9. "Les Croix de Bois", La Nouvelle Revue des deux Mondes, January-March, 1977, p. 69. He writes: "Mais le livre n'eût pas été écrit si le soldat du 39e d'infanterie, devenu caporal mitrailleur, n'avait, dans les circonstances les plus contraires, et à l'étonnement de ses camarades, sans cesse griffonné sur de petits carnets ou des bouts de papier ce qu'il voyait ou entendait".

10. Souvenirs sur Les Croix de Bois, op. cit. p. 17

un (futur) bouquin qui ne fera pas plaisir à tout le monde!¹¹

In a letter dated 15th June, after the horrific campaign in Artois, he reveals his chosen title. Fourteen years later in his Souvenirs sur Les Croix de Bois, Dorgelès explains this choice. On a march to Pontavert he remembers seeing the graves of soldiers along the road side. It was almost as if they were wishing their comrades, still alive, good luck, even searching those out who would later rejoin them in death. He reveals:

... regardant toutes ces croix dont les mains se joignaient, et tous ces jeunes hommes dont chacun portait sa plaque individuelle au cou, pour reconnaître le cadavre, j'ai brusquement compris que, morts ou vivants, nous ne formions qu'une immense armée, sous un unique emblème: des croix de bois, rien que des croix de bois ...

Mon livre avait trouvé son nom.¹²

He explains how, gradually, the finished work became an obsession:

Je travaillais sans relâche, le soir, le matin, à tous mes instants de liberté, et, au plus rude de l'hiver, je me suis souvent levé avant le jour, entortillé de lainages, pour continuer la page interrompue la veille. Une crainte m'aiguillonnait: celle de mourir sans laisser d'oeuvre, de remonter au front avant d'avoir fini mon livre.¹³

In Souvenirs sur Les Croix de Bois, Dorgelès points out that there was nothing pre-meditated about his writing, that by nature he was curious, observant, and that, by habit, he noted and mentally remembered a wealth of incidents. Nevertheless, if he believed that literature should not be openly didactic, as Flowers claims,¹⁴ it

11. Cited by Meyer in "Les Croix de Bois", op. cit. p. 72

12. Souvenirs sur Les Croix de Bois, op. cit. p. 28

13. Ibid. p. 46

14. "The Soldier's Stage: Roland Dorgelès, Les Croix de Bois", op. cit. p. 55

would appear that he considered that it should be purposeful. In Souvenirs sur Les Croix de Bois, he writes:

J'apprenais à souffrir, pour témoigner au nom de ceux qui ont tant souffert.¹⁵

In Bleu Horizon, he considers the role of the novelist not to be one of pure imagination, of pure fabrication, but sees it rather as the introduction of a little logic into a real world in which this is sadly lacking.¹⁶ Although he admits that the narrative for the most part is imaginary with "éclats de vérité",¹⁷ he makes it quite clear in Souvenirs sur Les Croix de Bois that his main intention is to produce "la réalité recréée".¹⁸ He continues:

Pas un instant je n'ai songé à tenir le journal de mon régiment. J'avais une ambition plus haute: ne pas raconter ma guerre, mais la guerre. Renoncer aux dates, effacer le nom des secteurs, oublier le numéro des armées, et tirer de moi-même de prétendus souvenirs si nourris de vérité que chaque combattant s'écrierait: "Ce sont aussi les miens".¹⁹

Flower considers that Dorgelès' ambition was to be the "lyrical witness of his generation",²⁰ a view substantiated by Dorgelès' own writings. In Bleu Horizon he claims:

Ce livre, je le répète, appartient maintenant, autant qu'à moi, à tous ceux qui se sont battus sous l'uniforme bleu horizon. Dans

15. Op. cit. p. 25

16. Op. cit. p. 10

17. Souvenirs sur Les Croix de Bois, op. cit. p. 33

18. Ibid. p. 33

19. Ibid. pp. 33-4. In Bleu Horizon Dorgelès points out that indeed many soldiers were disappointed that he had not chosen to portray the daily life of the "39e Regiment d'Infanterie" under the guise of a novel. See p. 98

20. Op. cit. p. 55

l'avenir, je le dis sans orgueil, on le consultera, avec quelques autres, comme un témoignage de temps révolus.²¹

He admits that he saw no reason to invent facts and incidents, that his whole being had been irrevocably immersed in the horror of war,²² but recognizes that not one of his characters is taken directly from reality:

C'est de mille traits observés que j'ai façonné chacun de mes personnages; je les ai tirés de tous, et surtout de moi-même.²³

He points out that Sulphart, for example, is fashioned out of an amalgamation of at least six comrades at arms. Similarly Demachy, Bouffioux, Bréval, Broucke, Lemoine are "tous humainement vrais, mais pas un véritable".²⁴ He explains that he would have been ashamed to have exploited the suffering of his friends in a too direct manner, in particular his memories of the dead.²⁵ He explains:

... quand l'heure fut venue d'écrire, j'ai laissé au sommeil ceux qui devaient dormir, et, remettant sac au dos, je suis parti tout seul, avec un régiment de fantômes.²⁶

It is this mark of compassion which permeates the novel throughout. Maurice Rieuneau draws a comparison between Le Feu and Les Croix de Bois in Guerre et Révolution dans le Roman français de 1919 à 1939²⁷ in order to emphasize this very point. He writes:

21. Op. cit. p. 42. See M. Rieuneau op. cit. p. 29. "Ce sont des témoignages directs, habillés en romans pour être plus attrayants et plus lus".

22. Souvenirs sur Les Croix de Bois, op. cit. p. 34. "Mon âme, mes pensées, ma chair, étaient toutes pleines de la guerre: je n'avais qu'à puiser".

23. Ibid. p. 36

24. Ibid. p. 36

25. Ibid. p. 36

26. Ibid. p. 37

27. Op. cit. p. 39

Si le roman de Barbusse était conçu pour susciter la colère et la révolte, le refus, celui-ci vise à faire naître une intense compassion, une fraternelle sympathie pour les victimes.²⁸

In spite of his laudable aims, Dorgelès was not confident that his finished work merited publication, indeed, he wondered whether in parts it was not subversive, that his pity and sympathy were not a little over expressed. He admits that, at first, he was reluctant to sign the finished work, fearing the reaction of his superior officers.²⁹ His reaction upon learning that 10,000 copies were to be published was one of incredulity:

Dix mille, mais c'était la folie! Jamais dix bataillons de lecteurs ne sortiraient de chez le libraire avec mon livre sous le bras. On n'en vendrait même pas la moitié.³⁰

On the whole, however, the novel proved a popular success. The first person to whom Dorgelès gave a copy, Lieutenant Dalleré, a friend and poet of the "39e Regiment", remarked:

Oui, cela résume tout!³¹

Dorgelès was awarded "le prix Femina" in 1919 for Les Croix de Bois, narrowly missing "le prix Goncourt" by one vote, which finally went to Proust for A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs.

Dorgelès does not immediately envelop the reader with the horrors of trench warfare but incorporates a series of self-contained

28. See J. Cruickshank, Variations on Catastrophe, op. cit. p. 94. "For Barbusse, in particular, protest means anger and a direct assault on his reader's sensibility. For Dorgelès it means careful documentation and trust in the instinctive moral response of his audience".

29. Souvenirs sur Les Croix de Bois, pp. 55-6

30. Ibid. p. 61

31. Cited by Dorgelès in Bleu Horizon, op. cit. p. 198

episodes of life at the front which gradually build up a picture of life along the western front which appears to speak for itself. Unlike Barbusse, Dorgelès portrays the early enthusiasm of the soldiers in the opening lines:

Les fleurs, à cette époque de l'année, étaient déjà rares; pourtant on en avait trouvé pour décorer tous les fusils du renfort et, la clique en tête, entre deux haies muettes de curieux, le bataillon, fleuri comme un grand cimetière, avait traversé la ville à la débandade.

Avec des chants, des larmes, des rires, des querelles d'ivrognes, des adieux déchirants, ils s'étaient embarqués. (p. 5)³²

There is a marked contrast here between the beginning of Les Croix de Bois and Le Feu, which is maintained throughout the two novels. Barbusse's first chapter is entitled "La Vision", which describes in a rather fanciful, romanticized manner the outbreak of war, as seen by a group of patients in a sanitarium, and the manifestation of what the war held in store. The second chapter, "Dans la terre", introduces the reader immediately to the horrors of trench warfare without any attempt to compose a transitional period. Dorgelès, on the other hand, takes time to portray the initial confidence and jubilation of the troops, allowing the conditions and events, themselves, of life at the front, to apparently destroy this positive spirit over several pages, rather than by direct authorial intervention. He patiently builds-up a contrast between the raw

32. In Souvenirs sur Les Croix de Bois, Dorgelès describes his own parting for the front: "... j'avais fièrement quitté Paris, portant en bandoulière une musette de fantaisie ... Mon innocence était si grande, pour tout ce qui concernait les usages militaires, que j'avais, l'avant-veille, envoyé au colonel une dépêche des plus désinvoltes pour lui apprendre, que, saisi d'un fort accès de fièvre, et ayant, d'autre part, quelques affaires à régler, je retardais mon voyage d'un jour". op. cit. pp. 2-3. He continues: "... la plupart envisageaient la guerre comme des vacances inattendues, juste assez périlleuses pour les relever d'un peu de piment". Ibid. p. 6. See also Bleu Horizon, op. cit. p. 47

recruits and the professional soldiers who have already lost their illusions. He explains how the newcomers view the established troops as "sauvages" with their haggard faces and different uniforms, (p. 8) and how the regulars, for their part, consider the new arrivals with disbelief and disdain. They stare with incredulity at the brightness of their weapons and utensils, their fastidiously packed bags, and listen with disbelief at the naïvety of their views. (pp. 9-11) When Demachy explains that he crams his haversack with cartridges in order to be prepared for an enemy attack, the more experienced soldiers find this highly amusing:

Les autres le regardèrent, étonnés. Puis, tous ensemble partirent à rire, d'un rire énorme qu'ils forçaient encore, étouffant, gesticulant, échangeant de lourdes claques sur les épaules comme des caresses de battoirs ... (p. 11)

This does not discourage Demachy in the slightest, however:

... il écoutait le canon qui ébranlait le ciel à grands coups de bélier, et il aurait voulu être déjà là-bas, de l'autre côté des coteaux bleus, dans la plaine inconnue où se jouait la guerre au parfum de danger. (p. 12)

The poetic nature of these lines, "de l'autre côté des coteaux bleus", "dans la plaine inconnue", "la guerre au parfum de danger", emphasizes the incaution and gullibility of the young soldiers, how they were not immediately convinced of the horrors of war. Dorgelès does not lose sight of the early pleasures experienced by many of the troops: in chapter I, "Frères d'Armes", he describes their billeting in the stables of a lawyer's estate. The occupants have long since left due to the German advance and the soldiers slowly infiltrate the house itself where Lemoine and Sulphart dress up as man and wife and, together with the rest of the squadron, have a wonderful time. (pp.

16-19) In chapter III, "Le Fanion Rouge", in the front lines, Demachy listens to the sound of the shells with pleasure, comparing it to the noise of wasps,(p. 54) and enjoys the smell of sulphur,(p. 55) even though, on the whole, his first contact with battle is a little disappointing:

C'était pour lui une déception, cette première vision de la guerre. Il aurait voulu être ému, éprouver quelque chose, et il regardait obstinément vers les tranchées, pour se donner une émotion, pour frissonner un peu.

Mais il se répétait: "C'est la guerre ... Je vois la guerre" sans parvenir à s'émouvoir.(p. 51)

Gradually, Dorgelès increases the "deception" and the "vision" tends slowly to fade. Demachy is astonished and disturbed at the thought of sleeping on the same straw, next to unclean individuals. He insists:

"... c'est très malsain ... surtout qu'il y a de la paille fraîche ... Cela fermente ... Il y a eu des cas d'asphyxie, souvent ..."(p. 25)

He eventually comforts himself by sleeping with a bottle of eau de cologne close to his face. Not until chapter V, "La Veille des Armes", does Dorgelès dwell on the horrific weather and underfoot conditions of the front lines. First of all, Demachy stresses the low temperature and discomfort of winter:

"Quand on sort du gourbi, le froid vous mordille le menton, vous pique le nez comme une prise, il vous amuse. Puis il devient mauvais, vous grignote les oreilles, vous torture le bout des doigts, s'infiltré par les manches, par le col, par la chair, et c'est de la glace qui vous gèle jusqu'au ventre".(p. 126)

There is a gradual build-up of the cold and how it slowly takes a firm hold over the exposed soldiers. At first it simply pinches the

chin and nose; then it becomes much worse; nibbling at the ears and the fingertips until it finally spreads throughout the body. This gives the impression that the facts are manifesting themselves without authorial intervention and the large use of the present tense conveys a sense of immediacy. For the most part, Dorgelès' criticism of war emerges through his descriptive and narrative techniques. Where indignation is expressed, Dorgelès generally refrains from drawing a moral. His anger stems more from extreme compassion than bitter resentment. In chapter XV he describes the battlefield:

Il allait encore pleuvoir; le jour était d'une blancheur livide qui aveuglait. A terre, des lambeaux de pluie traînaient en flaques jaunâtres que le vent fripait, et quelques gouttes espacées y faisaient des ronds. La pluie n'espérait pourtant pas laver cette boue, laver ces haillons, laver ces cadavres? Il pourrait bien pleuvoir toutes les larmes du ciel, pleuvoir tout un déluge, cela n'effacerait rien. Non, un siècle de pluie ne laverait pas ça. (pp. 383-4)

There is no attempt here to arouse the reader's sense of moral outrage at the inhuman conditions in which the troops lived and died. The question emphasizes the horror of the situation, but the response is not designed to excite, as with Barbusse. Dorgelès places the facts before the reader and his dramatic, emphatic reply arises out of pity, designed to ensure that the reader must never be allowed to forget the essential horror and inhumanity of war. In chapter XIV the appalling conditions in the trenches is communicated as fatigue parties carry out their daily tasks:

La boue venait à mi-jambes, dans le boyau. L'eau coulait de partout, de la paroi gluante et de la nuit. Ils pataugeaient dans ce ruisseau de glu noire, et pour ne pas s'embourber, il fallait poser le pied dans l'empreinte des autres, marcher de trou en trou. On n'entendait que le clapotis des pieds arrachés à la vase ...

Plus on avançait, plus le ruisseau de fange était profond. Les pieds hésitants cherchaient un coin solide où se poser; puis un faux

pas, et l'homme glissait jusqu'aux genoux dans un puisard d'écoulement.(pp. 345-6)

The constant references to the appalling underfoot conditions, "la paroi gluante", "ce ruisseau de glu noire", "pour ne pas s'embourber", clearly shows trench warfare to be an experience that shaped and limited an individual's behaviour in a manner hitherto unknown to him. There is a cumulative effect and an immediacy about the writing which conveys the difficult conditions which the soldiers endured in a most authentic manner. Dorgelès' description is allowed to carry his attitude. In "The Soldier's Stage: Roland Dorgelès, Les Croix de Bois", Flower claims that "the principal centre of interest of Les Croix de Bois therefore is not what Dorgelès has to say so much as how he choses to say it".³³ Dorgelès views the war as an educative process. From the early scenes of optimism as the new recruits arrive, slowly the vigour and enthusiasm fades as the conditions have their effects on the troops. In Chapter X, the narrator points out:

Nous acceptons tout: les relèves sous la pluie, les nuits dans la boue, les jours sans pain, la fatigue surhumaine ...(pp. 240-1)

Again the use of present tense and the simplicity of sentence construction, its clarity and lucidity, renews an image of the life which Dorgelès and his companions shared, with the minimum of distortion.³⁴ He continues:

33. The First World War In Fiction, op. cit. p. 58

34. In Bleu Horizon he writes: "C'est incroyable ce que l'homme s'habitue vite à la pire misère ... On s'habitue à ne pas dormir, à se tenir des nuits entières debout au créneau, ou à plat ventre sous la pluie devant le barbelé. On grogne: "Vache de temps", et c'est fini". op. cit. p. 50

La pluie fouettait la boue et les hommes. On ne la voyait pas, mais on entendait grêler ses rafales sur la terre molle et les capotes trempées ... Les hommes avançaient, les paupières plissées, les joues froides. Le vent leur sifflait dans les oreilles ...(p. 341)

The use of the verbs "fouetter" and "siffler" conjures up an image of the appalling wind and rain, the latter which is almost personified; nevertheless, they do allow a more realist appraisal of the situation rather than encourage a distortion of the events. One senses the gradual hardening of the troops and the rejection of their naïve optimism of the beginning. Dorgelès occasionally succumbs to the temptation to allow his own thoughts to interrupt and colour the narrative. "Le Fanion Rouge" begins with a march during which the troops almost appear to be tireless:

C'était une grosse rumeur de piétinement, de voix et de rires qui avançait dans la poussière ...

Personne ne pensait à la guerre. Cela sentait l'insouciance et la rigolade. Il ne faisait pas trop chaud, le pays était gai, et l'on regardait les choses avec des yeux amusés de soldats aux manoeuvres .(pp. 40-1)

The comment on the soldier's attitudes is more than a simple presentation of the scene. Nevertheless, there is no extensive, overt moralizing as in *Le Feu*. As Flower points out, in such instances, the implied bitterness and anger of the situation evaporates into reluctant resignation and even sentimental piety.³⁵ Words such as "rires", "l'insouciance", "la rigolade", "gai", "des yeux amusés" suggest clearly the positive spirit of the troops during the early stages. Slowly, however, their morale decreases as the physical pain increases. At first, it is the weight of their pack which presses down heavily, gradually affecting the entire co-

35. Op. cit. p. 56

ordination of their bodies; after each rest stop, it becomes more and more difficult to re-adjust to the pace. (pp. 44-5) Dorgelès depicts one scene where the exhausted troops are forced to march on, regardlessly, by their unscrupulous officer, Barbaroux, who threatens to beat them if they falter or grumble. (pp. 45-6) He continues:

On repartit en clopinant. On ne riait plus, on parlait moins fort. (p. 47)

Authorial comment is avoided and the facts are allowed to speak for themselves. In chapter IV "La Bonne Vie", Dorgelès depicts a scene in the trenches where the troops examine their lice infested clothing. Vairon and Broucke almost seem to take pleasure in the inspection and discovery of the insects which they immediately kill. (pp. 84-5) Sulphart gives a short explanation of the different kinds of louse: "des à la croix de fer", "des rouges", "des poux d'arbis". (p. 85) There is a light-heartedness amongst the troops which is rarely shown in Barbusse's novels, but the horror of the situation, nevertheless, is clearly present. Dorgelès describes the reaction of one soldier upon examining his clothing:

... dès le premier regard il se sent découragé. Son linge fourmille de vermine, on voit grouiller une file noire dans chaque pli. Un moment, il semble hésiter, puis, se décidant, il met tout en boule, sa chemise, son caleçon, sa ceinture, et jette le ballot par-dessus le mur. (p. 86)

The details recalled here are not chosen to fortify the reader's sense of outrage but to renew the reality which Dorgelès and his companions experienced. There is a similar approach adopted in the description of the endless waiting in the front lines:

Alors, on se rassied, le dos au mur, et on attend. Faire la guerre, n'est plus que cela: attendre. Attendre la relève, attendre les lettres, attendre la soupe, attendre le jour, attendre la mort ... Et tout cela arrive, à son heure: il suffit d'attendre ..."(p. 318)

The concentration, here, upon the word "attendre" is emblematic of the unchanging, repetitive state of waiting. As the passage progresses there is an intensification of the idea of waiting which reaches its climax in the somewhat chilling final line: "Et tout arrive, à son heure: il suffit d'attendre". The implication is that everything will come to he who waits, even death, but that there is no other solution: "Faire la guerre, n'est plus que cela". Dorgelès' control and moderation is evident here. He refuses to accept the privileges which omniscience can grant him to interject or to moralize at will, and maintains a sense of proportion. It is with a certain degree of composure and dispassion that he describes the hours of bombardment:

Brusquement, une rafale d'explosions ... Ce fut une seconde d'affolement. Ils [les soldats] se levaient, sortaient des trous ... tout de suite hébétés par le tonnerre assourdissant de l'artillerie subitement déchaîné.

... les obus tapaient à coups furieux, faisant voler des morceaux de tranchée blanche, comme des copeaux sous un robot de menuisier ...

Chaque obus soulevait une longue gerbe de terre dans un nuage de fumée; ceux qui tombaient sur le bois déracinaient des arbres entiers et les jetaient dans le taillis, tout droits, intacts, comme de gros bouquets.(pp. 58-9)

The description does not abound with literary imagery and adjectives. The soldiers are "hébétés", the noise of the artillery is like "le tonnerre assourdissant"; shells fall "à coups furieux", each one gouging out "une longue gerbe de terre". There is little that is unusual about the author's style. The vehicles of the similes are

"ordinary", mixing features of life at the front with those of a normal existence. Dorgelès rarely resorts to heavy symbolism. The first simile compares the destruction of the trenches by shell-fire to the wood shavings which spring from a carpenter's plane; the second draws the parallel between uprooted trees which are thrown on top of each other and large bunches of flowers. Dorgelès continues:

Quand une salve bien pointée donnait sur la tranchée ses quatre coups de pic, arrachant une gerbe de terre, de pierres et de madriers, un cri d'admiration montait, une clameur ravie de feu d'artifice.(p. 59)

The allusion to a firework display distinctly excludes any attempt to portray the horror of the bombardment on a similar scale of epic proportion as in *Le Feu*. In chapter XII, "Dans le Jardin des Morts", Dorgelès describes the shelling of a cemetery.³⁶ The sky is lit up periodically as if by a lighthouse's beam; machine-gun fire slides across the ground like a snake; the smoke from fading flares leaves fanciful shadows in the sky;(p. 324) the noise is like thunder; as the barrage intensifies; "une haie rouge de fusants" pierces the night and shells fall like needles, forging "une haie de fer" above the soldiers;(p. 325) the entire cemetery seems to belch out flame.(p. 326) Although the technique of comparison is similar to that of Barbusse, it is the content of the imagery that is less exaggerated. Cruickshank points out in *Variations on Catastrophe*, that destruction and distortion of the landscape in *Les Croix de Bois*, never quite conveys "the sense of primordial chaos suggested by Barbusse".³⁷

36. Meyer points out that the inspiration came from the cemetery of Neuville-Saint-Vaast, see "Les Croix de Bois", *La Nouvelle Revue des deux Mondes*, op. cit. p. 76

37. Op. cit. p. 96

As in Le Feu and Clarté, Les Croix de Bois focuses on the sensitivity of the troops which is gradually blunted as they succumb more and more to the physical horrors of life in the trenches. Gilbert Demachy spends his first evening with the squad, billeted in a stable, leaving his bags with those of his companions, in the feeding troughs;(p. 13) when rations are distributed, he is amazed to see the animalistic behaviour of the troops as they fight and shout for their own share. Sulphart advises:

"Si tu veux être mieux servi que les autres, il faut gueuler, même sans savoir: c'est l'seul moyen d'avoir ton compte".(p. 36)

Dorgelès describes how Demachy slowly becomes accustomed to his "vie brutale":

Il savait à présent laver son assiette avec une poignée d'herbe, il commençait à boire notre pinard avec plaisir, et n'avait plus honte de faire ses besoins devant les autres.(p. 57)

As the soldiers spend more and more time together in the appalling conditions of the front lines, a bond develops between them which Dorgelès compares to that of beasts and the image of the animal herd becomes increasingly prevalent. At the beginning of Chapter IV, after a long march, the troops are so exhausted that they lie down close to each other for comfort:

... ils se réchauffaient l'un l'autre comme des bêtes, ne trouvant plus le courage de grogner. Quelques-uns restés debout ... parlaient de paille fraîche ... et les camarades assis sur leurs sacs écoutaient sans répondre, trop hébétés pour rien désirer d'autre que le droit de dormir.(pp. 81-2)

In Chapter V a patrol which leaves the lines, with wire-cutters hanging from the men's necks, is compared to a herd of swiss cows

with bells jangling;(p. 126) during a moment of calm in the reserve lines, Dorgelès has time to reflect on the "pauvre vie de bêtes" that the soldiers lead;(p. 175) in chapter VIII after a night watch of three hours, soldiers huddle together in order to enjoy "un bon sommeil de brutes";(p. 222) as the regiment leave the trenches in chapter XI, ironically entitled "Victoire", Dorgelès writes:

C'est un grand troupeau hâve, un régiment de boue séchée ... On marche d'un pas traînant, le dos voûté, le cou tendu.(pp. 291-2)

As convoys of troops leave the battlefields of Artois, Champagne, Lorraine, Flanders, many lean out of the wagons that transport them and begin to bleat like sheep, emphasizing their powerlessness against the unscrupulous treatment by their superiors who drive them endlessly and without compassion, along the western front and finally to their deaths;(p. 353) in chapter XV there is a final ignominy as soldiers are seen walking down the lines dragging long, black bundles by ropes. Dorgelès explains:

C'étaient des morts.

Des brancards? - à peine en avait-on assez pour les blessés ... Alors, on traînait par les pieds, tous les morts glanés dans les champs, on les tirait avec une corde, comme les chevaux étripés des corridas ...(p. 363)

As the regiment files through a local village, supposedly victorious, in chapter XI, onlookers break out in tears at the horrific sight of the troops, depersonalized and dehumanized:

C'étaient des mannequins de boue qui défilaient, godillots de boue, cuissards de boue, capotes de boue, et les bidons pareils à de gros blocs d'argile ... Tous avaient sous le casque les mêmes traits d'épouvante ...(p. 302)

The rhetorical emphasis on mud is intended to convey Dorgelès' indignation at the appalling degradation of civilized man. In addition to the image of animals, the soldiers are also compared to primitive man, as they sit around a fire cooking in the reserve lines;(p. 94) and are compared to machines at work, as they quickly respond to the command to attack and begin to fire automatically without pause and without thought.(p. 378) The accounts illustrate Dorgelès' ability to make a strong emotional impression by the use of a few words and also that the brutality and inhuman nature of war does not necessarily demand descriptions of an epic scale as with Barbusse. Although the individual is clearly alienated from the rest of society, he is not in isolation at the front. Dorgelès underlines the sense of group identity in all the above instances. The author's impassivity can again be seen in the description of the suffering of the wounded. In chapter XII a night fatigue party discovers six soldiers in need of stretcher-bearers. One has been suffering for more than a week, abandoned by his regiment:

Il ne parle plus. C'est une chose tragiquement maigre, avec des yeux immenses, des joues creuses salies de barbe, et des mains décharnées, dont les ongles griffent la pierre. Il ne bouge pas, pour ne plus sentir la blessure assoupie de ses cuisses broyées, mais une soif horrible le fait geindre.(pp. 313-4)

"Tragiquement" implies authorial comment, but on the whole Dorgelès respects the reader's autonomy. He describes another sufferer:

... [il] ne vit plus que par l'imperceptible halètement de sa poitrine, les yeux fermés, les dents serrées, toute sa forme ramassée pour se défendre contre la mort, sauver son peu de vie qui tremblote et va fuir.(p. 314)

The scene is again one of personal, honest witness. Dorgelès' observation is firmly anchored in reality, and the suffering of the soldier clearly expressed in "l'imperceptible halètement de sa poitrine", in his closed eyes and firmly clenched teeth. In chapter XIV, "Mots d'amour", a wounded soldier is carried on a stretcher down the line:

... quelque chose de rigide sous la couverture brune, les lourds godillots dépassant. La face blême, les yeux immenses, les lèvres serrées, il ne parlait pas; rien qu'un gémissement rauque, quand les porteurs heurtaient son brancard. Il ne semblait voir personne, comme s'il regardait en lui-même la vie s'enfuir. Sa main pendant, comme une chose morte.(p. 349)

Dorgelès makes no direct reference to the soldier's wound. There is no use of exaggerated language which appeals to the emotions. Instead, the barest details are acknowledged: the rigidity of the body; the rare moan; the pale face, large eyes and tightly closed lips; the fixed gaze and limp hand. The scene lacks the vehemence and passion of Barbusse, allowing the reader freedom of response. There is nothing spectacular about Sulphart's wound in chapter XV "En revenant de Montmartre", as shrapnel damages his hand and back. Dorgelès describes the burning sensation as a friend pours iodine on the shattered hand and bandages the wound.(p. 391) As Sulphart makes his way to the nearest casualty station, he is joined by many more wounded soldiers:

Des blessés cheminaient tout le long des boyaux. Il y en avait de terribles, au teint gris, qui s'arrêtaient pour râler, accroupis dans des renforcements et vous regardaient passer avec des yeux hagards qui ne voyaient plus.(p. 393)

Dorgelès refuses to describe the appalling wounds in detail; he refuses to employ an imagery and a vocabulary which are highly

figurative in order to convey the horror of warfare. Instead he mentions the haggard looks and the last gasps for breath leaving the reader to imagine the rest. The divisional casualty station is similarly depicted. The major examines the wounded quickly as they arrive, then passes them on. Little attention is devoted to the detail of the horrific suffering:

Sur le parquet traînaient des pansements souillés, des tampons d'ouate. Une grande cuvette débordait d'eau rouge.(p. 400)

Even Sulphart plays down the amputation of his own fingers. He comments:

"Tant pis ... je ne suis pas pianiste" (p. 401)

His stay in hospital in the reserve lines is a wonderful experience. Dorgelès makes a brief allusion to the "plaintes aiguës", "des gémissements rauques" which can be heard coming from the operating theatre, periodically,(p. 411) but for the most part he concentrates on the joy of Sulphart to be away from the front and to be treated again as an individual:

Sa main, encore tout empaquetée de blanc, avec ses deux doigts amputés, le gênait bien un peu, et il ne parlait pas sans fatigue, les chirurgiens lui ayant ouvert deux fois la poitrine pour sortir des éclats, mais cela le classait parmi les grands blessés, et en plus du traitement de faveur que cela lui valait ... il en tirait quelques avantages moraux auxquels il était très sensible.(pp. 412-13)

Dorgelès shows a similar reluctance to depict in detail the suffering of Gilbert Demachy, wounded on the battlefield. He writes:

La douleur l'avait engourdi et il ne sentait plus ses membres ni sa tête, il ne sentait que sa blessure, la plaie profonde qui lui fouillait le ventre.(pp. 401-2)

Again, he prefers to present the reader with the bare framework rather than to portray in graphic detail the almost impossible. Rather than inflate Demachy's suffering, Dorgelès concentrates on describing the soldier's fear of dying and his despair when the stretcher-bearers do not arrive. He resolves to remain still to reduce his pain, then decides to sit up, fearing that he may be recognized as just another corpse should he remain prone. As Demachy bandages his own wound, again Dorgelès avoids the horrific details:

C'était au-dessus de l'aîne gauche ... il ne sentait rien qu'une chose gluante ... Ce fut horrible, il lui sembla qu'il allait s'arracher les entrailles, emporter sa chair ... Torturé, il s'arrêta, sa main posée sur sa peau nue. Il sentit quelque chose de tiède qui, doucement, lui coulait le long des doigts. Alors, effrayé, pour arrêter son sang, il prit son pansement et sans le dérouter, en tampon, il l'appliqua sur sa blessure.(pp. 405-6)

There are no details about the size and severity of the injury other than that it is "horrible" and is bleeding quite profusely. Demachy shouts out in order to maintain consciousness, which only results in stimulating others who lie nearby him, in equal pain:

Il entendit un Allemand qui suppliait, avec un accent:
 "Ici ... Blessé vrançais ... Venez, vrançais".
 Puis, soudain, ce fut un rire horrible, un rire dément qui fit trembler la nuit.
 "Hé, les copains! ... criait un autre ... j'serai plus soldat ... Venez voir, les gars, je peux plus être soldat, je n'ai plus de jambes ..."
 Les moribonds s'éveillaient l'un l'autre, se répondaient ...
 Puis le silence retomba, tragique.(p. 407)

There is no moral outrage in these lines. Dorgelès is not inviting the reader to react in a hostile and bitter manner. The facts speak for themselves and the result is an atmosphere of extreme pathos. As death approaches, Demachy hallucinates, seeing before him his old

companions, even those who are already dead. As the rain begins to fall, he sings in order to keep awake. Gradually, his voice dies out:

Gilbert ne chantait plus. Son souffle épuisé mourait dans un murmure que recouvrait la pluie. Mais ses lèvres semblaient bouger encore ...

La pluie ruisselait en pleurs le long de ses joues amaigries. Puis deux lourdes larmes coulèrent de ses yeux creux: les deux dernières ...(p. 409)

There is a hint of melodrama in these lines as the last tears trickle from Gilbert's already hollow eyes and announce his death, but the sense of tragedy is equally great. Again there is no direct authorial comment; we are left to believe that what we have in front of us is the reality of the situation with no distortion. The title of the novel alludes to the enormous death lists of the war and references to the dead are frequent throughout.³⁸ Dorgelès refuses, however, to indulge in the macabre detail in which Barbusse seems to dwell in *Le Feu* and *Clarté*, yet there is a strong sense of the theatrical, of the sensational, in his descriptions of the scenes of carnage. In chapter III, "Le fanion rouge", the regiment marches past a military cemetery:

... tout le long de la route, les croix au garde-à-vous s'alignaient, pour nous voir défiler.

Près d'un ruisseau, tout un cimetière était groupé; sur chaque croix flottait un petit drapeau, de ces drapeaux d'enfant qu'on achète au bazar, et cela tout claquant donnait à ce champ de morts un air joyeux d'escadre en fête.

... Autour des fermes, au milieu des champs, on en voyait partout: un régiment entier avait dû tomber là. Du haut du talus encore vert, ils nous regardaient passer, et l'on eût dit que leurs croix se penchaient, pour choisir dans nos rangs ceux qui, demain, les rejoindraient.(pp. 47-48)

38. See p. 69

At the beginning and end of the passage the crosses are personified. In the first instance they appear to stand by the road side observing the troops as they march by. Towards the end of the passage they appear to lean forward as if to select the dead of the future. Dorgelès' compassion for the dead is most intense. He cannot help but show a hint of pride in their sacrifice as he compares the cemetery, with its flags fluttering above individual graves, with a naval squadron with all colours on show; at the same time, the comparison between the flags on the graves and those brought by young boys at the fairground, suggests a naivety, almost a parody of war games, emphasizing all the more the folly and innocence with which those who enlisted in August 1914, went to the Front. Towards the end of chapter III, Gilbert's patrol comes across a field of dead. No details are given of their wounds, but many of their bodies appear so thin that it is difficult to imagine that they were ever alive. As many soldiers pause to remove the papers of the dead so that their relatives can be notified, Dorgelès writes:

Les pauvres camarades ... devaient revivre pour un instant sous leurs gestes fraternels. Et réveillés, miséricordieux, c'étaient les morts qui guidaient la patrouille, semblant se passer les vivants de main en main.(p. 78)

It is as if the dead are dramatically brought back to life as they come into contact with the patrol; they appear to guide them through the night from corpse to corpse. There is a similar theatrical scene as Vairon surveys the battlefield in chapter V. Dorgelès describes the sight of the dead:

Ils sont tombés comme ils chargeaient, front en avant; certains, abattus sur les genoux, semblent encore prêts à bondir ... On en voit un, adossé à une petite meule, qui, de ses mains crispées,

tient sa capote ouverte comme pour nous montrer le trou qui l'a tué.(p. 118)

In chapter XI, during an attack, French troops discover a trench full of rotting Bavarian corpses; limbs have been torn apart due to the effects of shell-fire, bodies dissected. One corpse, however, remains upright, supported by "un monstre sans tête", and appears to guard the badly decomposed mass³⁹.(p. 272) In certain chapters Dorgelès sensationalizes the use of corpses in the trenches. As Gilbert drags a body into the trenches from no man's land, Lemoine comments:

"Il en faudrait encore trois, quatre comme ça ... Ça nous tenait un bon parapet avec un peu de terre dessus".(pp. 277-8)

Later, Sulphart makes use of a corpse's foot which protudes out of the trench wall upon which to hang his bags,⁴⁰ and a machine-gun team set up their weapon on the swollen stomach of an enemy soldier.(p. 366) In some passages it is not the element of the grotesque that appears incongruous, but the idealization, almost poetic imagination of the author. In chapter XI, Gilbert envies the dead:

Tous les dix pas, des soldats étaient étendus, le front au ciel, les cuisses écartées et les genoux hauts, ou bien à plat ventre, la tête sur le bras. L'un d'eux était si bien couché qu'on eût dit qu'il dormait ...(p. 286)

Dorgelès' deep sympathy and understanding masks the true horror of the situation. In chapter V, as the narrator watches over his

39. Meyer points out that the incident does, in fact, have its roots in reality. See Dorgelès' letter to his wife, 14th January 1915. "Les Croix de Bois", La Nouvelle Revue des deux Mondes, op. cit. p. 77

40. See Dorgelès' letter, 8th June 1915, cited by Meyer, *ibid.* p. 77

sleeping companions, they seem so peaceful that they remind him of the dead who enjoy eternal rest. He comments:

Non, je ne peux plus les voir dormir. Le sommeil écrasant qui les emporte ressemble trop à l'autre sommeil.(p. 124)

The gradual effect of the dead over the living can be seen in a comparison between two views towards the beginning and end of the novel. In chapter VI the troops are confident in their own immunity:

Lui mourra peut-être, et le voisin et encore d'autres, mais soi, on ne peut pas mourir, soi ... On en a vu mourir dix, on en verra toucher cent, mais que son tour puisse venir, d'être un tas bleu dans les champs, on n'y croit pas.(p. 169)

In chapter XI, however, the narrator feels impregnated with death:

... c'est dans ma tête, dans ma peau que j'emporte l'horrible haleine des morts. Elle est en moi, pour toujours: je connais maintenant l'odeur de la pitié.(p. 293)

It is this pity and deep sympathy that runs throughout Les Croix de Bois, that is the very essence of the novel. Dorgelès' war experience marked him, as well as thousands more, for the rest of their life, his work stands as a testimony to that experience. In Bleu Horizon he writes:

Nous avons beau dire et beau faire, nous resterons la génération de la guerre ... Elle nous a marqués de son sceau rouge et nous pouvons frotter, astiquer, comme autrefois la plaque de couche rouillée de nos fusils, rien n'effacera la tache. Elle est partout; dans nos habitudes, notre langage; sans cesse elle nous remonte aux lèvres, tantôt poussée de bile, tantôt éclat de rire.⁴¹

41. Op. cit. p. 93

Unlike Le Feu, Les Croix de Bois is not an angry book; the protest contained within is not cynical, openly hostile, but genuinely human. Meyer shares a similar comparison in "Les Croix de Bois". He writes:

Le Feu est empreint d'une résonance lyrique, marque du poète, et aussi du polémiste que Barbusse allait être; Les Croix de Bois sont avant tout une incomparable chronique humaine, celle des choses vues et entendues, recueillies par l'extrême sensibilité du grand journaliste que fut aussi Dorgelès.⁴²

Dorgelès admits himself in Souvenirs sur Les Croix de Bois that he could never have written the novel had he not experienced the profound meaning of life in the trenches along the western front for himself: He points out:

Ce n'était pas en gonflant mes enveloppes de brouillons indéchiffrables que je composais le plus: c'était en traînant mon barda de secteur en secteur, en crevant de soif, en tremblant de froid, en partageant la griserie inquiète des veilles d'offensive et l'aigre accablement des retours.⁴³

Not wishing to write a precise account of his own experiences, but of a more global, general picture of war, there is no strict chronology of events, precision of dates, places, and so on. His characters and the actions in which they become involved are all imaginary, although their roots steeped in "un fond de vérité observée".⁴⁴ Despite factual and historical inaccuracies, however, there is an immediacy and vigour about Les Croix de Bois which conveys the sense of the fragmented life of the front-line soldier in a most authentic manner. In the large majority of incidents evoking the absurd, the grotesque, there is little authorial commentary, the mixture of physical

42. Op. cit. p. 67

43. Op. cit. p. 26

44. Ibid. p. 35

repulsiveness and utter insensitivity conveying Dorgelès' indignation. Maurice Rieuneau writes:

Dorgelès évite le commentaire des faits; il les laisse parler d'eux-mêmes et on ne trouve pas sous sa plume les passages lyriques ou vibrants d'un réquisitoire passionné, encore moins les morceaux de ton prophétique et révolutionnaire sur l'ordre futur de la société qui abolira les guerres au nom de la fraternité des victimes.⁴⁵

Cruikshank recognizes that Dorgelès has the confidence that the reaction of the reader will be one of horror and outrage needing no further prompting or guidance by the author.⁴⁶ If this is so then Dorgelès will have fulfilled his ultimate aim in writing Les Croix de Bois to which he refers in "Autour des Croix de Bois", Conferencia, in 1932, when he writes:

Je leur avais promis, si j'en revenais, de crier sans répit notre horreur de la guerre: j'ai tenu parole.⁴⁷

ii) Measured protest

The political/ideological overtones present in Le Feu are absent in Les Croix de Bois. Flower points out that Dorgelès' novel is free from any extensive, overt moralizing, and that this constitutes the major difference between the two works.⁴⁸ Meyer writes:

Le Feu est empreint d'une résonance lyrique, marque du poète, et aussi du polémiste que Barbusse allait être; Les Croix de bois sont avant tout une incomparable chronique humaine, celle des choses vues et entendues, recueillies par l'extrême sensibilité du grand journaliste que fut aussi Dorgelès.⁴⁹

45. Guerre et Révolution dans le Roman Français 1919 à 1939, op. cit. p. 43

46. Variations on Catastrophe, op. cit. p. 98

47. Vol. II, p. 508

48. "The Soldier's Stage: Roland Dorgelès, Les Croix de Bois", op. cit. p. 55

49. "Les Croix de Bois", op. cit. p. 67

Like Barbusse, it was literary and not political concerns which deeply interested Dorgelès. Destined by his parents to become an architect his years of study at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, in Paris, merely increased his taste for literature and led him to frequent more and more Montmartre and to involve himself deeply in the lives of the painters and writers. By the outbreak of war, he had already published poems and short stories, embarking on a journalistic career. It was this initial training which most likely prompted the large collection of notes and sketches that he made during his four years of war service and his desire that Les Croix de Bois should be accepted as an original novel, as a work of artistic imagination.

In chapter III, "Le Fanion Rouge", the ridiculous behaviour of major Barbaroux is placed before the reader without any interpretation or conclusion. Clearly he feels no sympathy or commitment to the soldiers under his command. As one of them complains of excessive fatigue during a long march, Barbaroux fails to adapt himself to the situation and to try to understand the condition of his troops:

"Tais-toi"! criait le major, les veines des tempes gonflées. "Tu marcheras comme les autres ... Je suis commandant, tu entends, commandant! Qu'est-ce que tu me dois?"

Le biffin hébété le regardait.

"Mais je ne sais pas ... Je ne vous dois rien, m'sieur le major".

"Tu me dois le respect", hurlait Barbaroux sautant sur sa selle. ... "Tiens-toi droit ... Tends la main, je t'ordonne de tendre la main ..." Naturellement sa main tremble ... "Tous alcooliques, fils d'alcooliques ... Eh bien, fiche-moi le camp, les autres marchent, tu marcheras ..." (p. 46)

Similarly, in "La bonne vie", the over-zealousness of captain Cruchet is plainly depicted. As he inspects the troops in the reserve lines,

he demands the same rigorous discipline as during peace time. The entire episode, set within the abominable confines of trench warfare, is farcical. Morache is asked to ensure that there is complete silence. Ricordeau, who is awaiting his sergeant's stripe, pretends to be authoritarian, in order to impress. With complete disregard for the situation, Cruchet carries out his inspection paying attention to the minutest of details:

Il remarque tout: le bouton qui manque, le point de rouille au fusil, le brodequin mal graissé, la tache de boue sur la cartouchière; et, la voix glaciale, il demande:

"Où vous êtes-vous sali comme ça?"

Quelle drôle de question!...(pp. 90-91)

Both incidents are narrated with detachment and objectivity. Unlike Barbusse, Dorgelès refuses to involve himself in the argument, Rieuneau writes:

Le narrateur s'efface le plus souvent pour nous faire entendre directement la conversation des hommes, leurs répliques, leurs voix, leurs accents même.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, within the contrast between the officer's unflinching militarism and the appalling conditions faced by the troops along the western front, lies the implication of the moral insensibility and indifference of the men in high command. This is clearly brought out in chapter IX, "Mourir pour la Patrie", where a young soldier is executed for refusing to go on patrol after a night attack. Although the episode is completely free from authorial intervention, nevertheless, the pathos and feeling of despair which Dorgelès creates, leaves the reader in no doubt as to the unscrupulousness and

50. Guerre et Révolution dans le roman français de 1919 à 1939, op. cit. p. 39

lack of interest of soldiers, as human beings, by their superior officers. The very title of the chapter is clearly ironic. The death which Dorgelès describes is far from glorious and heroic, as the title implies. The music played after the execution to the tune of "Mourir pour la Patrie", clearly contrasts with the ignoble act of death by firing squad, the horror of the situation is brought out:

Oh! Etre obligé de voir ça, et garder, pour toujours dans sa mémoire, son cri de bête, ce cri atroce où l'on sentait la peur, l'horreur, la prière, tout ce que peut hurler un homme qui brusquement voit la mort là, devant lui. La Mort: un petit pieu de bois et huit hommes blêmes, l'arme au pied.(p. 230)

Once the material is placed before the reader, he is free to respond to it as he will. There can only be one response, however. The frightful appeal never to be forced to witness such a scene again, the evocation of the executed man's final cry, "ce cri atroce où l'on sentait la peur, l'horreur, la prière ...", and the final recall of the execution post and of the faces of the soldiers of the firing squad, as ghastly white as their victim, indicate only one type of reaction - one of utter abhorrence. This is emphasized by further, apparently haphazard, recollections of the event. The narrator recalls how the condemned soldier begged for mercy from the colonel to no avail; how he had to be dragged to the execution post screaming for his children and commanding officer:

Son sanglot déchirait ce silence d'épouvante et les soldats tremblants n'avaient plus qu'une idée: "Oh! vite ... vite ... que ça finisse. Qu'on tire, qu'on ne l'entende plus! ..." (p. 231)

The use of the verb "déchirer" and the adjectives "épouvante" and "tremblants" and, yet again, the indirect plea that everything should

end as quickly as possible, clearly adds to the atmosphere of horror and grief. Berthier, we are told, clenches his teeth so as not to reveal his trembling jaw, as he and the other soldiers are made to file past the executed man; Vieublé cries uncontrollably. The narrator remembers:

En passant devant le poteau, on détournait la tête. Nous n'osions pas même nous regarder l'un l'autre, blafards, les yeux creux, comme si nous venions de faire un mauvais coup. (p. 232)

The feeling of guilt and regret for what they have carried out strengthens the overall theme of folly and protest in the chapter. The absurdity of the entire situation is underlined. The execution of a man for a somewhat trivial offense by callous, unthinking officers, is to be deplored. Similarly, despite their feelings of compassion and torment, the fact that human beings are powerless to rebel against what they see as immoral and grotesque, is equally reprehensible. Although Dorgelès again is careful not to add authorial comment, one cannot help but feel that the closing lines of the episode are not without melodrama, as if to make certain of the reaction desired from the reader. The "Café de la Poste" where the condemned soldier is tried and sentence passed, still bears the trimmings of a previous concert and the final line, set aside from the rest, as if to emphasize it all the more, repeats the information that the executed man had two children, and rather dramatically compares their height to that of the execution post. In Souvenirs sur Les Croix de Bois, Dorgelès records his feelings about this particular chapter. Initially it was entirely excluded by the censor and Dorgelès' commanding officer insisted that the episode was complete fabrication. Nevertheless, upon the author's persistence,

"Mourir pour la Patrie" was included in its entirety when the first 10,000 copies were printed in March 1919.⁵¹ The apparent callousness and lack of consideration of army commanders in the rear, is again described in "Le fanion rouge". Dorgelès presents a situation where inaccurate calculations by the French field artillery and a breakdown in communications between the front posts and the rear, result in troops fired upon by their own guns to the oblivion of army corps commanders. Nevertheless, again the episode is highlighted by a melodramatic thread which becomes stronger as the storyline unfurls, almost a leitmotif, hence the title. Between the shells, a lone figure in an isolated trench hole waves aloft a large red belt which resembles a red flag, "un fanion rouge", an indication to any artillery group to lengthen its fire. As the French shells continue to fall and the enemy fire tries to prevent the soldier's message from reaching its destination, the heroic propensities of the situation are intensified:

Entre deux bordées de tonnerre, le soldat se relevait toujours, son fanion au poing, et les balles ne le faisaient coucher qu'un instant. "Rouge! Rouge" répétait la ceinture agitée. Mais notre artillerie prise de folie continuait de tirer, comme si elle eût voulu les broyer tous. Les obus encerclaient le groupe terré, se rapprochaient encore, allaient les écraser ...

Alors, l'homme se leva tout droit, à découvert, et d'un grand geste fou, il brandit son fanion, au-dessus de sa tête, face aux fusils. Vingt coups partirent. On le vit chanceler et il s'abattit, le corps cassé, sur les fils acérés dont les liens le reçoivent.

L'homme tombé, les Boches tiraient quand même férocement et le crépitemment meurtrier nous faisait mal, cruellement mal, comme s'il nous avait blessés tous. Un nuage d'obus cacha l'horrible scène ... La fumée s'écarta. Rien ne bougeait plus ... Si .. Un bras remuait encore, remuait à peine, traînant son fanion dans l'herbe. "Rouge! Allongez le tir ... Allongez le tir ..." (pp. 67-8)

51. Op. cit. pp. 59-60

The tenacity of the soldier reaches spirited dimensions as he refuses to yield to the fire from both sides. The episode acts more as a literary monument to Dorgelès' companions in war, than a piece of detailed and accurate documentation. There is a gradual heightening of dramatic technique throughout in order to prepare for the rather exaggerated climax. At first the soldier only disappears momentarily as the French artillery fire is only light; as it grows in strength, it almost encircles the shell-hole yet miraculously does not achieve a direct hit; the soldier survives despite the heavy onslaught. The verbs "broyer" and "écraser" emphasize the power of exploding metal at high velocity and the comparison, inevitably offered with the defenceless and isolated infantryman, stresses the absurdity of the situation. The rather traditionally heroic stance that the soldier takes, as he fully exposes his body to both enemy and allied guns, waving his "flag" high above his head, receives a traditionally heroic ending, as the man sways and finally falls. The increase in the fierceness of the shell fire is noticeable by the third paragraph. "Les balles", "les obus" which "encerclaient", "les coups", now become "le crépitement meurtrier", as the Germans, in particular, begin to fire "férocement". The plight of the brave soldier appears hopeless. It seems most unlikely that he could have survived such a barrage of shell-fire. However, Dorgelès is careful to describe the scene to gain maximum effect and maintain the suspense. At first the battlefield is hidden by shell and gun smoke; as it gradually disappears, it seems that the soldier must have been killed, for nothing moves. The final two lines are highly imaginative. As the smoke thins, an arm can be seen to stir, still clutching the "red flag" in one final effort to have the protest

recognized. There is no mention of the man's condition, no description of any physical wounds sustained. If only temporarily, the individual appears to have triumphed over the anonymity and impersonality of the war that constantly engulfs him; an existence where positive moves were rarely made and yet casualty lists grew larger and larger. In "Victoire", the narrator comments:

... on ne voyait rien, toujours rien. C'était la bataille sans ennemis, la mort sans combat. Depuis le matin, que nous nous battions, nous n'avions pas vu vingt Allemands. Des morts, rien que des morts.(p. 283)

The contrast between "on ne voyait rien", at the beginning of the passage, and "Des morts, rien que des morts" at the end, the opposition in the phrases "bataille sans ennemis", and "mort sans combat", emphasize the absurdity of war in a restrained and objective manner. Later, in the same chapter, the technique is repeated when the narrator surveys the battlefield. Dorgelès affords the quickest of comments:

Comme c'est triste, un panorama de victoire!(p. 292)

The results of the ill application of science and technology, along the western front, almost draw out a rare, direct protest from Dorgelès in chapter XV, "En revenant de Montmartre". He writes:

La pluie n'espérait pourtant pas laver cette boue, laver ces haillons, laver ces cadavres? Il pourrait bien pleuvoir toutes les larmes du ciel, pleuvoir tout un déluge, cela n'effacerait rien. Non, un siècle de pluie ne laverait pas ça.(p. 384)

The tone is restrained. The excessive use of rain imagery and the use of question, rather than exclamation, as in Le Feu, prevents the comment from reaching dimensions of moral outrage designed to

persuade the reader to share it, nevertheless, there is a certain finality about Dorgelès' reasoning here which restricts the freedom of the reader in his response. The inclusion of a negative in each sentence clearly indicates the channel of thoughts which the reader is being invited to share. Dorgelès' narrator makes a similar protest in "Le moulin sans ailes":

J'essaie de pénétrer l'avenir, de voir plus loin que la guerre, dans ce lointain brumeux et doré comme une aube d'été. Irons-nous jusque-là? Et que nous donnera-t-il? Serons-nous jamais lavés de cette longue souffrance; oublierons-nous jamais cette misère, cette fange, ce sang, cet esclavage?(p. 172)

Again the frequent questioning softens the overall tone of the passage. The use of figurative language to describe the future as a "lointain brumeux", "doré comme une aube d'été", alleviates any tension. The reader, to a certain extent, is allowed to make up his own mind, although the narrator does, in fact, continue to affirm that he believes that soldiers will forget, despite their vows not to, and that they will only remember the good times. In "La veillée des armes", Sulphart's protests are similarly restrained in nature. He explains to Belin:

"Ce qui me fout à ressort ... c'est d'aller me faire fendre la gueule pour aller prendre trois champs de betteraves qui ne servent à rien ... Qu'est-ce que tu veux qu'ils foutent, de leur petit bois qui est dans un creux? C'est pour le plaisir de faire descendre des bonshommes, quoi! ..."(p. 123)

He goes on to advise:

"Cherche pas à comprendre, va, cherche pas à comprendre".(p. 124)

The absurdity of sacrificing lives for seemingly meaningless objectives is clearly beyond comprehension, as Sulphart suggests. Despite his anger, however, his attitude is one of composure. The use of question and lengthy phrases with "faire", such as "faire fendre la gueule" and "faire descendre des bonshommes", acts as a cushion to the criticisms implied of the lack of reasoning of those in higher command. The mentioning of pleasure suggests sarcasm rather than any sense of extreme moral outrage. At the end of chapter XII, "Dans le jardin des morts", the enumeration of awesome explosives such as torpedos, grenades, shells and their collective comparison with an erupting volcano, evokes more a sense of deep indignity than intense anger. The final exclamation is one of deep compassion:

"Au secours! Au secours! On assassine des hommes!"(p. 326)

The tone is similarly restrained in the passages where Dorgelès develops his thoughts on the quality of life and the true nature of those who fight at the front. In "Notre-Dame des Biffins", a young soldier laments to the narrator that he has neither desire, nor knowledge of how to fight with knives and bayonets. He points out:

"... je suis jardinier, moi, dans le civil. Et j'ai un de mes poilus qu'est même libraire. Ce que c'est des métiers à se servir d'un couteau?"(pp. 244-5)

The implications in this remark are quite clear. Soldiers did not undergo a special physical change in joining the ranks. They were still the same as those whom they had left behind; civilians in army uniforms for the most part. The majority fought because they were afraid not to, rather than out of any desire to kill the enemy.

Whether any society was worth being killed for, whether national institutions were so valuable and valid that lives should be sacrificed for them, were questions rarely discussed and asked in the trenches. Soldiers were only concerned with their immediate present, and the intensification of their existence and the intensity of their experience produced a heightened appreciation of life. Dorgelès' narrator comments:

Nous acceptions tout: les relèves sous la pluie, les nuits dans la boue, les jours sans pain, la fatigue surhumaine qui nous fait plus brutes que les bêtes; nous acceptons toutes les souffrances, mais laissez-nous vivre, rien que cela: vivre ...(pp. 240-1)

The absurdity of the proposed contract is apparent: total subserviency in return for being allowed to live. It is presented more as a hopeful plea, however, than an explosion of protest and affront. The desperate need to survive reaches ludicrous proportions in chapter V, "La veillée des armes", as Lemoine, Sulphart, Broucke and Fouillard share their feelings. Lemoine declares that he would be prepared to accept any march in order to be allowed to live; Sulphart would give up drinking wine; Broucke would sacrifice his left foot; Fouillard an eye.

Les voilà lancés dans les suppositions insensées, les hypothèses absurdes qui, pendant des heures, les font parler, bercés de fabuleux espoirs. La volière est ouverte: les rêves les plus saugrenus vont s'envoler. Ils imaginent des marchés impossibles, des conditions stupéfiantes que le général en personne vient leur proposer - donnant, donnant - contre leur libération. Et si formidables que soient ces conditions, ils acceptent toujours.(p. 120)

Clearly, such writing is not designed to fortify the reader's sense of anger. Indeed, Dorgelès rather invites him to enter a world of

fantasy. The use of selected diction is instrumental in creating such an atmosphere. He speaks of "les suppositions insensées", "les hypothèses absurdes", "de fabuleux espoirs", "la volière est ouverte: les rêves les plus saugrenus vont s'envoler". The author appears more concerned about renewing the experiences of the trenches which he and his companions shared, in this case the comforts that fantasizing brought about, than launching a more direct protest against the absurdity of war. Nevertheless, the very fact that the soldiers find some assurance and security in their imagination, that they are always prepared to accept any conditions, regardless of its nature, in order to survive, suggests, in itself, the utter folly of the situation. It is this feeling of inspiration which the illusory, the visionary stimulates, which encourages Sulphart to exaggerate his own war experiences during his stay in the base hospital in chapter XVI, "Le retour du héros". Dorgelès writes:

Dans sa bouche, la guerre devenait une sorte de grande blague, une succession abracadabrante de veilles, de patrouilles, d'attaques, de ribouldingues. En l'écoutant, le plus rétif des auxiliaires eût demandé à partir au front.(p. 416)

The absurdity of Sulphart's remarks is clearly recognized by his fellow patients, who become even more ill with anger. Dorgelès explains:

Tant que les infirmières étaient en rond autour du lit, écoutant attentivement le narrateur, ils n'osaient rien dire - tout au plus ricaner en sourdine - mais dès qu'elles étaient parties, on voyait se ranimer même les plus débiles, les derniers opérés sortir de leur demi-coma, les convalescents abandonner leur macramé, et, redressés sur leur lit, ils commençaient à injurier Sulphart avec des figures convulsées.(pp. 461-17)

To some extent Sulphart can be excused for creating an illusory world upon returning to the "home front". In the final pages of the novel, Dorgelès is at pains to emphasize the preposterous reaction of the civilian population to the troops who had defended them through four years of misery and destruction. He describes their reluctance to acknowledge the sacrifices of those in the front line and their swift decay of memory of the past. In one incident Sulphart tries to join in the conversations of a group of factory workers in a local cafe:

Lorsqu'il prononçait les noms de ses batailles, des noms tragiques qu'il croyait immortels, on ne les connaissait plus: l'égoïsme de l'arrière les avait oubliés. Et il en ressentait une sorte d'amertume.(p. 431)

There is contrast between what Sulphart deems unforgettable and what the civilians have already forgotten, between the selfishness of those in the rear and the humility of the returning soldier. The welcoming and appreciation for those who have fought, is missing; instead there is only indifference and ignorance. Instead of launching a bitter attack against such a reaction, Dorgelès' narrator can almost identify with this feeling of inconsideration and insensibility of the past:

C'est vrai, on oubliera. Oh! je sais bien, c'est odieux, c'est cruel, mais pourquoi s'indigner: c'est humain ...

On oubliera. Les voiles du deuil, comme des feuilles mortes, tomberont. L'image du soldat disparu s'effacera lentement dans le coeur consolé de ceux qu'ils aimaient tant.(p. 434)

The repetition of "on oubliera", the contrast between "c'est odieux," "c'est cruel" and "c'est humain", the image of the memories of the dead disappearing like autumn leaves falling from a tree, builds up a

strong atmosphere of pathos. The closing lines of the ultimate chapter, "Et c'est fini", are an apostrophe to the dead:⁵²

Vous étiez si jeunes, si confiants, si forts, mes camarades: oh! non, vous n'auriez pas dû mourir ... Une telle joie était en vous qu'elle dominait les pires épreuves. Dans la boue des relèves, sous l'écrasant labeur des corvées, devant la mort même, je vous ai entendu rire: jamais pleurer.(pp. 436-7)

The passage is full of contrast. Those who were so young, confident and strong are now dead; their cheerfulness had dominated the most adverse conditions; their optimism had shown through even in the face of death. Whilst Dorgelès offers no direct comment himself, the feeling remains evident that the slaughter of such a promising generation of youth is unpardonable and nonsensical. In his desire to convey to the reader the experiences of his war, in all their absurdity, Dorgelès shows no reluctance to include passages of apprehension and fear. In chapter III, "Le fanion rouge", Bouffioux's experiences of front line combat at Charleroi have left him so frightened that he resorts to any ploy in order not to be sent back to the trenches. The narrator informs the reader that since the Battle of the Marne, Bouffioux has volunteered willingly for all kinds of menial tasks:

Depuis on l'avait connu bûcheron, aide-vaguemestre, armurier, convoyeur du ravitaillement, cordonnier. Il s'offrait pour toutes les besognes, effrontément, et se cramponnait à la place usurpée, jusqu'à ce qu'on l'en chassât. Avait-on besoin d'un secrétaire qui sût tout juste lire, d'un menuisier n'ayant jamais tenu un rabot, d'un tailleur ne sachant pas coudre: il était là. On aurait demandé un aumônier pour la division qu'il eût crié: "Présent!" Il ne voulait pas se battre, c'était tout, et la peur lui donnait toutes les audaces.(pp. 42-3)

52. Guerre et Révolution dans le Roman Français de 1919 à 1939, op. cit. p. 38. Rieuneau describes this final chapter as "l'épilogue où l'auteur prend directement la parole pour exprimer en un envoi lyrique son hommage fraternel à la foule des morts ..."

Although the tone of the passage is a little exaggerated, in places - no-one would really need a secretary who could only just read, a carpenter who had never used a plane, a tailor who could not sew - the exaggeration only serves to emphasize the fear and worry of Bouffioux. In chapter VIII, "Le mont Calvaire", the effect of enemy mining parties at close proximity provokes Vieubl   to behave completely irrationally due to the incessant tension and anxiety. On one occasion, he attempts to leave the trenches and commit suicide in front of the enemy guns, (p. 224) but is restrained by Br  val and Demachy; a second time, he manages to break out of the trenches with four grenades which he subsequently distributes along the enemy lines in order to release the strain on his mind. (p. 225) His companions are equally visibly affected by the German tunnelling parties. The narrator vividly recaptures the scene when the digging is heard for the first time:

Je secouai brutalement Broucke, qui ronflait toujours, et Maroux, Br  val, Sulphart se couch  rent dans la galerie, l'oreille    terre. Nous autres les regardions, muets, le coeur dans l'  tau. Nous avions tous compris: une mine ... Anxieusement, nous   couteions ... (p. 214)

The tension is apparent. Whilst Maroux, Br  val and Sulphart lend their ears firmly to the ground, the rest of the squad look on in silence, "le coeur dans l'  tau"; they listen anxiously to the German troops at work, powerless to act and filled with terror. Demachy suggests that the only thing to do is to wait. The narrator continues:

Attendre quoi? Tous assis sur le bord de nos liti  res, nous regardions la terre, comme un d  esp  r   regarde couler l'eau sombre,

avant le saut. Il nous semblait que la pioche cognait plus fort à présent, aussi fort que nos coeurs battants. Malgré soi, on s'agenouillait, pour l'écouter encore!(p. 219)

The use of question and punctuation to break down long sentence construction into short bursts, enforces the atmosphere of anxiety and apprehension. The use of simile emphasizes the fear of the soldiers all the more. At first they are described as staring at the ground like a desperate man looks hard at the water before taking his leap; secondly, the sound of the German picks at work, so loud and rhythmic, is likened to the beating of the French soldier's hearts. Their powerlessness again is emphasized, as they kneel down to listen, unable to act in any way. Most frightening of all, however, is the silence, when the enemy's work comes to an end:

Au matin, ce fut un présage, une détresse intérieure qui nous réveilla. Ce n'était plus le bruit: un silence tragique, au contraire. L'escouade était muette, atterrée ...

Mon coeur s'arrêta net, comme si quelqu'un l'avait pris dans sa main. Je ressentis comme un frisson. C'était vrai, on n'entendait plus creuser. C'était fini.(p. 223)

The tension is underlined by the repetition of fear evoking words and phrases. The silence is described as "tragique", an omen of bad luck which heightens internal worries and fears. The squad becomes mute and motionless. The narrator's heart stops beating as if someone has removed it and is clutching it tightly, refusing to allow it to function normally. A shiver runs down his spine. In all these instances, the sensation of fear dominates everything. It creates an insulated, self-contained world with its own values and rules, one which is unavoidable for even the strongest of men. In chapter III, "Le fanion rouge", Demachy strives anxiously not to show his fellow soldiers his true feelings. He clenches his hands and even sings to

try to convince his companions of his calmness and composure.(p. 61)

In the same chapter, Gilbert is unable to move as he contemplates a battlefield of corpses:

Gilbert n'osait plus avancer, la peur au ventre, les jambes molles ... Il regardait les morts, tous ces morts qu'il avait vus courir à leur atroce destin. Leur grand champ l'effrayait ...(p. 77)

Fear of the pending attack keeps the narrator awake in "La veillée des armes", as his mind becomes totally preoccupied with the designated hour to go over the top. Dorgelès uses exaggeration to emphasize the power that apprehension can exercise over an individual:

Transi, je me remets à danser comme un ours devant mon créneau noir, sans penser à rien qu'à l'heure qui s'écoule ... Toute la tranchée danse, cette nuit. Tout le régiment danse, cette veille d'attaque, toute l'armée doit danser, la France entière danse, de la mer jusqu'aux Vosges ...(p. 127)

Dorgelès is at pains to destroy the traditional heroic and glorious concept of the attack. The squad is rendered silent upon learning from Bouffioux of plans to attack the enemy the following day. There are no celebrations, there is no eager anticipation:

Un bref silence tomba sur nous: juste le temps que le coeur fasse toc toc. Plusieurs ont brusquement pâli; d'imperceptibles petits tics: un nez qui se fripe, une paupière qui saute.(p. 107)

Again the reaction is physical rather than verbal. Dorgelès focusses on the heart beat, the silence, the pale, expressionless faces, the involuntary movements of the soldiers. They have no words, there are no words, which are appropriate to describe the inner torment of their souls. As the hour of the attack approaches, the growing fear of the troops is accentuated by reference again to their silence and

inertia, and comparison to those who are not to take part in the raid:

Aucun ne sort un médaillon de sa poche pour l'embrasser furtivement, aucun non plus ne s'écrie, comme dans les contes: "Enfin! On va sortir des trous!..."

Muets, nous écoutons les hommes de soupe qui parlent d'abondance, l'un relayant l'autre. Ils rangent les troupes, ils installent l'artillerie, ils assurent le ravitaillement, ils étudient l'arrivée des réserves ... Ils parlent, ils parlent.(p. 109)

Dorgelès dismisses optimism and enthusiasm as idealistic concepts. The silence and immobility of those about to go over the top is in total opposition to the activity and noise of the support units. In particular the verb "parler" is emphasized which contrasts directly with the verb "écouter". The adjective "muets" appears to have a numbing effect upon those awaiting orders to go forward, whilst the verbs "ranger", "installer", "assurer", "étudier", on the other hand, all suggest a positive and more optimistic stance from those who have merely been detailed to assist. In chapter XI, "Victoire", as Cruchet gives the order to fix bayonets, the narrator describes the reaction of the troops:

Un frisson d'acier courut tout le long de la tranchée.(p. 265)

Even Cruchet's final words of encouragement and optimism appear less convincing than usual. The narrator wonders whether they are not tinged with emotion and apprehension. During the attack itself, the fear of the soldiers is revealed in several ways. Some find relief by open laughter;(p. 266) others shout insults to give themselves and their comrades greater courage;(p. 269) many simply scream to increase their confidence and rid themselves of their pent-up frustration and tension;(p. 270) some remain silent, afraid to open

their mouths lest they reveal their lack of strength and courage.(p. 389) In chapter XI, "Victoire", it is the fierceness of the bombardment which inspires feelings of terror and panic among the troops:

A chaque coup, le coeur décroché fait un bond; la tête, les entrailles tout saute. On se voudrait petit, plus petit encore, chaque partie de soi-même effraie, les membres se rétractent, la tête bourdonnante et vide veut s'enfoncer, on a peur, enfin, atrocement peur ... Sous cette mort tonnante, on n'est plus qu'un tas qui tremble, une oreille qui guette, un coeur qui craint ...(pp. 275-6)

It is noticeable that Dorgelès again concentrates on the physical reactions of the body and that his description is again controlled and restrained. The experience under fire is conveyed without authorial comment and events are seemingly placed before the reader, to respond as he will. The heart, the head, the bowels and the limbs are all affected by fear. Indeed, the very dignity of man is reduced to merely "un tas qui tremble". With the strong conclusion, "on a peur, enfin, atrocement peur", the reader is left in no doubt as to the alarm and dismay experienced by those in the front lines. Later, in the chapter, during an enemy barrage, it is again the physical reactions of the troops which are portrayed:

Le visage contracté, les poings crispés, les mâchoires serrées, nous comptons les coups. Peu à peu la tête se vide, tout en semblant plus lourde ... On n'entend plus rien que ces explosions infernales qui vous déchirent la poitrine. Ils tirent, ils tirent ... On se sent les jambes molles, les mains froides, le front brûlant. Est-ce cela, la peur?(pp. 283-4)

The plethora of adjectives builds up the atmosphere of the passage to the dramatic ultimate question "Est-ce cela, la peur?" The reader's response, however, is not as free as it would seem. There have been similar descriptions of body reactions to death, attack, bombardment,

earlier in the novel, and where the narrator has commented that fear was the motivating force. A similar conclusion can be drawn here. Again Dorgelès' writing shows control, particularly when dealing with such an emotive subject. This can be seen to the greatest effect, perhaps, in Gilbert's death scene, in chapter IV, "En revenant de Montmartre". As he lies mortally wounded on the battlefield and evening begins to fall, it becomes more and more unlikely that he will be found by stretcher bearers:

La peur le reprit. Pourquoi serait-il seul vivant dans cette forêt hantée? Pour rester couché là, ne fallait-il pas être muet comme eux [les morts], froid comme eux? C'était forcé, il fallait mourir ...

Mais ce seul mot - mourir - le révolta au lieu de l'accabler. Eh bien, non ... Il ne voulait pas mourir, il ne voulait pas! (p. 403)

Dorgelès is dealing with a most difficult concept, the fear of dying. On one hand Gilbert almost feels obliged to yield to death in order to be able to join his friends whose corpses lie strewn around him; on the other hand, however, he revolts against the idea with all his strength. Dorgelès' somewhat objective treatment of an extremely subjective issue, is not accorded a great deal of importance here and is passed over rapidly. Nevertheless the absurdity of the conflict as a whole can never be forgotten or simplified. In the closing lines of chapter V, "La veillée des armes", the narrator shares the following view about the horror and folly of battle:

Il me semble que ma vie entière sera éclaboussée de ces mornes horreurs, que ma mémoire salie ne pourra jamais oublier. Je ne pourrai plus jamais regarder un bel arbre sans supputer le poids du rondin, un coteau sans imaginer la tranchée à contre-pente, un champ inculte sans chercher les cadavres ... Non, ce que je serai embêtant, avec mes histoires de guerre, quand je serai vieux! (pp. 132-3)

This passage may be taken as typical of Dorgelès' sensitivity throughout the novel. In Ce que j'ai appris à la guerre, he writes:

Je hais la guerre, mais j'aime ceux qui l'ont faite. C'est là qu'on a jugé les hommes. D'autres, au contraire, englobent dans la même aversion les combattants et les combats, comme si les victimes étaient responsables du fléau, mais il est facile de lire dans le coeur trouble de ces gens-là. Ce qu'ils détestent, c'est encore moins les braves que la bravoure.⁵³

He refers to the horrors of 1914-18 as "la leçon inutile"⁵⁴ and concludes that "la guerre ne nous a rien appris. Rien, pas même la haine".⁵⁵ It would appear that although Dorgelès recognized the utter absurdity of war and the fear of those who fought but who continued to fight nonetheless, he lacked the politically motivated anger of Barbusse. Unlike Le Feu, the protest in Les Croix de Bois is far from author centred but is spread throughout the novel via the soldiers of the squad. There is no hint of moral or ideological overtones, but a measured response. Whilst Dorgelès' compassion for the troops is seen throughout, it does not reach the intensity of that of Duhamel in Vie des Martyrs and Civilisation. On the contrary, his somewhat dispassionate style allows a more realistic appraisal of the situation to take precedence over a distorted or incomplete one. Meyer remarks about the difference between Dorgelès' letters to his wife and Les Croix de Bois. He points out that the letters often toned down the horror of trench warfare or elaborated upon the truth in order to dramatize the plight of the soldiers:

53. Paris, Editions Montaigne, 1927, p. 88

54. Ibid. p. 81

55. Ibid. p. 92

Tandis qu'il écrit son livre quelques années plus tard, sans doute déçu et meurtri, mais à loisir et d'arrache-pied ... pour "laisser une oeuvre".⁵⁶

It is this initial aim together with the author's composure and avoidance of excessive and exaggerated literary expression that permits a convincing renewal of the absurd reality of life in the trenches which he and his companions shared.

56. "Les Croix de Bois", op. cit. p. 80

CHAPTER IX

Fulfilling the promise

i) Chevallier: LA PEUR - An animated account in retrospect

In Histoire de la Littérature française au XXe siècle, Simon emphasizes the importance of the date 1930 with regard to the literature of war. He writes:

Pour comprendre le mouvement de l'esprit français entre les deux guerres, il est important de remarquer qu'autour de l'année 1930, le vent a tourné. La génération littéraire qui commence à s'exprimer vers cette date est plus sérieuse, moins égoïste, moins joyeuse que celle de ses aînés ... La crise économique, le pressentiment du grand drame dont l'ombre approche, l'idée que la révolution et la guerre sont inévitables, expliquent ce retour à la gravité et cette obsession de l'actualité.¹

Maurice Rieuneau refers to the birth of a "littérature révolutionnaire" and more generally of a "littérature engagée" on the themes of war and peace, as characteristic of this new period.² Gabriel Chevallier would appear to confirm this line of thought in his 1951 preface to La Peur. He writes:

Aux tranchées, quand nous lisions les proses des va-t'en-guerre de l'arrière, nous nous promettions de dire un jour notre vérité de boue et de sang. Nous estimions que nous accomplirions un devoir, de mise en garde d'une part, et d'autre part de fidélité à nos copains morts. Ces pages furent écrites ... pour tenir notre serment du petit poste.(p. 12)

Earlier he claims that former infantry soldiers have read the novel and acknowledged its success in depicting the truth about the horrors of trench warfare.(p. 10) Rieuneau points out, however, that the

1. Tome II, Paris, Armand Colin, 7th edition, 1963, p. 78

2. Guerre et Révolution dans le roman français de 1919 à 1939, op. cit. p. 214

work was not widely noticed by the public in 1930,³ and, indeed, little has been written about it since. Rieuneau continues:

C'est pourtant le type même du livre de protestation contre la guerre et contre la conception noble de la guerre.⁴

The author's personal feeling is stamped throughout the novel via his "personnage autobiographique", Jean Dartemont.⁵ His aim is twofold:

... il s'agit de déprécier la guerre, de détruire un mythe noble.⁶

Writing during the late 1920's with over a decade of retrospection and hindsight, Chevallier does not allow the events and knowledge of these post-war years to dominate the narrative. Nevertheless, it is plain to see where his sympathies lie throughout. Rieuneau continues:

Son livre, vibrant et souvent pathétique, n'est qu'un cri de honte, un témoignage passionné, qui ne cache pas ses intentions et n'affecte pas l'impartialité.⁷

In "La Zone des Armées", Dartemont, the narrator, describes his regiment arriving at the front, towards the end of 1915:

Notre arrivée dans le cercle enchanté fut une désillusion ... nous dûmes fourrier une étape sous la pluie, pendant laquelle nos beaux équipements, nos sacs complets, nos cartouches et nos outils nous pesèrent lourdement ... on nous fit dresser nos tentes sur les pelouses spongieuses ... Cette manoeuvre, à laquelle nous étions maladroits, nous prit beaucoup de temps et se termina dans

3. Ibid. p. 203

4. Ibid. p. 203

5. See Rieuneau, Ibid. p. 205. Dartemont's childhood and later years are recounted in Propre à Rien, 1936. The novel is divided into two parts, "Enfances" dealing with his life up to the outbreak of war in 1914, "Apprentissages" which takes up the story of his career in 1919.

6. Ibid. p. 206

7. Ibid. p. 207

l'obscurité. Puis, déjà mouillés, il nous fallut dormir dans ce marécage.(p. 45)

The use of the first person narrative gives the account a strong air of veracity whilst moulding the reader's response. Chevallier hopes for a similar initial reaction from the reader as from his narrator, one of horror and surprise. Throughout the passage the emphasis upon the wet conditions is evident. The rain falls continually, the ground is spongy due to the amount of water it has soaked up; the soldiers themselves become more and more wet as they struggle to put up their tents and finally have to resign themselves to sleeping in the swampy conditions. The tone of the entire passage is one of utter disillusionment. Chevallier contrasts "cercle enchanté", which symbolizes the front lines and the fascination they held for those who had never witnessed their horrors, with "désillusion"; the "beaux équipements" of which the troops were so proud, at the beginning, now weigh down heavily on their shoulders due to the rain, all their shine has vanished. During an advance through captured enemy lines, marching becomes extremely difficult due to the thick mud and the constant rain:

Une pluie fine se mit à tomber et nous pénétra. La boue recouvrait nos pieds et les maintenait si fortement collés au sol, que pour les retirer, nous devons saisir une de nos jambes à deux mains. Nous nous réchauffions alternativement chaque jambe.(p. 98)

On the whole the horror is exposed undramatically. Towards the end of the novel Chevallier describes the arrival of Dartemont's regiment in the heart of Champagne:

Les grillages de l'averse nous parquent dans un lieu de désolation, l'horizon n'est qu'un ruissellement qui accable et dilue l'esprit. De tristes baraques, souillées de la boue que nous

traînons à nos pieds, font penser à un camp de prisonniers. Nos vêtements sont traversés, nos vivres sont froids et nous manquons de feu ... Dans les environs, nous n'avons aperçu ni un arbre ni une maison. Cette contrée est inhospitalière, hostile, la nature elle-même nous refuse un peu de joie.(p. 333)

The accumulation of words referring to the wet conditions - "les grillages de l'averse", "un ruissellement", "souillées", "traversés" - builds up a picture of total desolation. This is reinforced by the comparison of the troops' billets with a prisoner of war camp. Throughout the passage the reader is very much aware of the views of the author, although direct authorial comment is for the most part avoided and the tone of the description remains restrained. Nevertheless, Chevallier clearly manipulates the reader's reaction throughout. In the first line the environment is described as "un lieu de désolation"; the horizon is "un ruissellement qui accable et dilue l'esprit"; in the final line the countryside is shown as inhospitable even hostile, and Chevallier even affords himself a poetic image as nature is personified but offers little consolation. One is conscious that the facts do not speak for themselves, that the author constantly manipulates them to assure his desired response. In "30° de froid", he directly informs us that much more severe than the rain and the mud was the cold.(p. 239) Chevallier has his protagonist describe how the soldiers in the trenches wore different kinds of clothing in order to keep them warm, especially at night. He describes:

La longueur des nuits est inimaginable. Les craquements du gel font un bruit de cisailles dans les fils de fer ... Nous veillons sur nous, sur des secteurs de notre corps qui se figent, comme si nos artères charriaient des glaçons. L'immobilité nous tient chaud traîtreusement, nous enveloppe d'une dangereuse ouate d'inertie, et il faut un effort de volonté pour recourir aux mouvements, qui agitent le froid, avant de ranimer les flambées de notre sang. Nous

voyons paraître les premières lueurs du jour comme une délivrance.(p. 241)

The constant use of the first person plural throughout the passage personalizes the description of a cold night in the trenches. Chevallier presents us, via Dartemont, quite forcefully, with his memories of the effects of low temperatures on the troops. In order to render the picture more poignant he uses literary images. The noise of the ice cracking in the night is compared with the sound of wire-cutters at work; the soldiers shiver with cold as if their veins were carrying ice cubes and not warm blood;

the cold is almost personified, enveloping the soldiers with a false security, that of immobility, from which they find it increasingly difficult to escape. It takes all their strength and will to rekindle the "flambées" of their blood. There is more than a hint of cool detachment, however, in the description of the discovery of lice in the narrator's clothing:

... ressentant une démangeaison, je glissai ma main dans mon pantalon où quelque chose de mou s'incrusta sous mon ongle. Je retirai mon premier pou, blafard et gras, dont la vue me contracta de dégoût. M'étant isolé derrière une haie, je visitai mes vêtements. L'insecte avait déjà des compagnons, et, dans les coutures, je découvris les points blancs de leurs oeufs. J'étais contaminé, mais il me fallait cependant conserver ces vêtements répugnants, endurer les chatouillements et les morsures de la vermine, à laquelle mon imagination prêtait une activité de tous les instants. L'immonde famille devait désormais prospérer sur mon corps, pendant des mois, et souiller ma vie intime de son pullulement.(p. 50)

Although the narrator admits that the sight of the louse filled him with disgust and that the thought of having to wear contaminated clothing made his imagination render the situation even worse, there appears an unconvincing resignation to the fact. Instead of tearing off his clothes with horror, Dartemont lucidly examines them. The

vocabulary employed is somewhat impassive: "je retirerai mon premier pou", "la vue me contracta de dégoût", "mon imagination prêtait une activité", "L'immonde famille devait prospérer ..." We must consider, however, whether this detracts from the overall attempt at verisimilitude.

Dartemont's first experience of bombardment, related at the beginning of "Le baptême du feu", has a similar mark of distant reflection and composure:

Les premières balles perdues commencèrent de sillonner l'air, mais on distinguait à peine les coups de fusil. Des obus passaient, comme des vols de gros oiseaux, très haut, pour aller tomber dans quelque bas-fond où ils éclataient sourdement. Les fusées maintenant éclairaient un vacillant paysage, recouvraient une nature en loques d'un bref et sinistre clair de lune.(p. 64)

The comparison between shell fire and the passage of large birds overhead fails to enhance the reality of the situation and the flares which light up a trembling countryside, revealing "une nature en loques", conjure up more of a poetic image rather than the true horror of life at the front. Later, Dartemont continues:

... les grenades crépitaient comme des étincelles de machine électrique. Les gros obus ... éclataient au hasard, avec une flamme rouge, nous secouaient de leur souffle fétide, nous entouraient de jaillissements de métal et de pierres qui entamaient parfois nos rangs. De longs hurlements humains dominaient, par instants, tous les bruits, se répercutaient en nous en ondes d'horreur et nous rappelaient, jusqu'à nous rendre flageolants, la lamentable faiblesse de notre chair, au milieu de ce volcan d'acier et de feu.(pp. 73-4)

Chevallier would appear more preoccupied with the literary effect of the passage than depicting the reality of the bombardment. Later Dartemont recalls: "La danse commence!"; he speaks of "la cadence accélérée du pilonnage", explosions which "font chanceler la montagne";(p. 221) and "la colère de l'artillerie".(p. 272) His

imaginative temperament is clearly evident in the description of the aftermath of bombardment, in the depiction of the devastation of the countryside. He points out:

Le bouleversement était admirable. J'étais transporté dans une contrée inconnue, qui ne ressemblait à rien de ce que j'avais pu voir .. Des arbres mutilés étaient figés dans des postures de suppliants. L'un qui portait des feuilles, me fit penser à la poignante gaieté d'un infirme.(p. 65)

and later:

Il semblait que nous avions atteint un lieu de monde qui tenait du rêve, dépassé toutes les bornes du réel et de l'espoir ... Nous étions comme échoués sur quelque banquise interplanétaire, entourée de nuées de soufre, dévastée par des tonnerres soudains. Nous rôdions dans des limbes maudits qui allaient, d'un instant à l'autre, se transformer en enfer.(p. 95)

The alien nature of the landscape is stressed: "une contrée inconnue", "un lieu du monde qui tenait du rêve, dépassé toutes les bornes du réel", "quelque banquise interplanétaire". Mutilated trees are personified and seen as beggars; one is compared to a cripple. In the second passage it is as if the soldiers have been abandoned and left stranded on an inter-planetary ice-bank surrounded by clouds of sulphur. The evil nature of the situation is stressed; the soldiers wander around "des limbes maudits" which threaten, at a given moment, to turn into a nightmarish hell. Within these passages, Chevallier is claiming that the real is no longer the real, that the real has become almost a dreamlike experience with nightmare-like qualities. Despite the figurative language, this sense of alienation which the author tries to convey is just as authentic as the pain of injury or the heroism in suffering that we examined in Duhamel's work. In such adversity man's dignity is

rapidly lost. As with Barbusse and Dorgelès, Chevallier emphasizes the depersonalization, the dehumanization of the soldier in the front lines. His use of the present here and the first person singular renders the description in chapter II, part II, particularly vivid as his protagonist admits:

Je vis comme une bête, une bête qui a faim, puis qui est fatiguée. Jamais je ne me suis senti si abruti, si vide de pensées, et je comprends que l'accablement physique, qui ne laisse pas aux êtres le temps de réfléchir, qui les réduit à ne plus éprouver que des besoins élémentaires, soit un sûr moyen de domination. Je comprends que les esclaves se soumettent si aisément, car il ne leur reste plus de forces disponibles pour la révolte, ni l'imagination pour la concevoir, ni l'énergie pour la concerter.(p. 244)

Having returned to the trenches after a spell in the reserve lines, Dartemont finds it difficult to believe that the soldiers still refuse to give in to death:

... je m'étonne que ce bétail, où je suis confondu, ait encore tant de résistance à opposer à la mort.(p. 246)

In chapter IV, part I, again the symbol of the beast is used to stress the degradation of man:

Les hommes ... ne furent plus qu'un gibier traqué, des animaux sans dignité dont la carcasse n'agissait que par l'instinct.(p. 72)

As the narrator's battalion prepare to attack in "Le Chemin des Dames", the troops are described as ghastly and dejected, abandoned by God, and condemned by their commanding officers. There is a use of biblical imagery as the infantry await their own crucifixion, with no hope of divine or terrestrial help. Dartemont's final comment is almost theatrical:

Désserter! Il n'est plus temps ...(p. 283)

The attacking infantry men, subjected to the shells and bullets of the enemy's defences, are compared to worms, wriggling desperately in order to avoid the gardener's spade. Chevallier concludes:

Toutes les déchéances sont consommées, acceptées. Etre homme est le comble de l'horreur.(p. 284)

The soldiers in La Peur are essentially passive beings. Rieuneau remarks in Guerre et Révolution dans le roman français de 1919 à 1939:

... ils subissent les bombardements, subissent les corvées pénibles, subissent les blessures, subissent la boue, la pluie, les poux, les rats. On devrait dire "subir la guerre" et non "faire la guerre."⁸

In chapter V, part I, "La barricade", Chevallier has his protagonist emphasize the excessive weariness of the troops who gradually become unaware of time, place and distance, and who cease to think.(p. 90) He writes:

Nous étions aussi pâles que les cadavres qui nous environnaient, sales et fatigués, l'estomac tenaillé par la faim et secoués par les frissons glacés du matin.(p. 95)

Again the author's grief is kept in check but the use of imagery to stress the pain and suffering is ever present, as the soldiers are compared to the corpses which surround them. So inhuman are the living conditions of the front lines themselves, that Dartemont compares them with the most basic lifestyles of primitive man.(p. 65) He also stresses the impersonal treatment of the soldiers by their commanding officers. In "La zone des armées", he relates the

8. Op. cit. p. 206

incident of an infantry regiment's colonel who constantly maltreats the soldiers under his directive;(p. 55) in "L'hôpital", Nègre, a sergeant from Limoges and the occupant of the next bed to Dartemont, tells the story of "le général baron de Pocolote", whose military strategy takes no account of the human lives it expends. According to Pocolote, war is not a question of economy but of destruction.(p. 129) Chevallier expresses a similar view in the closing pages of the novel as Dartemont recollects the years of battle after the cessation of hostilities:

A vingt ans, nous étions sur les mornes champs de bataille de la guerre moderne, où l'on usine les cadavres en scie, où l'on ne demande au combattant que d'être une unité du nombre immense et obscur qui fait les corvées et reçoit les coups, une unité de cette multitude qu'on détruisait patiemment, bêtement, à raison d'une tonne d'acier par livre de jeune chair.(p. 378)

The emotion and bitterness is controlled; the tone is one of detachment and objectivity. Nevertheless, again Dartemont uses figurative language to emphasize the horror of the situation. Corpses are butchered as if in a factory; each individual soldier is seen as a unit of a much larger impersonal force which one destroys "patiemment" yet "bêtement". The description is brutally analytic, ironic in the disproportionate equation between steel and flesh. It is only away from the horrors of the front that the soldiers have the chance to regain their human status. In "L'hôpital", Chevallier shows the effects of the warm-heartedness and understanding of the nursing staff under the direction of Mlle. Nancey, the "infirmière-major". Dartemont comments:

La jeune fille m'adossa aux oreillers, posa une cuvette sur mon lit et me nettoya la figure. Je changeai de tête. Du masque hâve, tatoué d'horreur et de fatigue, que m'avaient donné vingt jours de

combat, sortit mon vrai visage d'homme destiné à vivre, mon visage de l'arrière.(p. 141)

Ironically, like a beast that sheds its skin, Dartemont's appearance is dramatically transformed: "Je changeai de tête". When he first arrives at the hospital his facial traits resemble a mask, distorted by the physical horrors of trench warfare. It is as if he has been tattooed with pain, fear and fatigue. Symbolically however, as he becomes accustomed to the comfort of the hospital, his real face, "visage de l'arrière", gradually reveals itself. The dramatic effect is maximised. Dartemont now becomes "[un] homme destiné à vivre" as opposed to "un homme destiné à mourir" in the trenches.

Dartemont's recourse to literary technique is also apparent in his portrayal of the wounded. In "La barricade", they are compared to fugitives; their wounds appear less significant than the white bandaging which contrasts noticeably with their mud covered bodies, and which is stained red, in places, with blood. Their groans are set in opposition to the silence of the stretcher casualties. Four soldiers are described as carrying one man whose arm has been torn off. The full horror of the situation, however, is not realized as Chevallier appears more interested in the moral implications of such horrific slaughter. The torn muscles which are clearly visible in the gaping wound are described as "effilochés", more appropriate for the description of frayed material; the emphasis, however, is placed upon the injured man's cries for help from a seemingly empty heaven. Chevallier focusses interest on the apparent absence of God and his lack of interest'(p. 83) In "Secteurs calmes", Petitjean receives a mortal shell which badly damages both of his legs. The situation is almost poeticized:

Ses yeux regardent fixement le ciel et en reçoivent un léger reflet qui les nuance en bleu pâle, comme une porcelaine délicate. Puis il les ferme, il s'isole dans son malheur qui le sépare de nous.(p. 228)

The comparison drawn between the dying man's eyes and delicate china detracts from the gravity of the situation.⁹ There is irony in chapter III, part II, "le Chemin des dames" when, as the wounded utter their "plaintes animales", the sun bathes the plateau with "rayons-tièdes".(p. 288) There is a similar use of literary technique in the detailed descriptions of the injuries:

Ceux qui sont gravement touchés ont les mains crispées sur la déchirure par où s'écoule leur vie en une fontaine de sang, repassent leur destinée derrière leurs yeux clos et se débattent dans la brume envahissante de l'agonie.(p. 289)

The badly wounded, in traditional heroic gesture, clutch their wounds from which their life flows in a fountain of blood. This elevated expression continues as they are described as fighting for their lives when the hazy depths of the pain begin to cloud over their threatened existences. In "La barricade" the death-rattles of the wounded contrast against the calmness and quietness of no man's land. Chevallier has Dartemont react philosophically:

Dans ces cris, nous reconnaissons les cris que nous portons en nous, qui sortiront de nous, ce soir peut-être ... Il semble que les deux armées se soient tuées pour écouter, et, dans leurs tranchées, doivent rougir de honte.(p. 103)

Later, he describes the confusion and chaos of a casualty clearing station in the reserve lines:

9. See *La Peur* p. 295. As Dartemont's regiment advances in "Le Chemin des Dames" the horrific sight of one dead soldier, as his brain spills out of his crushed skull, is likened to "une mousse rose".

Toutes les couchettes sont prises. Leurs occupants épuisent la gamme des intonations de la douleur et du désespoir. Certains sentent venir la mort et luttent contre elle farouchement, avec des imprécations et des gestes frénétiques. D'autres au contraire laissent partir leur vie en un mince filet de fluide, avec des soupirs étouffés. D'autres exhalent des gémissements rauques, réguliers, par quoi ils bercent leur souffrance. D'autres implorent pour qu'on les soulage; d'autres pour qu'on les aide à en finir. D'autres appellent à leurs secours des êtres que nous ne connaissons pas. D'autres, dans le délire, se battent toujours, poussent d'inhumains cris de guerre.(p. 112)

The patients' groans are said to exhaust the scale of hurt and pain. Throughout the passage Chevallier adopts a careful, analytic approach which gives examples of "la gamme des intonations". There is contrast between those who frantically try to fight off death and those who accept the inevitable. "Des imprécations et des gestes frénétiques" are directly set against "des soupirs étouffés". The poetic image of those who "laissent partir leur vie en un mince filet de fluide" contrasts with those who "luttent ... farouchement". Ironically, "des gémissements rauques" appear to have a soothing effect. There is contrast between the wounded who desperately want to live and those who will on death; between those who consciously cry out and those who shout unintelligibly, in delirium. Dartemont goes on to describe three of the wounded soldiers. In each case the real and the literary are juxtaposed. One has a horrific wound to the jaw and mouth:

le trou hideux de sa bouche ... est une fontaine de sang épais.(p. 113)

Another soldier has been blinded and wears a bandage which covers his eyes:

"[il] lève la tête vers le ciel, dans l'espoir de capter une faible lueur par le soupirail de ses orbites ...(p. 113)

The third soldier has lost both hands. Instead of stressing the pain, Chevallier places emphasis on verbs which involve "touch" in order to express his misery:

Elles lui manquent déjà pour souffrir, pour satisfaire ce besoin si naturel, si habituel, qui consiste à les porter à l'endroit douloureux, qu'elles servent afin de calmer. Elles lui manquent pour se tordre, se crispier et supplier. Celui-là ne pourra jamais plus toucher.(p. 113)

All three wounded men are described as "blocs boueux" who have the look of "chiens qui rampent devant le fouet". The narrator continues:

Ils soutiennent leurs membres brisés et psalmodient le chant lugubre monté des profondeurs de leur chair.(p. 113)

Again literary imagery is used, comparing the cries of the injured with the chanting of ominous songs which come from the depths of their lacerated bodies. Chevallier clearly depicts the chaos of such makeshift hospitals:

Les infirmiers sont débordés. Ils vont d'une couchette à l'autre surveiller les râles. Dès que ces râles ne sont plus que des balbutiements, qui indiquent que le moribond est au seuil du néant, on sort l'homme qui achèvera de mourir dehors, aussi bien, et l'on apporte à sa place un autre blessé qui a des chances de vivre. Le choix sans doute n'est pas toujours heureux, mais les infirmiers font pour le mieux, et tout dans la guerre est une loterie.(p. 114)

The use of the present tense throughout renders the situation much more vivid. The use of frequent punctuation adds an element of lucidity, clarity, which gives the entire account an objective appearance. Nevertheless, Chevallier's presence is always indirectly

felt and towards the end of the passage, this again becomes evident: "les infirmiers font pour le mieux, et tout dans la guerre est une loterie". Again the tone of all the above passages dealing with the injured at casualty stations is one of detachment and restraint. The use of figurative language creates an image of reality but an image intended to explain. In chapter IV, part I, Phlegmon has a wounded leg which has become infected. Chevallier writes:

On a fait une longue entaille, fouillé jusqu'à l'os et sillonné de drains; il est plein de tuyauteries comme une machine. Les draps levés, l'odeur de cette cuisse est pénible, pareille à une odeur de halle pendant l'été.(p. 129)

The smell of his wound is likened to that of a market in summer. Peignard has had the bone removed from part of his foot, it is "désossé", a term which usually applies to meat. In both instances Chevallier uses the explicable to evoke the inexplicable. With calmness and lack of emotion, Dartemont observes how the motionless foot pulls on the leg and thigh, making the groin swollen and sending sensations of pain right through the stomach and straight to the heart.(p. 130) We are told that Mouchetier's hand has been amputated and thrown on the garbage pile, "la voirie". Dartemont explains how the nervous system still sends impulses to the stump which, in turn, transfers a haunting sensation to the brain.(p. 131) Chevallier directly intervenes at this stage, via Dartemont, to point out that of all the patients, those who had been mutilated were the most pessimistic:

Il leur est trop cruel de penser qu'ils ont perdu un membre juste au dernier moment, qu'avec un peu de chance ils auraient pu revenir intacts. Ils préfèrent croire que la mutilation leur a non seulement assurée la vie, mais qu'elle les épargnera des années de souffrance.(p. 132)

The serious cases in the ward are treated with the same indifference and lack of passion. One soldier suffers from a perforated intestine. His wound is described as smelling like a latrine; his face is compared with an old ivory colour, then, as he begins to deteriorate, it is as though covered by grey dust which has not been swept away; his beard begins to rapidly spread across his face and is likened to ivy growing across the façade of a building.(p. 133) Another suffers badly from gangrene of the arm and leg. Dartemont recalls:

On le dispute à la pourriture par morceaux, de quinze à vingt centimètres chaque fois ... Il passe ... à certaines heures, d'horribles cris. Mais personne ne murmure contre ces cris, parce que la situation du malheureux est effrayante, et le demeurera, même s'il guérit. Nous nous étonnons au contraire que ces cris soient si rares et que son corps ait tant de résistance.(p. 134)

Again the horror is depicted with a lucidity and clarity of tone. Even when portraying the dead, Chevallier uses colourful vocabulary and literary imagery. In "Le baptême du feu", Dartemont surveys the battlefield at Neuville-Saint-Vaast. Many of the soldiers are so badly decomposed that all that remains of their face is a mask, but, "d'une horreur magnifique". The narrator compares this to a bronze statue, weathered by the elements. On one corpse's face, tears appear to have trickled down one of the cheeks, Dartemont explains that this is most probably "une pâte durcie qui devait être de la cervelle". He concludes the description in poetic fashion. "Une main pieuse" appears to have closed one of the corpse's eyes; his mouth remains fixed with the traditional, final agonizing scream spread across his lips; "découvrant les dents, grande ouverte, pour

crâcher l'âme comme un caillot".(p. 66) In "La barricade" Dartemont relates the journey to relieve soldiers in the front lines. One of his companions stumbles over what appears to be a rotting mass and reveals "un homme de cire" with "une bouche sans haleine" and "des yeux sans expression".(p. 91) It transpires that this particular corpse appears to be "le gardien d'un royaume de morts".(p. 92) Dartemont describes the scene:

Des cadavres dans toutes les postures, ayant subi toutes les mutilations, tous les déchirements et tous les supplices. Des cadavres entiers, sereins et corrects comme des saints de châsses; des cadavres intacts, sans trace de blessure; des cadavres barbouillés de sang, souillés et comme jetés à la curée de bêtes immondes; des cadavres calmés, résignés, sans importance; des cadavres terrifiants d'êtres qui s'étaient refusés à mourir, ceux-là furieux, dressés, bombés, hagards, qui réclamaient la justice et qui maudissaient ... Et des fragments de cadavres, des lambeaux de corps et de vêtements, des organes, des membres dépareillés, des viandes humaines rouges et violettes, pareille à des viandes de boucherie gâtées ... des entrailles déroulées, comme des vers ignobles que nous écrasions en frémissant.(p. 92)

Chevallier's approach is again analytic, punctuated with rhetorical repetition. The wealth of adjectives used here almost over-describes the situation to the extent that the horror is almost "diluted" as it is spread out further and further. The repetition of "cadavres" lends a certain literary structure to the passage; "des cadavres ... sereins" contrast with "des cadavres terrifiants", "des cadavres ... sans trace de blessure" with "des cadavres barbouillés de sang", "des cadavres calmés, résignés", with "des cadavres ... furieux ... qui maudissaient", "des cadavres intacts" with "des fragments de cadavres, des lambeaux de corps". The narrator seems to be searching for suitable adjectives to describe the worse mutilations. They are referred to simply as "des viandes humaines rouges" and compared to tainted meat in a butcher's shop. The bowels and innards of these

masses which lie strewn across the ground are compared to vile worms which the troops tread on and crush. Chevallier does not merely depict the scene of carnage, however. He leaves the reader in no doubt as to his own thoughts and concludes:

Le corps de l'homme mort est un objet de dégoût insurmontable pour celui qui vit, et ce dégoût est bien la marque de l'anéantissement complet.(p. 92)

As Dartemont surveys the plain outside the trenches, there is even more horror. As far as the eye can see the countryside is littered with the corpses of French soldiers. Again figurative vocabulary is used in order to picture the unbelievable scene:

... la plaine était bleue ... Des champs de héros, des chargements pour les nocturnes tombereaux ...(pp. 92-3)

Chevallier actually includes a footnote in the text to excuse and explain the apparent excessiveness of the word "bleue". He claims that, to a young soldier who had just spent a tiring and frightening night in the trenches, such exaggeration was perfectly admissible. The use of the footnote would appear to illustrate Chevallier's own sensitivity to the effects of his descriptions. As a reader, one must question to what extent they are vraisemblable or indeed exaggerated episodes of reality. One corpse appears to be laughing. There is irony in the fact that, although he appears content to be dead, as Dartemont moves closer he notices that half his face is missing and that the inside of his head is completely empty:

La cervelle, qui avait roulé d'un bloc, était posée bien proprement à côté de lui-comme une pièce chez le tripier - près de sa main qui la désignait.(p. 94)

There is a certain detachment about this description which reflects the years of retrospection and analysis of which the author has clearly had the benefit. The description of the brain as a neat, compact "bloc" which has come to rest "bien proprement" beside the soldier is hardly credible, and yet, if it were true, would serve to emphasize the ghastliness of the situation all the more. The comparison between the brain and a piece of tripe at the tripe-dealers again detracts from the true horror of the situation, which is rendered even more grotesque by the suggestion that the soldier's hand is pointing to the brain as if to indicate its owner. On the other hand, the grotesqueness could add to the horror, if the veracity of the overall picture is deemed convincing. A similar question over verisimilitude can be seen when the protagonist describes the discovery of individual corpses buried or half-visible in the trenches themselves. In "La zone des armées", Dartemont describes the deepening of a trench and the spade of one soldier which penetrates a hidden corpse:

Une puanteur envahit la tranchée, nous mit sur la bouche un irrespirable tampon, nous planta au bord des paupières des aiguilles empoisonnées qui nous tirèrent des larmes. Ce geyser pestilentiel sema la panique parmi les travailleurs ...(pp. 58-9)

Again the language is highly figurative. It is as if each soldier has had fixed to his mouth a wad of material impregnated with an unbreathable substance or poisoned needles placed beneath the eyelids which draw tears from the eyes. The punctured corpse is compared to a "geyser pestilentiel" and the exaggerated effect can be seen as the troops panic and try to escape from the area. Nevertheless, as the

smell worsens, its effect becomes more outrageous and the author's language even more excessive:

Le cadavre développa ses ondes atroces, prit possession de la nuit, nous pénétra jusqu'au fond des poumons de sa décomposition, régna dans le silence ... Mais nos corps avaient flairé l'odeur horrible et féconde de la pourriture, qui est vie et mort, et longtemps cette odeur picota nos muqueuses, fit sécréter nos glandes ... Notre pourriture promise, et peut-être prochaine, communiait dans cette pourriture puissante, à son apogée, qui domine l'âme livide et la chasse.(p. 59)

The corpse is described as taking complete control of the situation, its "ondes atroces" penetrate the night air and its macabre form dominates the digging party. Chevallier expands, however, his protagonist's literary technique at this point. There is almost a visionary outlook at the end of the passage as the overwhelming sensation of decomposition and putrefaction infiltrates and takes over the bodies of the living, suggesting perhaps the future when they too might be little more than a rotting mass. Similarly in "La barricade", Dartemont remembers one sap which appears to be guarded by a corpse of which only the head and one hand remains visible. One of the fingers seems to point towards the soldiers as they leave and enter, as if to remind them of their mortality.(p. 97)

Throughout La Peur the narrator and chief protagonist, Dartemont, is endowed with a colourful and vivid vocabulary. For the most part events are dramatized, poeticized and the language used, pictorial and figurative. Chevallier's writing is far removed from the "littérature de témoignage" of the war years and shortly afterwards, and moves towards "une littérature animée par une conscience historique véritable".¹⁰ The choice of literary form with

10. See Rieuneau op. cit. p. 212

a principal character who is most likely a "porte-parole" for the author, is Chevallier's preference for describing "notre vérité" to which he refers in the preface. Nevertheless one cannot help but feel that in comparison to Le Feu, Les Croix de Bois, Vie des martyrs, the overall horror and indignation is considerably toned down. Rieuneau writes:

Gabriel Chevallier n'insiste que modérément sur les horreurs de la guerre. Peut-être que dans ce domaine on avait tout dit et avec une force difficile à surpasser.¹¹

Writing some ten years after the armistice, Chevallier's own horror and anger have become more restrained; there are no real battles described and the very hint of heroism is destroyed by the admission that Dartemont has never even seen a living German, let alone killed many enemy troops. Although he hides behind Dartemont for the most part of the novel, facts and incidents are never allowed to speak for themselves and one senses that, throughout, Chevallier is very close to Dartemont in everything that he says and does, occasionally intervening to lend support and to try to convince the reader of the authenticity and veracity of his report.

ii) De-glamorizing the myth: a personalized approach

In the "préface" to the 1951 edition of La Peur, Chevallier makes clear his reason for writing the novel. He speaks of "Ce livre, tourné contre la guerre", (p. 9) which, because of its intense protest against the absurdity of war, was suspended from publication in 1939, with mutual agreement between author and publisher. Chevallier explains:

11. Ibid. p. 203

Quand la guerre est là, ce n'est plus le moment d'avertir les gens qu'il s'agit d'une sinistre aventure aux conséquences imprévisibles. Il fallait le comprendre avant et agir en conséquence.(p. 9)

It would appear that the aim of La Peur, then, is to show and to warn people of the monstrosity of combat, and to destroy the traditional, heroic image of war. Chevallier continues:

On enseignait dans ma jeunesse - lorsque nous étions au front - que la guerre était moraliste, purificatrice et rédemptrice. On a vu quels prolongements ont eus ces turlutaines: mercantils, trafiquants, marché noir, délations, trahisons, fusillades, tortures; et famine, tuberculose, typhus, terreur, sadisme. De l'héroïsme, d'accord. Mais la petite, l'exceptionnelle proportion d'héroïsme ne rachète pas l'immensité du mal.(p. 9)

He admits that he wrote from memory and that he had no documentation or records from which to work, but that he was determined to use his own experiences to show what he calls, "la malfaisance de la guerre", and to revoke its prestigious attraction. He points out:

Quand je pensais, jeune démobilisé de 1919, que la guerre n'était que stupidité et monstruosité, je ne croyais pas voir si clair ni si en avance sur mon temps.(p. 12)

It would seem that he feels that his message has every significance in contemporary society, as the possibility of war can never be dismissed. Pacifism and antimilitarism, he claims, are now essential components for the progress of mankind. A future without them would be, in Chevallier's opinion, human suicide:

Où l'on cassera la planète, on brisera des morceaux de continents. Ou le ravage atomique fera de pays entiers de nouveaux déserts de Gobi, de nouveaux Saharas. Les survivants, fuyant les cités foudroyées, se réfugieront dans les anfractuosités du sol, privés d'industrie, d'électricité, de carburant, et enfin, d'armes. On peut entrevoir, soit le retour à l'âge des cavernes, soit les funèbres entrechats de la fin du monde.

Eviter la guerre, c'est maintenant une précaution qui ne concerne plus seulement les patries, mais la Terre entière.(pp. 12-13)

However, Chevallier recognizes humanity's weakness and failure to learn from the past and therefore considers that the testimony contained in La Peur, is still of invaluable nature:

Ce livre, dans l'esprit de l'auteur, était un cri d'alarme. Il l'est resté.(p. 13)

Furthermore, he considers the novel to be innovative, as few other accounts emphasize the sensation of fear in war and, in particular, scarcely any author who has participated himself, admits his own fear. He adds:

L'auteur du présent livre estima qu'il y aurait improbité à parler de la peur de ses camarades sans parler de la sienne. C'est pourquoi il décida de prendre la peur à son compte, d'abord à son compte. Quant à parler de la guerre sans parler de la peur, sans la mettre au premier plan, c'eût été de la fumisterie.(p. 10)

In Guerre et Révolution dans le roman français de 1919 à 1939, Rieuneau acknowledges:

Peu d'écrivains ont consacré tant de pages à montrer les effets dégradants de la peur sur l'animal humain.¹²

He points out that, although it is not easy to portray the feeling of fear, to ignore it and to remain silent simply perpetrates the traditional image of war increasing its influential impact on those farthest from the front. He argues strongly in favour of Chevallier's approach:

12. Op. cit. p. 206

Il faut au contraire montrer ce que fait la peur d'un homme, en le montrant à nu, sans les pieux arrangements ni les fausses pudeurs des chroniques bien-pensantes. Le goût de l'analyse psychologique vraie nourrit ainsi la passion antibelliciste.¹³

Chevallier's portrayal of fear is even more striking and vivid because he writes in the first person. In chapter IV, part I, "Le baptême du feu", Dartemont, the narrator, describes the silent suffering of a group of soldiers under enemy shell fire, in the front lines:

Je vis mes camarades pâles, les yeux fous, se bousculer et s'amonceler pour ne pas être frappés seuls, secoués comme des pantins par les sursauts de la peur, étreignant le sol et s'y enfouissant le visage. Les éclatements étaient si continus que leur souffle chaud et âcre éleva la température de cet endroit et que nous transpirions d'une sueur qui se glaçait sur nous, mais nous ne savions plus si ce froid n'était pas de la chaleur. Nos nerfs se contractaient sous des brûlures d'entaille, car plus d'un se crut blessé et ressentit, jusqu'au coeur, la déchirure terrible que sa chair imaginait à force de la redouter. (p. 72)

The collective fear of the group gives rise to the basic animal instincts of survival. They huddle closely together in their trench so as to gain in confidence, embracing the ground tightly and burying their faces into the soil for maximum protection. There is use of simile, as their coiled up bodies are compared to those of Jumping-jacks. Chevallier manages to enter into the minds of his characters, as his narrator admits that such was the tension and apprehension, that many soldiers experienced the pain and anguish of shrapnel and bullets tearing away their flesh, even though they had not been wounded. In chapter V, "La barricade", Dartemont relates a similar sensation, as he and a group of soldiers take cover from the enemy barrage in a Russian sap:

13. Ibid. pp. 206-7

Notre coeur nous déchirait d'explosions internes, ébranlait les parois de notre thorax pour s'échapper. La terreur nous frappait de suffocations, comme une angine de poitrine. Et nous avions sur la langue, comme une amère hostie, notre âme, que nous ne voulions pas vomir, que nous ravalions avec des mouvements de déglutition qui nous contractaient la gorge.(p. 96)

Again, the account is not only a personal one but manages to penetrate into the individual's consciousness. Clearly, any sentiment is extremely difficult to put into words. Here, Chevallier uses vocabulary and idiom that would normally be used to depict the external devastation of shell fire, to portray the internal chaos and confusion provoked in the soldiers due to their fear. The narrator describes a series of internal explosions which tear at his heart, swiftly mount into his throat, loosen the walls of his thorax and almost suffocate him, as they try to escape. It is almost like a severe spasm which appears to send his soul into his mouth and which he has to fight hard not to vomit. The whole sensation leaves a pungent taste to his palate which is compared to a bitter tasting host taken at communion. The vividness of the description is completed with an onomatopoeic ending, as Dartemont tries to swallow, which results only in a further tightening of the throat muscles. The powerlessness which the narrator and his companions experience here is echoed in part II, chapter VI, "Cessez le feu!", where a whole trench of soldiers press themselves flat to the ground, as enemy 150 and 88 batteries shell the front lines. Dartemont again describes a tightening of the throat and bowels.(p. 367)¹⁴ Although

14. See p. 269. In part II, chapter III, "Le Chemin des Dames", Dartemont is overcome by severe intestinal pains as the enemy bombardment intensifies. "Mes entrailles fermentent, se gonflent, exercent des poussées qui vont faire céder les muscles. Mon corps me trahit ..."

their bodies are intermingled like some strange reptile, each man feels strangely isolated in his predicament:

Chacun se sent seul et se débat les yeux fermés dans ses ténèbres, dans le coma de la peur. Chacun a l'impression qu'on le voit, qu'on le cherche, et se cache dans les ventres, dans les jambes, se couvre, se protège des autres corps qui se détendent et lui communiquent leurs sursauts de bêtes à la torture. Les visions repoussantes que la guerre nous a imposées depuis des années nous hallucinent et nous dominent. (p. 368)

Unable to move as the terror spreads through their bodies, it is as if each soldier succumbs to a prolonged unconsciousness during which he is tormented by oppressive illusions of the past. This feeling of isolation and experience of hallucination is described by Dartemont in part II, chapter III, "Le Chemin des Dames", as the troops receive orders to go over the top.

Nous nous regardons, et nos regards avouent notre détresse. Nous n'avons pas le courage de dire un mot ...

Puis, c'est un lourd silence. Les hommes retombent dans l'immobilité, se réfugient dans le noir pour grimacer. Chacun demeure stupide, assommé, la gorge serrée par le noeud coulant de l'angoisse: on attaque! Chacun s'isole avec ses pressentiments, son désespoir, rassure, contraint sa chair indignée, révoltée, lutte contre les visions hideuses, contre les cadavres ... La funèbre veillée commence. (p. 277)

Each soldier withdraws into the shadows of the trenches to manage his own fear. Regarded as a sign of weakness, none can bring himself to admit to being afraid and yet, clearly, everyone shares the same sensation. At a time when a collective spirit is needed the most, Chevallier shows the reader how each individual confronts his own despair of the future, with little success. There is something distinctly morbid about the hours prior to an attack. As each man tries to come to terms with his ghastly visions of death, the entire scene is comparable to a funeral vigil. Once out of the trenches,

Dartemont describes the overriding feeling of fear which metaphorically paralyzes the brain to all external considerations:

La panique nous botta les fesses. Nous franchîmes comme des tigres les trous d'obus fumants, dont les lèvres étaient des blessés, nous franchîmes les appels de nos frères, ces appels sortis des entrailles et qui touchent aux entrailles, nous franchîmes la pitié, l'honneur, la honte, nous rejetâmes tout ce qui est sentiment, tout ce qui élève l'homme, prétendent les moralistes - ces imposteurs qui ne sont pas sous les bombardements et exaltent le courage! Nous, fûmes lâches, le sachant, et ne pouvant être que cela. Le corps gouvernait, la peur commandait.(p. 88)

Man becomes an unthinking and callous creature who can no longer be held responsible for his own actions, which border on the insane. Chevallier's sentences are long and flowing in an attempt to convey the gradual spreading of the feeling of terror. The repetition of "nous franchîmes" emphasizes the losing of self-control which each soldier experiences, building up to a total sense of powerlessness. The climax is short and poignant, built around the verbs "gouverner" and "commander". The heart and soul have been overpowered. Man is ruled by his body, but what is more important, and significantly placed at the end of the description for greater impact, his actions are controlled by his fear. Dartemont comments:

Je n'imagine pas du tout le combat, je n'ai aucun réflexe de soldat. Je me dis: "Tout cela est idiot, absolument idiot!" Et je cours, je cours comme si j'étais pressé.
Ai-je peur? Ma raison a peur. Mais je ne la consulte pas.
Idiot, idiot!(p. 108)

As the attack gets under way, the narrator finds his faculty of reasoning subordinate to his fear. Although he recognizes this, he is powerless to effect any change. In an attack in the "Chemin des Dames" sector, later in the novel, he describes a similar feeling and elaborates in the following manner:

La pensée cesse de fonctionner, de comprendre. L'âme se sépare du corps, l'accompagne comme un ange gardien impuissant, qui pleure. Le corps paraît suspendu par une ficelle, comme un pantin. Rétracté, il se hâte et trébuche sur ses petites jambes molles ...

.. Chacun pour soi. Nous courons, cernés. La peur agit maintenant comme un ressort, décuple les moyens de la bête, la rend insensible.(p. 285)

Dartemont describes a complete breakdown in the process of analysis and synthesis. There is a hint of metaphysics as the soul appears to separate from the body and is likened to a guardian angel without power. The soldier's body is compared to that of a puppet, controlled by external forces which gradually manipulate his every limb and dominate his every movement. Gradually, he is rendered completely insensitive and almost animalistic in behaviour. As the enemy lines come into view, the heightened emotion of the individual becomes extreme, transforming itself into hatred, into a desire to kill. The narrator explains:

L'excès d'angoisse nous a donné cette joie féroce. La peur nous a rendus cruels. Nous avons besoin de tuer pour nous rassurer et nous venger.(p. 287)

Fear renders man aware of the basic instincts of survival; he becomes intoxicated with every success, until, almost paradoxically, his initial vulnerability results in a somewhat powerful, but, unstable confidence. Dartemont describes the feeling amongst the troops as the enemy trench lines are taken and preparations made for their consolidation:

Le succès nous a donné de l'assurance, une grande force. Nous nous sentons une extraordinaire élasticité, qui vient de notre désir de vivre, et la volonté farouche de nous défendre. Vraiment, là, en plein jour, le sang bien chaud, nous ne craignons pas d'autres hommes.(p. 287)

Clearly, there is a gradual increase in their self-assurance. Success creates within each man "une grande force", which develops into "une extraordinaire élasticité", stimulated by their desire to stay alive and resulting in a powerful assertiveness. Nevertheless, as soon as the height of battle dies down and the adrenalin begins to decrease, the feeling of fear, which has never truly been overcome, takes hold again. Dartemont observes:

Notre ardeur tombe peu à peu, notre courage se dissipe comme une torpeur d'ivrogne, l'inquiétude revient pour l'avenir ... Nous espérons qu'à la nuit on nous retirera d'ici. Mais, avant la nuit, il peut se passer bien des choses. (p. 288)

The scene parallels the above; in this incident each man's self-assurance gradually decreases, however, as his body mechanism returns to normal. At first there is a cooling down of the individual's ardent enthusiasm; his courage gives way to apathy; his inertia is compared to the sluggishness of a drunkard. Anxiety returns and the final sentence shows a pessimistic view of the future. As the troops slowly become aware of the return to normal of their surrounds, of the renewed noise of cannon fire and shell explosions, their "cycle of fear" begins again. Dartemont explains:

Nous nous cachons, nous ne voulons pas qu'on nous découvre, et, si nous entendons appeler, nous ne répondrons pas. C'est assez! Nous avons assez fait aujourd'hui. Nous ne voulons plus sortir, traverser le plateau sous les barrages, compter sur un nouveau miracle pour sauver notre vie. Nous dissimulons nos visages, nous faisons semblant de dormir. Mais nous écoutons de toutes nos forces, avec désespoir, avec terreur, ce qui se passe au-dessus de nous - malades! Là-haut, c'est une charge de troupes d'éléphants qui piétinent et qui broient. Les obus sont maîtres. Nous avons peur, peur ... (p. 292)

The preponderance of negatives in the opening lines of the passage strengthens the feeling of pessimism within each individual. Clearly

there is the fear that further action will greatly reduce the probability of their survival. As the troops hide themselves, cover their faces, feign sleep, resort to any action which will lessen the chances of participation in additional exercises that particular evening, a recognizable picture of the despair and misery, which led to the mutinies of 1917, is built up. As they realize that the next bombardment may be merely a prelude to an assault similar to the one in which they have just taken part, their cycle of fear returns them not to their original position, but, indeed, to an even more negative position. Their recent experiences magnify external events. Shellbursts are compared to the noise of a charge of elephants: missiles and projectiles clearly dominate. Soldiers become almost ill with terror and despair, with the thought of having to sacrifice themselves yet again in the most impersonal of conflicts. The repetition of "peur" emphasizes that they have almost reached breaking point. In part II, chapter V, "En Champagne", even the words "passer le parapet" have a chilling effect on the frontline soldiers.(p. 357) In part II, chapter I, "Secteurs calmes", Dartemont recalls comrades who have fought and survived the battle of Verdun:

Ils disent qu'à leur retour ils sont restés plusieurs jours avant de pouvoir manger normalement, tellement leur estomac était serré, tellement ils avaient pris le dégoût de tout. Ils n'ont conservé de là-bas aucun souvenir qui ne soit d'épouvante et d'égarement.(p. 206)

He describes an intensification of the initial after-effects of fear, as time passes. The effect upon morale and performance is devastating. Soldiers on leave or convalescence grow in fear of returning to the trenches. In part I, chapter VI, "L'hôpital",

Dartemont hopes ardently that the discharge date on his record card will not be filled in for some time(p. 121); as he and fellow patients discuss a possible end to the hostilities, he speaks on behalf of all:

Nous espérons moins un dénouement triomphal que la fin, qui nous rendra la sécurité. Y retourner est un programme qui nous glace d'horreur et nous refusons de l'envisager .(p. 131)

Clearly, there is the feeling that the end can no longer justify the means, that the troops desire peace and security above all, even if this be a negotiated and not necessarily victorious settlement. With the use of the verb "refuser", the troubles of 1917 are again foreshadowed. The soldiers' torment and anguish receives little if any support and true understanding from civilians in the rear. Dartemont recalls the incredulity of one nurse upon hearing that the narrator had never seen a live German soldier; let alone killed one, even during time spent in the front lines. With total disbelief she listens to his accounts of loneliness, of waiting, of boredom, of basic survival. He continues with his stark and painful revelation:

"Je vais vous dire la grande occupation de la guerre, la seule qui compte: J'AI EU PEUR".(p. 146)

The effect is catastrophic. A collective sensation of anger builds up amongst the nursing staff present. Dartemont admits that if it was possible, every soldier at the front would revolt against military absurdity and the folly of war. Nègre supports this view:

"Tous sans exception. Le Français, l'Allemand, l'Autrichien, le Belge, le Japonais, le Turc, l'Africain ... Tous ... Si on pouvait? Vous parlez d'une offensive à l'envers, d'un sacré Charleroi dans toutes les directions, dans tous les pays, dans toutes les langues ... Plus vite, en tête! Tous, on vous dit, tous!(p. 147)

The unanimous feeling of discontent which Nègre suggests here fails to gain the sympathy of the listeners and the discussion is swiftly terminated by Mlle Bergniol, herself the daughter of a colonel in the French army. Nevertheless, amongst the soldiers in the front lines the sensation continues to escalate. In part II, chapter III, "Le Chemin des Dames", Frondet is ravaged by fear. Dartemont points out the psychological implications of his traumatic experiences:

Il a ce visage raviné, ces yeux tristes, ce sourire désespéré de ceux que ronge une idée fixe. Lorsque la peur devient chronique, elle fait de l'individu une sorte de monomane. Les soldats appellent cet état le cafard. En réalité, c'est une neurasthénie consécutive à un surmenage nerveux. Beaucoup d'hommes, sans le savoir, sont des malades, et leur fièvre les pousse aussi bien aux refus d'obéissance, aux abandons de poste, qu'aux témérités funestes.(p. 265)

He openly shares his sympathy for those who have unknowingly succumbed to what he refers to as "[le] dernier degré de l'ignominie", (p. 273) and admits that he too has reached this stage.

His fear becomes gradually unbearable. He explains:

Voilà ce que j'étais sans le savoir, ce que je suis: un type qui a peur, une peur insurmontable, une peur à implorer, qui l'écrase ... Il faudrait, pour que je sorte, qu'on me chasse avec des coups. Mais j'accepterais, je crois de mourir ici pour qu'on ne m'oblige pas à monter les marches. J'ai peur au point de ne plus tenir à la vie.(p. 274)

He lucidly examines his loss of self-esteem. Although he might be able to deceive his fellow companions, he concludes that he can never delude himself:

Je m'absorbe dans des tâches vaines. Mais je n'écoute que les obus, et mon tremblement intérieur répond au grand tremblement du Chemin des Dames.(p. 274)

The comparison between his internal rumblings and the devastation of the "Chemin des Dames" ridge, emphasizes the destructive effect that the war is having upon his personality. He continues:

J'ai même interrompu les fonctions de mon corps: je ne suis plus obligé d'aller aux feuillées. Je passe mes heures de repos dans mon encoignure, dissimulé aux regards, à écouter les bruits du dehors, et je reçois dans la poitrine tous les chocs du bombardement. J'ai honte de cette bête malade, de cette bête vautrée que je suis, devenu, mais tous les ressorts sont brisés. J'ai une peur abjecte.(p. 275)

Chevallier is at pains to destroy the traditional heroic conception of war. Dartemont is portrayed as a passive individual, thoroughly ashamed of his actions but unable to prevent his fear from having a degrading effect upon his whole character. He admits:

La mort serait préférable à ce dégradant supplice ... Oui, si cela devait durer encore longtemps, j'aimerais mieux mourir.(p. 275)

In part II, chapter IV, "Dans L'Aisne", however, he refuses to surrender to his desperation. He realizes that death does not immortalize individuals but merely erases them from memory, nevertheless, he is powerless to overcome entirely his incessant fears of the dangers of war. He points out:

Nous ne savons ni l'heure ni l'endroit . Mais nous savons que l'endroit existe et que l'heure viendra. Il est insensé d'espérer que nous échapperons toujours.

C'est pourquoi il est terrible de penser.(p. 309)

Maurice Rieuneau comments that there is little optimism in *La Peur*:¹⁵ Dartemont himself confirms that he can never allow himself to become too confident or enthusiastic:

15. Op. cit. p. 207

Il se passe en moi quelque chose d'étrange. Mon caractère est tel que je pousse toujours la logique aux dernières limites, que j'accepte mes actes dans toutes leurs conséquences, que j'envisage le pire. (p. 317)

Even when news of the armistice filters through to the troops, their reaction is more one of bewilderment than positive pleasure. A comrade's attempt at a joke by imitating the noise of a shell, falls flat. Dartemont explains:

Nous ne sommes pas habitués encore à ne plus avoir peur. (p. 379)

The passionate feeling of Chevallier is stamped throughout all these pages dealing with the sensation of fear experienced by his protagonist. His intentions are clear, to portray the psychological effects of war on the soldiers, and by doing so, to de-glamorize the heroic notions of battle. There are noticeably few scenes where traditional exchanges of fire, trench raids, take place, as if to earnestly avoid the habitual heroic gestures. Rieuneau writes:

On dirait même que Chevallier a pris plaisir à ne raconter aucune bataille véritable.¹⁶

In addition to the treatment of the theme of fear, a constant flow of sarcasm and satire is directed against the military commanders and high-ranking officers, throughout the book. In part II, chapter I, "Secteurs calmes", Dartemont speaks of this "injustice légalisée" which is the privilege of those in high command to send soldiers to their deaths daily without ever consulting them, or worse still, by deluding them into thinking that their contribution would be

16. Ibid. p. 205

worthwhile and successful. He continues in defense of the infantryman's point of view:

On est là parce qu'on peut pas faire autrement! Ils sentent qu'ils sont les manoeuvres de la guerre, et ils savent que les bénéfices ne profitent jamais qu'aux patrons. Les dividendes iront aux généraux, aux hommes politiques ...(p. 211)

He pours scorn on the word "héros" which civilians liked to hear and which Chiefs of Staff constantly promoted. Dartemont points out that the average soldier never considered his actions to be heroic, but that the hours he endured at the front to be out of necessity, and the dangers that he confronted regularly to be part of his existence. He continues:

Entre eux, ils s'appellent les bonhommes, c'est-à-dire de pauvres types, ni belliqueux ni agressifs, qui tuent, sans savoir pourquoi. Les bonhommes, c'est-à-dire la lamentable, boueuse, gémissante et sanglante confrérie des P.C.D.F.,¹⁷ comme ils se désignent aussi ironiquement. Enfin, la chair à canon.(p. 211)

The contrast in tone between the first and second sentences is notable. The first gives a conventional description of the life of the infantryman in the trenches. The second with its unmistakable bitterness and sarcasm, is how Chevallier himself, as a soldier at the front, remembers the experience. His pointed remarks reach a climax in the ensuing conversation between a sentry and Dartemont:

"Ça finira donc jamais, c'te saloperie!

- Mais si, mon vieux, ça ne peut pas durer toujours.

- Ah! bon Dieu! ... si on mettait le père Joffre là dans mon trou, et le vieux Hindenburg en face, avec tous les mecs à brassard, ça serait vite tassé leur guerre!"

17. Pauvres cons du front (My footnote)

Dartemont is left to reflect that the sentry's suggestion is not as simplistic as it appears:

Il est même lourd de vérité humaine, de cette vérité que les poilus expriment encore de cette manière: C'est toujours les mêmes qui se font tuer! (p. 212)

The message is poignantly clear. The generals and politicians who make arbitrary decisions that send thousands of men to their deaths, are unaware of the horror they create because they never visit the front lines. There is the strong belief that if they were to endure the physical and mental pressures that the troops underwent, if they were to put their life at risk like the troops did daily, then wars would perhaps never begin, or, at the very least, end quickly. In part I, chapter III, "Le Chemin des Dames", Dartemont describes how the soldiers in his battalion have lost all respect for the commander:

Le commandant n'a même pas reconnu son secteur et ne sort pas de sa cabine. A l'exception de l'adjudant qui prend ses ordres, personne ne l'a vu. Il se soulage dans un bouteillon, que l'ordonnance va vider sur le parapet. On lui prépare ses repas sur une lampe à alcool, et il doit passer la majeure partie de son temps étendu sur sa couchette. Il a perdu toute dignité, il ne sauve même plus les apparences ... Nous avons le sentiment que notre commandant, tombé au-dessous de ses fonctions, nous ferait tous tuer stupidement, que la peur le rend fou, sans lui retirer les droits qu'il tient de ses galons. Nous estimons que notre bataillon n'a plus de chef ... (p. 266)

The adverbs "stupidement" and "fou" emphasize the absurdity of the situation. Decisions made by incompetent officers, or those rendered insane by their own fear, result in the pointless sacrifice of men along the whole of the western front, and a severe breakdown in confidence between the rank and file and those in higher office. The lack of experience of such men is emphasized in part I, chapter III,

"La zone des armées". Dartemont stresses the fact that few have had any previous experience of direct warfare on such a scale. He continues:

Les généraux étaient comme des diplômés sortant d'une école: de la théorie et pas de pratique. Ils sont venus à la guerre avec un matériel moderne et un système militaire qui retardait d'un siècle. Ils apprennent maintenant, ils expérimentent sur nous. (pp. 57-8)

The contrast in these lines suggests the gulf between what many officers purported or were taken to be and what they really were. "Généraux" are in direct opposition to "diplômés sortant d'une école"; "théorie" is contrasted against "pratique"; "matériel moderne" against "un système militaire qui retardait d'un siècle"; and finally there is the fact that their training supposedly completed, the so-called experts only then begin to experiment and learn. In order to stress the absurdity of the situation, Dartemont compares the military manoeuvres advocated by commanders-in-chief to a game of draughts. He points out:

De même qu'au jeu de dames il faut supprimer beaucoup de pions avant d'y voir clair, de même il faudra tuer encore beaucoup d'êtres avant que les choses se dessinent. (p. 57)

This insensitivity to death and sacrifice of human lives for little gain is emphasized in part II, chapter III, "Le Chemin des Dames". Chevallier describes the endless waiting in the front lines as the shells gradually increase to announce the possibility of an attack. In spite of the frightful casualty lists, still the shelling continues. He observes:

Nous comprenons qu'il faut, de part et d'autre, des morts et des morts pour que celui qui a pris l'initiative de la bataille s'effraie des pertes et cesse sa poussée. Mais nous savons qu'il

faut vraiment beaucoup de victimes pour effrayer un général ...(pp. 272-3)

The use of the first person plural strengthens the authenticity of the account and underlines the personalized approach taken by Chevallier which is encountered throughout the novel. The open bitterness of Le Feu is replaced by a more reflective, cynical tone in La Peur. It is with a certain controlled sarcasm that Chevallier^r describes the inflexibility of those in higher command:

Ces gens-là ne se doutaient absolument pas des effets de l'armement moderne, canons et mitrailleuses, et leur grand dada était la manoeuvre napoléonienne: rien de changé depuis Marengo! Nous qui étions assaillis, au lieu de nous établir sur des positions solides, on nous éparpillait à découvert dans les plaines, revêtus de nos uniformes de cirque, et on nous lançait contre des forêts, à cinq cent mètres. Les Boches nous tiraient comme des lapins ...(p. 161)

On at least two occasions he openly criticizes their absence from the front lines. In part I, chapter VI, "L'Hôpital", Dartemont clearly attempts to destroy the civilian myth about generals leading their divisions into combat. He explains to Mlle Bergniol:

Ils ont marché une fois pour crâner, pour épater la galerie - ou, sans savoir, comme nous avons marché nous-mêmes le premier coup. Une fois mais pas deux! ... Mais voilà, ils ont découvert l'échelonnement en profondeur, les bons vieillards agressifs! C'est la plus belle découverte des états-majors!(p. 148)

Again the tone is derisive. There is more than a hint of flippancy in the way the generals are described as "les bons vieillards agressifs", in the way their retreat to Head Quarters is viewed as "la plus belle découverte". In part II, chapter III, "Le Chemin des Dames", criticism is levied upon the lack of artillery officers to deal with the growing enemy bombardment. A "sous-lieutenant" complains bitterly:

C'est une belle bande de dégueulasses! Ils ont peur de salir leurs bottes! Leurs peaux ne sont pas plus précieuses que les nôtres!(p. 268)

The matter is not dwelled upon, however. Chevallier has no intention of launching a hostile tirade against the upper echelons of the officer class. Almost casually he offers the comment:

On n'en a jamais vu aucun, et nous ne pouvons rien faire de plus.(p. 268)

and the incident is swiftly dismissed. Writing ten years after the end of the war, he has the elegance and composure to offer eye-witness accounts designed to remember and shock, without becoming too involved in the more controversial nature of the incidents that he portrays. Nevertheless, the personalized angle of the accounts is perhaps one of the crucial strengths of *La Peur*. The former colonial infantry colonel in part I, chapter III, "La zone des armées" is a prime example. His brutality towards the troops under his command is described so vividly, as if directly drawn from the author's memory. Chevallier writes:

Il procédait d'une manière, dont je fus témoin, qui révélait le détraquement. Il interpellait un homme, le faisait approcher, l'interrogeait doucement pour le mettre en confiance, avec un bon sourire - mais ses yeux brillaient étrangement et ses veines se gonflaient. Et subitement il lançait un grand coup de poing dans la face du subordonné, accompagné d'un flot d'injures dont il s'excitait encore: "Tiens, salopard! Enfant de garce!" et continuait de taper jusqu'à ce que l'autre, revenu de sa surprise, se sauvât.(pp. 54-5)

The use of the word "témoin", and the emphasis of the imperfect tense throughout revives naturally the incident for the reader and lends force to the veracity of the account. A similar approach is used to relate the immoral obsession of the general, known to the troops as

"père Rondibé", who mounts a constant watch on their weekly visit to the showers:

Ce chef sadique n'aimait voir les soldats que nus. Il passait en revue chaque nouvelle fournée, alignée sous les jets, à petits pas de vieillard, en tenant son regard à mi-corps. Si quelque objet le frappait par la dimension, il félicitait l'homme: "Tu en as une belle, toi!" Son visage se ridait de contentement et il bavait. On ne le rencontrait qu'à la douche et aux feuillées.(p. 56)

Whilst the scandal and contempt of the situation is passionately revealed, Chevallier still manages to keep an impartial reaction. Bertrand's immediate response is both poignant yet pathetic. His words arouse a balance of pity and anger in the reader. He comments:

Il est terrible de penser que la vie de dix mille hommes peut dépendre de ce général. Comment veux-tu que nous gagnions la guerre avec des chefs pareils?(p. 56)

During the opening pages of "Le Chemin des Dames", Chevallier takes advantage of his writing with hindsight to make mention of the disastrous attacks of April 1917 and the climax of military incompetency, Nivelle's advance in the Aisne. An artillery "sous-officier" describes the results of the inflexibility of his commanding officers to Dartemont. He estimates that, within two hours of the start of the offensive, between 50-100,000 soldiers had been either wounded or killed.(p. 253) He continues:

Il n'y a qu'une expression pour traduire: on marchait dans la viande ...(p. 255)

He believes that the heavy losses during the fighting along the "Chemin des Dames" ridge contributed significantly to the ruin of the French army, and were chiefly responsible for provoking the main wave of mutinies. He explains:

Tu connais la passivité des hommes. Ils ont tous marre de la guerre depuis longtemps, mais ils marchent. Pour que les troupes se soient révoltées il faut qu'on les ait poussées à bout ... Quand on a voulu les faire attaquer de nouveau, les poilus se sont sentis perdus, jetés à la boucherie par des incapables qui s'entêtaient. La chair à canon s'est révoltée, parce qu'elle avait trop pataugé dans les flaques de sang et qu'elle ne voyait pas d'autre moyen de se sauver. La provocation est venue des chefs, de certains chefs. Songe qu'on a fusillé de pauvres gens, qui avaient supporté déjà des années de misère, et qu'on n'a pas jugé un seul général. Il fallait chercher dans les états-majors les responsables de la révolte, qui était la conséquence du massacre.(pp. 256-7)

Open criticism of such a nature rarely pervades the pages of protest of Le Feu and Clarté or the impassioned description of Les Croix de bois. Such direct accusation would have been censored immediately during the war years and shortly after the armistice. Here, however, Chevallier refuses to avoid controversial issues in his disparagement of war, and without drawing conclusions, which his retrospective position might invite, nevertheless, benefits considerably from writing a decade after the end of the hostilities. In part II, chapter IV, "Dans l'Aisne", the theme of revolt is again introduced. Writing in the first person plural, Chevallier gives a brief synopsis of the effect of the battles of 1915, of Verdun, of the Somme, on the average French soldier. The disastrous Nivelle offensive of April 1917 is condemned as "une action criminelle" against humanity, which automatically led to insubordination and a severe questioning of authority. He writes:

Nous suivions de loin la révolte de nos frères, et, de coeur, nous étions avec eux: les mutineries furent une protestation humaine. On nous a trop demandé, on a fait de notre sacrifice un trop mauvais usage. Nous comprenons que c'est la docilité des masses qui rend de telles horreurs possibles, notre docilité ... Nous sommes

dans l'ignorance des plans d'opérations, mais nous sommes témoins des batailles et nous pouvons juger.(p. 307)¹⁸

Chevallier's outcry against military authority and his defence of those who had suffered unduly and for far too long, bears a remarkable degree of composure and calm, which is perhaps even more striking and effective for its lack of vehemence and vigour. The use of the impersonal "on" denounces those who make vital decisions yet are never seen and, who, themselves, never seem to wish to see. It contrasts with the more human and warm first person plural "nous". The author's personal sentiments are imprinted throughout the novel but no more so than in the line, "nous sommes témoins des batailles et nous pouvons juger". Not only has he witnessed what he writes about, but has had sufficient time in which to reflect and analyse. It would appear that he now considers himself ready to judge. There is a gradual progression in his thoughts as the narrative unfurls. Writing from a detached position, he lucidly describes his initial enthusiasm turning to doubt and developing into an incessant pattern of self-questioning, which culminates in an almost philosophical comment about the future. In part I, chapter III, "La zone des armées", there is a naïvety about the conclusions his protagonist, Dartemont, reaches without having yet arrived at the front. He recalls:

Si je devais mourir maintenant, je ne dirais pas: c'est affreux ou c'est terrible, mais: c'est injuste et c'est absurde,

18. See also p. 324. Chevallier directly refers to Nivelle and Mangin as "brutes sanguinaires" and to their futile offensives as "les tueries organisées". See also p. 243. Chevallier writes: "Notre pire ennemi est notre capitaine. Nous le redoutons plus que les patrouilleurs allemands, et, pendant la nuit, nous sommes plus attentifs aux bruits de l'arrière qu'à ceux de l'avant".

parce que je n'ai encore rien tenté, rien fait qu'attendre ma chance et mon heure ...(p. 60)

Even upon arriving in the front lines, August 1915, he admits that he found the situation so incongruous, the suffering and devastation so unbelievable, that he could not, at first, take it seriously:

Il y avait là trop de crasse, de poux, de corvées et, d'excréments; trop de destructions pour aboutir à quoi?(p. 75)

Chevallier shares Dartemont's step by step realization of the folly of war, and yet the greatest folly remains; in spite of his realization, he does not contemplate for one moment the possibility of refusing to carry out his duty, however absurd it may seem. In "La barricade", Dartemont prepares to advance:

Les clairons sonnaient un glas. Nous savions que devant nous, à quelques centaines de mètres, nos frères blêmes allaient s'offrir aux mitrailleuses acharnées. Nous savions que, eux tombés, puis d'autres, pareils à nous, aussi hantés par l'idée de vivre, de fuir, de ne pas souffrir, ce serait notre tour à nous, ne comptant pas plus qu'eux dans la masse des effectifs sacrifiés. Nous savions que le massacre s'accomplissait, que le sol se couvrait de nouveaux cadavres, aux gestes de naufragés.(p. 96)

The abundant use of punctuation and the repetition of "nous savions", emphasizes the awareness of the soldiers of their plight. At the same time, despite their recognition, they are powerless to break the vicious circle which transforms them, time and again, from "frères blêmes" to "cadavres, aux gestes de naufragés". In the same chapter, after yet another horrific advance with appalling casualties, Dartemont remarks that no longer is the infantry left with illusions. He points out that a depleted battalion is simply replaced by another battalion; more and more troops are made to fight on land still littered with the dead of the previous wave:

Nous regardions les hommes bleus étendus entre les lignes. Nous savions que leur sacrifice avait été vain et que le nôtre, qui allait suivre, le serait également. Nous savions qu'il était absurde et criminel de lancer des hommes sur des fils de fer intacts, couvrant des machines qui crachaient des centaines de balles à la minute. Nous savions que d'invisibles mitrailleuses attendaient les cibles que nous serions, dès le parapet franchi, et nous abattraient comme un gibier.(p. 99)

Again there is the haunting repetition of "nous savions". It implies, ironically that, whilst the soldiers in the front lines "knew" the horrific truth of war, those in the rear, especially the generals and politicians whose directions and campaigns prolonged the misery, were ignorant of the sheer horror that was being perpetuated. Dartemont continues:

Cette offensive, qui devait nous porter à vingt-cinq kilomètres au premier bond, tout enfoncer, avait péniblement gagné quelques centaines de mètres en huit jours. Il fallait pour s'obstiner dans cette folie, dans ce gaspillage de vies humaines, la vanité d'un Quartier Général tenu loin des batailles, qui ne voulait pas convenir qu'il avait manqué son coup et qu'il ignorait la guerre de positions ... Nous n'étions plus là que pour acheter ces lignes de notre sang. Il ne s'agissait plus de stratégie, mais de politique.(p. 100)

The passivity of the soldiers is striking. In spite of the absurdity of their situation, they stick rigidly to the task at hand, fully aware of the ineffectual sacrifice they are being asked to make. Whilst not hiding his intentions, Chevallier carefully constructs his protagonist's realization of the truth and subsequent deductions. Responsibility is clearly placed with the statesmen and politicians in the rear. Although the tone is calm and composed, the passage is full of deep-seated pessimism. Even ten years after the armistice, Chevallier manages to capture the hopelessness of the situation and the dejectedness of the soldiers. In part II, chapter V, "En

Champagne", Dartemont's despair reaches a climax, as he can foresee no immediate end to the hostilities. He reflects:

J'en ai marre! J'ai 23 ans, j'ai déjà 23 ans! J'ai entamé cet avenir que je voulais si plein, si riche en 1914, et je n'ai rien acquis. Mes plus belles années se passent ici, j'use ma jeunesse à des occupations stupides, dans une subordination imbécile, j'ai une vie contraire à mes goûts, qui ne m'offre aucun but, et tant de privations, de contraintes se termineront peut-être par ma mort ... J'en ai marre!(pp. 338-9)

The absurdity of the entire conflict is perhaps captured best in these lines of the novel. Chevallier portrays a gut reaction to war set far aside from the traditional high-spirited, conception of chivalry. The degradation of the individual is slowly built-up. The promised rewards of August 1914 have not come to fruition. Instead Dartemont and his fellow soldiers are mortgaging their youth in return for "occupations stupides", "une subordination imbécile", "tant de privations, de contraintes", perhaps even death. He continues:

Que ceux qui aiment la guerre la fassent, je m'en désintéresse. C'est affaire des professionnels, qu'ils se débrouillent entre eux, qu'ils exercent leur métier. Ce n'est pas le mien! ... Je suis sans haine ... Mon patrimoine, c'est ma vie ... Moi mort, je me fous de la façon dont les vivants se partageront le monde, de leurs tracés de frontières, de leurs alliances et de leurs inimités. Je demande à vivre en paix, loin des casernes, des champs de bataille et des génies militaires de tout poil. Vivre n'importe où, mais tranquille, et devenir lentement ce que je dois être ... Mon idéal n'est pas de tuer.(p. 339)

There is little optimism in these thoughts, only sound pacifist tendencies. The emphasis is upon humanity and life, a wonderful gift from God, rather than upon designed mechanical reaction bent on killing. Dartemont represents the average infantryman, thoroughly disillusioned with the war. He is without hatred and yearns only for

peace. The irony is, however, that as soon as he receives orders from his commanding officer, like thousands of soldiers along the western front, he immediately obeys. Viewing the events objectively, Chevallier allows himself, periodically, the opportunity to step aside and comment on the action and events he depicts. In "Dans l'Aisne", he concludes that the front line soldiers were certainly credulous "pawns", allowing their lives to be gambled and sacrificed by unscrupulous military leaders due to their accustomed role of subservience. He puts forward the view that the soldier in the trenches was probably closer to the enemy facing him than the "enemy" behind him at headquarters; that both shared exactly the same dejection and despondency as both played similar parts in the overall futility and foolishness of the war. He writes:

Nos uniformes diffèrent, mais nous sommes tous des prolétaires du devoir et de l'honneur, des mineurs qui travaillent dans des puits concurrents, mais avant tout des mineurs, avec le même salaire, et qui risquent les mêmes coups de grisou.

Il arrive que par un jour calme où le soleil brille, deux combattants ennemis, au même endroit, au même instant, passent la tête au-dessus de la tranchée et s'aperçoivent, à trente mètres. Le soldat bleu et le soldat gris s'assurent prudemment de leur loyauté mutuelle, puis ils esquissent un sourire et se regardent avec étonnement, comme pour se demander: "Qu'est-ce qu'on f... là?" C'est la question que se posent les deux armées.(p. 310)

The comparison between soldiers of both sides and the mining fraternity again serves to emphasize the utter folly of the situation. Chevallier's choice of simile underlines the bond between adversaries in the most hellish of conditions. As the miners grow extremely close as they work side by side below ground level, so too do those in opposing trench lines feel a certain empathy and deep understanding developing. And yet still wars continue and are prolonged. Not only do the troops accept the absurdity of their

situation, they also agree to the pitching of their bodies against machines and metal travelling at high velocity. In "La barricade", Chevallier has Dartemont react in a rather sarcastic manner. His naïvety at this stage of the war clearly shows. As he advances on the enemy lines, he reflects upon his vulnerability:

Donc, j'attaque en tête d'un bataillon. J'ai pour seule arme cinq grenades d'un modèle inconnu et je marche à la garde impériale allemande ...(p. 107)

As the attack draws nearer the enemy trenches, his sarcasm changes into despair and horror:

Je n'imagine pas du tout le combat, je n'ai aucun réflexe de soldat. Je me dis: "Tout cela est idiot, absolument idiot!" Et je cours, je cours comme si j'étais pressé.(p. 108)

By the time he is hospitalized, however, his philosophy has been completely cemented and he decries war with firm conviction. He tells Mlle Bergniol:

La guerre n'est qu'une monstrueuse absurdité, dont il ne faut attendre ni amélioration ni grandeur.(p. 150)

Even as the war reaches a close and the impending cease fire draws nearer, there is an absence of optimism among those at the front. Nègre checks Dartemont's tendency to rejoice in the future of mankind. He chastises him for believing that the younger generation will listen to the truth about war, that it will recognize its folly and take positive steps to prevent it from recurring. His advice is to play the system, to become part of the very society that advocates wars and then steps back and profits from them. He reasons:

Est-ce que tu peux croire à quelque chose après ce que tu as vu? La bêtise humaine est incurable. Raison de plus, rigole! On se fout de tout, nous! Alors rentrons dans le jeu, acceptons les vieux mensonges qui nourrissent leur homme. Rigole, rigole donc!(pp. 374-5)

With only five hours before the armistice, Nègre advises extreme caution. His haunting words to Dartemont have pessimistic overtones for the future. He tells him:

Nous sommes encore à la merci d'un artilleur mal luné, d'un barbare fanatique, d'un nationaliste en délire. Vous ne pensez pas, par hasard, que la guerre a tué tous les imbéciles? C'est une race qui ne périra pas. Il y avait sûrement un imbécile dans l'arche de Noé, et c'était le mâle le plus prolifique de ce radeau béni de Dieu!(p. 376)

It would appear that Nègre's unrelieved pessimism is a reflection of Chevallier's own state of mind during the time of writing *La Peur*. He was clearly in the position to see that none of the optimism of the 1914-18 campaign, of a war to end all wars, had come to fruition in a Europe once again threatened, with peace in the balance, at the beginning of the 1930's. The "race" which Nègre mentions would possibly identify with the rise of the Nazi party; "les imbéciles", Hitler and his closest supporters. It is in this manner that Chevallier concludes his "livre tourné contre la guerre" which he hopes will act as "un cri d'alarme". The didactic, hostile style of Barbusse, however, is absent; like Dorgelès the response is measured but not spread amongst the soldiers who form part of Dartemont's squad. Indeed, few characters other than Dartemont are mentioned at length in the novel. *La Peur* is very much a personalized account of life in the trenches with the author/narrator at the very centre of the action. The frequent use of the first person plural "nous" form highlights the direct quality of Chevallier's style, strengthening

the illusion of reality he strives to create. And yet, in spite of his vivid description of the episodes of intense fear and apprehension, of the appalling attitude of military commanders and their unforgivable inflexibility, the tone of the novel is one of calm and extreme control. Chevallier expresses himself in a lucid and well-ordered manner; his message is based on logic and sound reasoning. This would appear to be the result of ten years of reflection and valuable hindsight. In many ways it is not surprising. What is astonishing, however, is the unrelieved pessimism of La Peur. Whilst the passing of time has apparently allowed Chevallier to be more objective in his approach than the earlier writers, it has neither alleviated the painful memories nor blurred the horrors and degradation of war. In many ways it could be said that it has emphasized them all the more, that they are dwelt upon to such an extent that any light-hearted moments, any optimistic experiences are glossed over quickly or not included at all. This however does not detract from the author's overall intentions to destroy the traditional chivalric conception of combat. In spite of relying on memories and impressions, and in spite of his own strong emotions, he produces a pulsating account of life in the trenches which focuses deeply on the absurdity of war, whilst maintaining a composed stance.

SECTION III

THE AFTERMATH: REFLECTION ON THE ANONYMITY OF WAR AND SOCIETY: TOWARDS A SPIRITUAL REVOLUTION

CHAPTER X

War as a manifestation of the disease of modernity

Drieu la Rochelle: LA COMEDIE DE CHARLEROI - An antithetical experience

Drieu la Rochelle was a member of the student generation that Agathon describes in Les jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui,¹ having entered the Ecole des Sciences Politiques in 1910. In chapter two we saw that many such students were in revolt against liberalism, democracy, pacifism ... that military combat and colonial adventurism were seen as magnificent opportunities for the release of energy and force, whereas pacifism was regarded as a creed for the faint-hearted and cowardly.² Drieu shared these views and, when he failed his final examinations for graduation in 1913, allowed himself to be drafted into the French army as an enlisted man, seeing this as a chance to be born anew. He welcomed August 1914 with open enthusiasm; not only was this liberation from the monotony of barracks' life, a vision of new possibilities, but a last hope for salvation, a chance to achieve grandeur by a public sacrifice and military death. Maurice Rieuneau writes:

Pour Drieu la révolution qu'il attend ne sera pas autre chose que la restauration de l'esprit de guerre dans une société pourrie par la paix.³

-
1. Paris, Plon-Nourrit, 1913
 2. See Chapter 2 pp. 41-42 (this thesis)
 3. Guerre et Révolution dans le roman français de 1919 à 1939, Paris, Klincksieck, 1974, p. 539

In 1914 he joined the 5th Infantry Regiment and was wounded at Charleroi when leading a bayonet charge against an enemy machine gun position. It was during his stay in Deauville hospital that he composed his first poems of the war. On 15th October he returned to the front as a sergeant in Champagne, and on 29th October was wounded a second time. Following a period of hospitalization in Toulouse, the following year he was transferred to the East, from where he was soon evacuated, suffering from dysentery and treated in Toulon, then Paris. On 6th January 1916, he returned to the front at Verdun with the 116th Infantry Regiment. On 25th February, during the first enemy offensive, he was wounded for the third time, at Douaumont. Hospitalized at Montbrison, Drieu was moved into the auxiliary services, December 1916. The following year he published Interrogation, a small volume of war poems, in the Nouvelle Revue Française. On 6th November 1917 he volunteered to return to the armed services, but was to remain with the auxiliary units until July 1918 when he was brought into the 19th Régiment du Train, becoming adjudant in September. He finished the war as an interpreter with an american division at H.Q. near the Swiss frontier, then at Verdun.

By his own admission, Drieu la Rochelle's active war service was not extensive. In a letter to Benjamin Crémieux, 1929, he confirmed that he had only spent five months out of four years at the front.⁴ (Two weeks in Belgium and Charleroi, August 1914; two weeks in Champagne, September 1914; two months at the Dardanelles in 1915; one month at Verdun in 1916; one month at Verdun, October 1918). Perhaps this is why he appears less dismayed than many of his

4. See R. Soucy, Fascist Intellectual: Drieu la Rochelle, California, University of California Press, 1979, p. 55

contemporaries by the slaughter and suffering, and why he looks back so nostalgically on his war experience. For Drieu the war had provided an escape from the past and a foundation for the future. He came away from the war highly coloured by pre-war feelings; damning the older generation as decadent, especially men like his father who had not fought in the war and who had misled youth with their falsifying rhetoric. Although his active war experience had been limited, he was at the front long enough to learn that realities of war were quite different from the romantic visions of his youth. Grover writes:

The over-intellectualized young bourgeois, after a year of unrealistic military preparation in a Paris barrack was thrown into the realm of death, violence, and the absurd. The young soldier ... had the revelation of a world very different from what his books, his professors, and his family had led him to expect.⁵

By 1918 Drieu was able to estimate how romantic fiction had corrupted youth, how the hours of bombardment and shell-fire were quite different from those portrayed in books. And yet, at the same time, he found the war a source of personal regeneration because it immersed him in "reality" at last. What counted for Drieu was direct experience with life, not indirect experience through books. The First World War had provided such an experience. Soucy points out that even the immediacy of death was life-restoring for Drieu, that by confronting this ultimate reality, he had deepened his sense of life. He points out that the war, by transporting Drieu from the dream world of "romantic" literature to the real world of the trenches, had revitalized his existence and renewed his soul.⁶ And

5. Drieu la Rochelle and the Fiction of Testimony, California, University of California Press, 1958, pp. 5-6

6. Op. cit. p. 252

yet it was sixteen years after the armistice before Drieu was able to describe the essence of his war experience. Field claims that, haunted by the fear that the world to which he would return would not be worth the sacrifices made by his generation, upon the conclusion of the armistice, Drieu became unutterably dismayed by the eagerness with which men lost themselves in the mad scramble for money and power that had been characteristic of European society in the years before 1914.⁷ Field goes on to suggest that despite all the sacrifices made during the course of the war, despite all the delusions of grandeur, Drieu was more and more convinced, during the years following the armistice, that 1914-18 was to mark another stage in the general process of French decline, and that Europe was in the throes of a profound spiritual crisis, a crisis in which the beliefs and attitudes of the past were no longer relevant.⁸ He points out that already in the nineteenth century Nietzsche had inveighed against the destruction of culture by the forces of science and technology, but that it had taken the outbreak of the war to arouse the peoples of Europe to the magnitude of the danger with which they were faced.⁹ The "Wall Street Crash" of 1929 and the subsequent economic crisis which intensified feelings of hatred and suspicion that divided one nation from another, appalled Drieu. He believed that French society was sick, decadent; that it was dominated by a morally and intellectually bankrupt older generation which resisted "spiritual" revolution demanded by its youth. Grover writes that Drieu brought back from the war moral wounds much more difficult to heal than fleshly ones; that he felt early that he had been blighted,

7. Three French Writers and the Great War, op. cit. p. 87

8. Ibid. pp. 93-4

9. Ibid. p. 98

his country too, and that nothing was more urgent than to expose the seriousness of the damage.¹⁰ Soucy claims that the First World War had confirmed rather than given rise to Drieu's belief in France's decadence. He asserts that Drieu did not believe in French superiority during the latter stages of the conflict but that she had only achieved victory due to the help of her allies. He points out also that Drieu had bitterly resented the appearance of French troops who looked foolish in red pants, ludicrous epaulettes and steel helmets.¹¹ He continues:

Throughout the 1920's and 1930's he filled his novels and short stories with accounts of decadence in French life. For him the roaring twenties were sick and the lost generation of the post-war year corrupt.¹²

In a preface to *Gilles*, (1942),¹³ Drieu observed that the idea of decadence was one of the most important aspects of his work. He writes:

Je me suis trouvé comme tous les autres écrivains contemporains devant un fait écrasant: la décadence. Tous ont dû se défendre et réagir, chacun à sa manière, contre ce fait. Mais aucun comme moi - sauf Céline - n'en a eu la conscience claire.¹⁴

In many ways Drieu was well equipped to investigate the phenomenon of decadence. As a child he was obsessed by the constant fear of failure, (the near ruin of his wealthy family fortunes by his father was to haunt him for the rest of his life), and he tried to overcome this by indulging in heroic, romantic fantasies. Fascinated by the Napoleonic legend, he was greatly attracted by the nationalist

10. Op. cit. p. 248

11. Op. cit. pp. 96-7

12. Ibid. p. 99

13. The Novel was first published by in 1939

14. p. VIII

revival, pre -1914. At the age of 14, however, he had read Nietzsche, and had become convinced that, with the decay of traditional religious values, there was an urgent need for man to discover a new myth that would save Western Civilization from the destruction that awaited it. Nevertheless, after 1918, the feeling that Western Civilization was already in a process of total disintegration was widespread in Europe. Grover makes a direct comparison between these years and the height of Drieu's battle experience, the attack which he led at Charleroi. He writes:

Compared to such a moment the trivial and unheroic everyday life of the post war years was a kind of death.¹⁵

Plunged in a tragic period of total involvement, Drieu wrote in order to denounce the horror of life in contemporary civilization. Grover claims that Drieu's fiction is an exploration of the miseries of the "abandoned" modern man in an urban civilization.¹⁶ It would appear that his central subject is primarily metaphysical, the plight of the modern man for whom "God is dead", and his efforts to find purely humanistic values in a universe which is not human, in a society cowardly and insincerely clinging to an obsolete order. Totally opposed to the idea of didactic, moralizing accounts, however, Drieu's view of literature is a means by which he can express positively the values he believes to be crucial for a revitalization of society emerging more clearly in the 1930's.

In La Comédie de Charleroi, war is an anti-war in every respect, a corruption of the dream. The novel appears to suggest that modern life, in war as elsewhere, is destructive of the

15. Op. cit. p. 54

16. Ibid. p. 251

possibility of creative action. Dale writes that "man is progressively reduced to the wretched alternative of frenzied immersion in the anonymous mass or the demoralizing cynicism of the outsider isolated in an absurd world".¹⁷ Rieuneau points out:

Le massacre passif des hommes sous le feu et l'acier n'est évoqué que très sporadiquement et toujours en liaison avec l'idée de décadence moderne, dont la guerre industrielle est un aspect important.¹⁸

The very title of the novel suggests an absurd world in which man's performance can only be comic. War, which ought to be the "stage" for a dramatic showing of man's heroic and courageous nature, is merely a disillusionment. The reality of the conflict is portrayed as an essentially comic reality, a startling contrast between dream (tradition), and the real. The work is divided into six parts although there is little unity and hardly any chronology between the different sections. "La Comédie de Charleroi", the opening account, deals with the early months of the war in 1914 from a perspective taken in 1919; "Le Chien de l'Ecriture" covers the period from February 1916 to the 1920's; "Le Voyage des Dardanelles" is set in May 1915; "Le Lieutenant des Tirailleurs" in February 1916 taken from a perspective in 1917; "Le Déserteur", set in 1932, looks back, in places, to 1914; "La Fin d'une Guerre" focuses on October 1918. Because of the illogicality and irregularity of the structure of La Comédie de Charleroi, we shall analyse each part separately.

17. Op. cit. p. 68

18. Op. cit. p. 543

"La Comédie de Charleroi"

The opening section of the narrative centres around Madame Pragen and gradually reveals the social comedy of her exploitation of her son's death on the battlefield at Charleroi. Her view of war is mythical; she is blinded by her role of heroic mother to the reality of the decadence within herself and the war. The first person narrator, Drieu, describes her arrival at the station, about to begin the journey to Charleroi:

Mme Pragen était costumée en infirmière - major, toutes décorations dehors. J'allais donc me promener pendant huit jours, avec toutes ces couleurs qui déteindraient sur moi ...(p. 10)

As they return to the battlefield, the sincerity of her actions becomes more and more questionable. She insists on walking because her son Claude, the touching embodiment of the young "bourgeois", unprepared for war, completely lost and inefficient on the battlefield, had also walked a great deal. The narrator reflects:

Etait-elle sincère? Chaque parole de cette femme résonnait toujours comme quelque chose de voulu. Je n'avais pas cru dans le chagrin que depuis quatre années elle traînait à grand fracas. Mais cette dernière phrase me bouleversait; jamais je ne lui avais trouvé un accent aussi théâtral ...(p. 20)

For several months we learn that she has allowed herself to be deceived, only too ready to believe what she desires to hear and to cherish the preconceived notions and ideas of which she has become a prisoner. Soldiers who return from the front invent positive news of Claude's safety, certain to be rewarded by the impervious Mme Pragen.(p. 46) At the beginning of chapter III, it becomes clear that not even a consciousness of the debased reality of war has made

any impact on Mme Pragen's views and the decadent social order of peace in general. Representative of many of her generation, it is not the unrivalled horror of war that fascinates Mme Pragen but the "beaux sentiments" and "clichés" that are associated with it. The narrator explains:

Elle avait voulu, comme abstraitement, voir l'endroit où était mort son fils; mais non pas l'endroit où il avait été tué. Elle ne savait pas ce qu'était la guerre et elle ne voulait pas le savoir. Cela faisait partie de ce domaine des hommes pour lequel les femmes ont si peu de curiosité. Seuls, les honneurs intéressaient Mme Pragen dans le domaine des hommes.(p. 57)

At the beginning of chapter V the narrator and Mme Pragen visit the cemetery where her son is deemed to have been buried. Her determination to find Claude's grave is not indicative of her sincerity. Drieu writes:

Mme Pragen recherchait le nom de Pragen. Mme Pragen, qui était née Muller, recherchait le nom de Pragen, comme son bien. Elle voulait exercer le droit d'écrire le nom de Pragen, ici, de marquer ce lieu du nom de Pragen - de ce nom dont - elle-même avait été marquée et qu'elle avait fait sien, à tout hasard. Elle ne cherchait pas son fils.(p. 95)

In order to perpetuate the name, at a mass in the local church, the following day, she presents each parishioner with an effigy representing her dead son. In return, a civic reception is held in her honour and the mayor records the commune's gratification for the time and money that Mme Pragen has devoted to it. Later she attempts to "buy" the narrator's support and trust by offering to sponsor an electoral candidature. The latter graciously declines the opportunity to pursue a political career, answering that he belongs neither to the right nor the left, that he is simply against all who are old. In this return to the battlefields of northern France there

is no attempt to revive images of war in all their horror and monotony. On the contrary, the sight of Mme. Pragen, with her "Légion d'honneur" and other decorations hanging prominently, singles out France and war as a whole as objects of derision. Drieu, through the war, is attacking contemporary civilization in general, and, in particular, those who exploit others in order to nourish their own prestige. Dale believes that Drieu was projecting on to the war his preoccupation of the early thirties which included a conviction that France, in its mediocrity and indecisiveness, was the "sick man of Europe".¹⁹

The narrator of the short stories is all the more aware of war as a symptom of the general decadence of society because in war itself, before his disillusionment, he discovered what he felt to be his true vocation, that of hero and leader of men. In chapter IV he admits:

La guerre m'intéressait parce que j'allais me faire capitaine, colonel - bien mieux que cela, chef.(p. 69)

Already in L'Interrogation²⁰ (1915-17) and Fond de cantine²¹ (1915-19) he had enthused about virility and the excitement of combat. In "Paroles au départ", he had written of battle:

... là-bas je vais chercher ma vie, la vie de ma pensée.²²

In La Comédie de Charleroi, however, for one who has dreamed of heroics and of war as a liberating process, reality is disillusioning. Drieu scorns the anonymity and dullness of modern

19. Op. cit. p. 64

20. Paris, Editions de la Nouvelle revue française, 1917

21. Paris, Editions de la Nouvelle revue française, 1920

22. L'Interrogation, op. cit.

warfare and denounces military combat. He deplores the fact that war has lost its sacred character, that it has degenerated into an "immense foire"²³ which engulfs vast herds of men, and drags them into a collective phenomenon where their individual actions prove fruitless. He writes:

Quelle ressemblance entre mes rêves d'enfance où j'étais un chef, un homme libre qui commande et qui ne risque son sang que dans une grande action et cette réalité de mon état civil qui m'appelait, veau marqué entre dix millions de veaux et de boeufs? ... Les bouchers allaient entrer et un vague soupçon me secouait dans mon sommeil; ce couloir de Chicago, ce n'était pas la carrière de gloire dont pourtant avait besoin l'orgueil de ma jeunesse. (pp. 32-3)

There is a strong contrast between the "homme libre" of Drieu's imagination, who directs, and the "veau marqué" who obeys, in all reality. The revered "chefs" of Drieu's childhood dreams materialize as "bouchers" in the heat of battle. Throughout the opening part of the novel he gives free rein to the resentment he harboured towards the officers who commanded him during the war. In chapter II he describes the captain in charge of his unit:

C'était un gros bureaucrate, le ventre rond sur des jambes courtes et faibles. La figure rubiconde, avec une maigre moustache sale, comme du crin de cheval de bois. Il n'avait pas l'air rassuré, ce matin-là, lui qui devait prendre sa retraite en octobre. Dès la première rafale, il fut balayé, les quatre fers en l'air. (p. 26)

Towards the end of chapter IV he savagely criticizes his lack of initiative and foolish inflexibility in battle. As the German advance threatens to destroy the French defensive lines, he obstinately awaits further orders and refuses to move the men under his command to safer positions. Drieu writes:

23. La Comédie de Charleroi, Paris, Gallimard, 1934, p. 32

Ce gros pleutre qui voulait s'en tenir au devoir, c'est-à-dire ne pas bouger. Ah! j'avais toujours détesté mes officiers, mes professeurs. De quel droit un médiocre vient-il me donner des ordres, en se targuant d'une hiérarchie qu'on peut toujours chahuter?(p. 92)

There is the implication here that many officers had been appointed to their rank rather than having earned it in battle, and that few were true leaders endowed by nature with special fighting qualities of the nature that Drieu had dreamed about as a child. One senses that had they been of the natural elite, then perhaps he might have reacted differently, but instead they were arrogant, persistent and cowardly. The real leaders at the front were soldiers, like Drieu himself, who emerged from the ranks during moments of high tension and took charge of the situation. The narrator/author addresses this crucial observation in chapter II, which he calls "le vif de la guerre .. le vif de la société, la question du commandement".(p. 41)

He describes his unit under enemy bombardment:

Nous étions là trente hommes dans un creux. Qui commandait? Il y en avait qui avaient des galons, d'autres qui n'en avaient pas. Des professionnels et des civils. Il y avait ce lieutenant, un bourgeois, un civil. Il entrevoyait ce qu'il fallait faire, mais il aimait mieux ne pas le voir au point de devoir le faire. Et pour le sergent, le fait qu'il ne voyait rien, c'était sa pauvre force. Or, moi tout de suite je voyais clair - je savais - et je bouillonnais.(p. 41)

Here the hero/narrator assumes the leadership of his unit and salvages the situation when the officer in command is indecisive. He suggests to the lieutenant that a reliable runner is required to relate the details of the situation back to high command in the rear lines and immediately volunteers to undertake the responsibility. His delight to be actively involved, to be able to act upon his

initiative, is evident. He openly attacks the "médiocrité" of those in higher office who shirk confrontation and decision making:

... cette médiocrité qui avait trop peur pour fuir et trop peur aussi pour vaincre et qui reste là pendant quatre ans, entre les deux solutions.(p. 42)

Drieu considers this "médiocrité" to be "le plus grand supplice de la guerre".(p. 42) He detested this aspect of modern war which was destructive of man's freedom and creative initiative, which stifled his spontaneity. Although the narrator of La Comédie de Charleroi is a rational man, he nevertheless feels the strong impulse of the hero myth, which he sees that only war can fulfil. He advocates strongly the spirit of struggle and combat in which life must be lived if it is to be possessed of any grandeur. He believes that without suffering and danger and without the qualities that men must develop in order to fight against suffering and danger, human existence is doomed to futility. He admits:

Par moments, j'étais le patriote qui avait lu des livres et des journaux. Mais à d'autres moments, j'étais cela que j'avais commencé à connaître à la caserne. Un zéro, une nullité, quelque chose de complètement dérobé. Un pleutre, moins qu'un pleutre, un zéro. Quant à l'homme, où était-il?(p. 38)

One of the great disappointments of the war for Drieu was the total destruction of the traditional heroic action. It was extremely difficult to be a "hero" on a front line of several hundred kilometres where generals, separated from their troops, sent trainloads of soldiers into battle, daily, like herds of cattle to the slaughter. The anonymity of the front soon broke the pride of the so called "hero". It was to be a great anticlimax for Drieu, still haunted by the dreams of glory of his childhood. In chapter II he

bemoans the fact that modern commanders are so aloof from death and suffering, so distant from the battlefield and day to day existence in the trenches.(p. 43) In particular he criticizes their archaic battle strategies and reactions to modern mechanized warfare. In chapter IV he addresses the much wider theme of unpreparedness:

Nous n'étions pas prêts. Nous n'avions rien de ce qu'il fallait. Nous étions un foutu peuple. Tous ces députés, tous ces généraux. Les pantalons rouges et pas de canons. Et pas de mitrailleuses non plus ...(p. 79)

For Drieu, the old fashioned nature of the French army, the weakness of its artillery, the insistence upon use of the bayonet, the awkwardness of the French uniform and the most revealing red trousers, are vestiges of the sacred, reciprocal activity between men that war once was. They are totally out of place, however, in modern, demythicized war. This is condemned in La Comédie de Charleroi as part of the general decadence of western civilization. The battlefield becomes symbolic of modern life in all its anonymity where communication and co-ordination is completely destroyed. Drieu describes the effects of bombardment:

L'armée commençait à se disloquer. Sous les premières fureurs du feu, ses parties se séparaient les unes des autres. Déjà elles se voyaient à peine; bientôt elles ne se verraient plus. Et pendant quatre ans, leurs efforts et leurs souffrances s'en iraient, parallèles, sans jamais se rencontrer. Artillerie et infanterie se cherchaient et ne se trouvaient pas. Et les généraux étaient ailleurs. Déjà nous n'étions plus que des groupes perdus dans l'abominable solitude du champ de bataille moderne, chaque homme creusant sa tombe, seul devant un destin d'ailleurs pareil à celui du voisin car la nature, réglée par la science, travaille en série et ne cherche plus la fantaisie.(pp. 52-3)

The destructiveness and confusion of modern war precludes personal confrontation and revitalization. Men become objects, devoid of

personal and human qualities and characteristics. Glory, honour, courage, leadership are swept away by the impersonal and infernal methods of combat. Man has completely victimized himself by creating a situation that he can no longer control. Drieu describes an enemy advance:

Les balles sifflaient. On se terrait; mais on n'avait pas trop peur, car personne ne serait touché. On tirait au jugé, de mal en pis.

Zing, zing. On écoute, on se rappelle les histoires. Il faut se persuader, car on a de la peine à le croire, que la mort ce soit ces mouches ... D'abord farceuses, amusantes. Ensuite coquines, surnoises. Mais bientôt cinglantes. Tout d'un coup en acier, tout d'un coup dures. Décidément, décidément ... Tout d'un coup, on a peur et colère en même temps.(p. 37)

The defensive response is equally as confusing:

Et je tirais soigneusement, c'est-à-dire que je prends un temps avant de lâcher chaque coup. Mais je ne savais pas où je tirais, car je ne voyais aucun ennemi. Et le lieutenant nous donnait des ordres confus; il n'avait pas l'air d'être bien fixé sur la hausse.(p. 39)

The narrator realizes the impossibility of becoming a hero and his heroic gestures diminish proportionately. In chapter IV the human confrontation falters as the attack ends and modern warfare brings both sides into contact with the horizontal earth. Human participation in battle is now greatly minimized:

Dans cette guerre, on s'appelait, on ne se répondait pas. J'ai senti cela, au bout d'un siècle de course. On a senti cela. Je ne faisais plus que gesticuler, crier.

Je n'avais plus guère. Je trébuchais, je tombais.

Ils trébuchaient, ils tombaient.

Je sentais cela. Je sentais l'Homme mourir en moi.(pp. 76-7)

The verbs "gesticuler" and "crier" now become respectively "gesticuler" and "crier" in order to emphasize the reduced role of the individual and his growing powerlessness against modern

mechanized warfare. The gradual build up of negatives and the use of the impersonal "on" culminate in the final line. "Je sentais l'Homme mourir en moi", which confirms the rejection of traditional patterns of battle and the impossibility of self-conquest, as the test becomes one of industrial power rather than human courage. Maurice Rieuneau writes of "l'honneur de la guerre industrielle, déshumanisée en ce qu'elle rend superflu l'héroïsme".²⁴ He observes:

... Drieu la Rochelle constatait la déchéance de la guerre moderne industrielle, où le courage n'a plus de place ni de sens. Dans la guerre d'acier, l'héroïsme est impossible. La guerre, épiphanie des vertus, est devenue en 1914 inhumaine car les hommes y ont été écrasés par une machine anonyme ...²⁵

Modern man has created war machines that he can no longer control. These machines, initially intended as an extension of himself in battle, force him to cover in trenches, forever isolated by his own invention. Drieu vehemently denounces such machines in La Comédie de Charleroi.

... cette guerre est mauvaise, qui a vaincu les hommes. Cette guerre moderne, cette guerre de fer et non de muscles. Cette guerre de science et non d'art. Cette guerre de bureaux. Cette guerre de journaux. Cette guerre de généraux et non de chefs ... Cette guerre de fer et de gaz. Cette guerre faite par tout le monde, sauf par ceux qui la faisaient. Cette guerre de civilisation avancée.(p. 75)

The constant juxtaposition emphasizes the absurdity of the situation. Modern war reverses tradition, the spirit of which should not be allowed to disappear according to Drieu. There is more than a hint of sarcasm in the final line. If this war of mechanization is a reflection of the progress made by modern science and technology, then it would appear that Drieu associates this wholesale destruction

24. Op. cit. p. 540

25. Ibid. p. 319

of human and natural forms with the death of Man and of creativity in the decadence of the modern world. Rieuneau observes:

La guerre a été dénaturée, telle est l'horrible vérité que révèle l'effroyable éclatement de Thiaumont devant lequel le narrateur pousse un hurlement. Non de peur ou de douleur, mais de dégoût.²⁶

Rieuneau shares the belief that Drieu regretted the time when man faced man in open combat when war served as a valuable source of man's vitality and a necessary outlet for his animality. In 1914, however, man was pitted against machines rather than against men, artillery barrages being substituted for hand to hand combat, and the pattern of daily life assuming all the "postures de la honte".²⁷ In chapter IV, Drieu writes:

La guerre n'est plus la guerre. Vous le verrez un jour, fascistes de tous pays quand vous serez planqués contre terre, plats avec la chiasse dans votre pantalon. Alors, il n'y aura plus de plumets, d'ors, d'éperons, de chevaux, de trompettes, de mots, mais simplement une odeur industrielle qui vous mange les poumons.

La guerre moderne est une révolte maléfique de la matière asservie par l'homme. Comment vous défendez-vous contre un tremblement de terre? En fuyant.(pp. 87-8)

It is important to remember that Drieu does not criticize the impersonal and mechanized aspects of modern war because he is against war itself, but because he believed that exchanges in modern battle often interfered with the more natural kinds of warfare. Soucy points out that Drieu was not entirely opposed to militarism and war, although he criticizes the kind of war the First World War had become a war which after the first exhilarating days of combat, had settled down into a dehumanized, industrialized affair which had

26. Ibid. pp. 540-1

27. Ibid. p. 541

little to do with the more virile kinds of warfare men had waged for centuries.²⁸ In chapter II he describes the reactions of troops under heavy bombardment:

... on se serrait les uns contre les autres à quarante ou cinquante, en faisant le gros dos. Et tous nos sacs côte à côte faisaient une sorte de pavage à l'épreuve du shrapnell et de l'éclat, mais point du percutant.

Donc, à deux pas d'une batterie avancée et bientôt repérée, nous formions, selon la règle rédigée dans un bureau placide, un tumulus de viandes, toutes prêtes pour le hachis. Comme ça, les Allemands feraient quarante victimes d'un seul coup.(p. 55)

Again the tone is heavily sarcastic. The troops huddle together for shelter "selon la règle rédigée dans un bureau placide". The contrast is striking. The destructive capacity of modern machinery renders the soldiers in the trenches anything but "placides." It is ironic that those who decide their fate, who make them succumb to the most frightful tortures, remain, for the most part of the conflict, well away from the front lines. The grimmest comment, however, is reserved for the end of the passage. Drieu compares the row of soldiers to meat hanging in a butcher's shop, ready to be hacked into smaller pieces. The proximity of the troops will clearly facilitate the intentions of the enemy. The negative view of war in La Comédie de Charleroi is largely a post-war development. Drieu's attitudes did not become fixed during the fighting, but the novel rather expresses a later view, when, as Dale points out, "reflection has reinforced the element of disenchantment which had been in the war years little more than an intermittent dissonance in an otherwise harmonious exaltation of the warrior spirit."²⁹ It is noticeable that Drieu's writing, with hindsight, removes the narrow-minded element

28. Op. cit. p. 267

29. Op. cit. p. 63

that can pervade, from time to time, earlier accounts. *La Comédie de Charleroi* neither depicts war as a national crusade or a war of justice, nor does it portray the Germans as objects of hatred. Indeed, it is more a study of the anonymous individual caught up in an impersonal structure, a description of the world through the self and the self through the world. The two fuse together as Drieu explores the static propensities of the modern battlefield which scientific and technological developments have brought about, the impotence of the soldiers faced with grenades, machine guns, artillery and other products of man's military genius, and the overall nature of modern warfare which has become very much a horizontal experience, a passive acceptance of the threat of modern weapons which allows little possibility for man to revitalize himself by his actions, to regenerate himself amidst the experience of trench warfare that crushes instead of exalts. Rieuneau writes of:

... l'impuissance des hommes broyés sous des forces qui ne sont plus à leur échelle et qui les dégradent.³⁰

He speaks of Drieu's war service at Charleroi and Verdun, and how it made him aware of the degradation of society, of the individual, how it made him realize that the average man in the front lines, constantly subjected to the horrific effects of bombardment and uncertainty that came with modern weaponry, was transformed into little more than:

... une chose passive, broyée, inerte, une victime qui subit un déluge et non un homme qui lutte.³¹

30. Op. cit. p. 541

31. Ibid. p. 540

Drieu expresses this rejection of "vertical" war, of the traditional advances and encounters, in favour of "horizontal" war which rivets soldiers to the earth and slowly dismembers unit after unit, throughout "La Comédie de Charleroi". In chapter II the narrator reveals his astonishment upon his initiation to this new kind of warfare and his subsequent reactions:

J'étais étonné d'être ainsi cloué au sol; je pensais que ça ne durerait pas. Mais ça dura quatre ans. La guerre aujourd'hui, c'est d'être couché, vautre, aplati. Autrefois, la guerre, c'étaient des hommes debout. La guerre d'aujourd'hui, ce sont toutes les postures de la honte.(p. 31)

The contrast is further emphasized as Drieu describes his childhood illusions and how this horizontal phenomenon has completely destroyed his former hopes of glory, has led him to deplore the condition of modern man and to realize that his dreams of making history can only be ephemeral. He writes:

Enfant, j'avais rêvé d'être soldat, mais quel rêve c'était! Quel rêve imbécile et vide de tout contenu! L'homme moderne, l'homme des cités est rongé de rêves du passé ... J'avais rêvé de courir le monde, d'entraîner les hommes dans des actions, de détruire des empires et d'en construire d'autres.

Mais ce matin-là, dans mon demi-sommeil, traversé d'inquiétudes, de pressentiments, d'élans obscurs, je me doutais que mon désir d'action s'était pris à une glu bien grossière et bien trompeuse, quand je l'avais confondu avec l'amour de la guerre. Quelle ressemblance entre mes rêves d'enfance où j'étais un chef, un homme libre qui commande et qui ne risque son sang que dans une grande action et cette réalité de mon état civil qui m'appelait, veau marqué entre dix millions de veaux et de boeufs?(p. 32)

The sacred and human quality of war, a reciprocal activity between men, has completely disappeared, and yet the narrator desperately wishes to cling on to his images of the past. He cannot believe, at first, that the lethal bullets that whistle through the air are anything other than "[des] mouches".(p. 37) He sees only one way to

achieve "verticality", to recreate the past, he will become a "chef", and unlike his fellow soldiers who disgust him with their inability to lead, he will seize every vertical opportunity to escape the horizontal experience. In chapter II, when he insists on acting as a liaison runner, his superiors completely misunderstand his feelings and needs:

Le lieutenant, qui avait peur de remuer, ne pouvait attribuer mon envie de mouvement qu'à une plus grande peur.

Je le regardai en face, puis le sergent; mon activité les fustigeait.(p. 42)

Nevertheless, he persists in his belief that war constitutes the only activity that will allow him to recreate himself and to revitalize his life. All too quickly, however, he is forced to succumb to horizontal warfare as his unit and colleagues are shamefully dismembered. There is a strong hint of regret and bitterness as he returns to the battlefield at Charleroi with Madame Pragen in chapter II. He points out the shell hole which became his refuge as the attack was aborted. Clearly, Madame Pragen, in her civilian role, fails to grasp the significance of this hole in the ground. Drieu explains:

Mme. Pragen continua à marcher, ne portant aucun intérêt à mon trou. Ce bienheureux trou, ce trou où ma vie s'était enfouie pour une métamorphose, ce trou où s'étaient passées de si drôles de scènes. C'était là qu'était morte, pour moi ou pour quelques autres, la charge fauchée par la mitrailleuse allemande ... C'était là que pour moi la bataille avait tourné.(p. 49)

Gradually, he is forced to resign himself to a passive and inactive stance. In chapter IV he admits:

... la guerre, parmi ces énormes troupes mobilisés, prenait pour moi un tour peu prestigieux ...(p. 68)

and finally:

... je ne comptais plus guère sur la gloire.(p. 68)

It is interesting to note that, although our equation of first-person narrative with autobiography would appear well founded in La Comédie de Charleroi, (indeed it is particularly widespread in the case of war fiction as we have seen already), there are, nonetheless, discrepancies between author and narrator. In particular, there is no direct mention in the novel of a second infantry charge in Champagne or of the heroic exploit for which Drieu was awarded the "Croix de Guerre". Rieuneau stresses the importance that this latter experience held for Drieu. He explains:

Mais il ne parvient pas à oublier la minute divine où il a été un héros, un chef. Cet éclair, dans la guerre, suffit non seulement à la sauver aux yeux de Drieu, mais à l'installer au plus haut dans son souvenir et à polariser toute son énergie morale pour le reste de ses jours.³²

Soucy points out that the First World War toughened Drieu's body and moral decadence by providing him with an opportunity to confront death bravely, and that although the bayonet charge at Charleroi had been repelled, nevertheless, he felt that he had shown himself capable of facing death like a "man".³³ In La Comédie de Charleroi there is a strong feeling, which runs throughout the opening part, that whatever the drawbacks of modern warfare, confrontation with death is vital to man's spiritual health, that man should always engage in warfare if only to put his courage to the test. The most

32. Op. cit. p. 541

33. Op. cit. p. 197

vivid description of this phenomenon comes in chapter IV as Drieu summons up sufficient strength to raise himself above the mediocre level of average humanity and to stand upright on the battlefield. Although he remains convinced that the problems that confront mankind in the modern world are insurmountable when confronted with abstract reasoning, that they can only be solved by positive action, initially, he is quite surprised by his determined stance:

Toutes mes forces surgissaient à l'espoir ... Dieu allait reconnaître les siens; cette plaine c'était le champ du jugement. La guerre m'intéressait parce que j'allais me faire capitaine, colonel - bien mieux que cela, chef ...

Je me levai, tout entier.

Alors, tout d'un coup, il s'est produit quelque chose d'extraordinaire. Je m'étais levé, levé entre les morts, entre les larves. J'ai su ce que veulent dire grâce et miracle. Il y a quelque chose d'humain dans ces mots. Ils veulent dire exubérance, exultation, épanouissement - avant de dire extravasement, extravagance, ivresse.

Tout d'un coup, je me connaissais, je connaissais ma vie. C'était donc moi, ce fort, ce libre, ce héros. C'était donc ma vie, cet ébat qui n'allait plus s'arrêter jamais. (pp. 69-70)³⁴

Gradually, however, he grows in confidence, recognizing the validity of experience and practice only, and happy with the fact that true knowledge is the product solely of personal experience. Drieu here appears particularly taken with the idea that war is an integral part of existence. Soucy points out that Drieu himself wrote in 1927 that it was only after an individual had killed with his own hands that he truly understood life.³⁵ Clearly, although his efforts come to nothing ultimately, this initial engagement in some kind of violent struggle provides him with not only a test of strength so desperately needed, but a sensation of well-being, a fulfilment which penetrates his entire soul, spirit and body. He openly laments the fact that

34. See also pp. 65-6

35. Op. cit. p. 268

the vast majority of his comrades at arms show the greatest reluctance to imitate his action:

... c'est là, c'est à ce moment-là, qu'a été la faillite de la guerre, de la Guerre dans cette guerre.

Les hommes ne se sont pas levés au milieu de la guerre - du moins tous ensemble. Ils n'ont pas surmonté, dépassé, ou plutôt poussé à fond ...

Ils ne se sont pas rencontrés, ils ne se sont pas heurtés, enlacés, étreints.

Les hommes n'ont pas été humains, ils n'ont pas voulu être humains. Ils ont supporté d'être inhumains. Ils n'ont pas voulu dépasser cette guerre, rejoindre la guerre éternelle, la guerre humaine. Ils ont raté comme une révolution.

Ils ont été vaincus par cette guerre. Et cette guerre est mauvaise, qui a vaincu les hommes.(pp. 74-5)

The short paragraphs and sentences, often reduced to no more than a single line, the careful choice of words and repetition of phrases of similar meaning, create a sense of drive and urgency which aptly matches the ideas he intends to convey. Nevertheless, the narrator leaves Charleroi as "chef sans emploi et non comme un homme", (p. 88) his departure signalling man's defeat in the face of his own reason and as Flower puts it, "his inability to integrate into a mythical, existential context".³⁶ By the end of his account, Drieu admits that his war experience has destroyed all his pride of the past and all his hopes for the future. He concludes that it will take years for him to fully understand, if ever, the nature and folly of man. (p. 123) In one short sentence he conveys perhaps his entire philosophy behind La Comédie de Charleroi, when he emphasizes his consciousness of universal decadence, of a disease manifested equally in self, war and modern society. He writes:

Tout est anonyme dans la guerre d'aujourd'hui, comme dans la vie d'aujourd'hui. (p. 108)

36. Op. cit. p. 77

Although there are familiar aspects of trench warfare running throughout this opening section of the novel (the troops in the opening paragraphs who sing "La Marseillaise", are the same as those who sang "L'Internationale" in their capacity as civilians p.9; the ill-preparedness of the French army reveals an expertise in theory and a sad deficiency in practicality pp. 35-6; the costly errors made on the field of battle which result from inexperience and sheer incompetence pp. 40, 53; the dehumanization of man pp. 72-3; the absurdity of death and killing in general pp. 671, 85; the wounded and the suffering pp. 60-1), the narrative does not focus upon the everyday reality of war and it contains little which is characteristic of the "First World War novel" as we have examined in previous chapters. There is little concern with accurate observation and detailed description. As Dale points out, it rather diagnoses "a disease of modernity spreading malignantly through the body of Western civilization",³⁷ and advises that war, the most horrific manifestation of this disease, must no longer be viewed in isolation.

"Le Chien de l'Ecriture"

Much less attention will be devoted to this section of the novel as it constitutes only a tenth of the total volume of the narrative.³⁸ The opening three chapters revolve around a rest period for the narrator's division in a Lorraine forest, February 1916, and his meeting with "Maréchal des logis" Grummer, the cousin of an old university friend. There is mention of the narrator's service in the

37. Op. cit. p. 71

38. "La Comédie de Charleroi" takes up 123 of the novel's 316 pages.

Dardanelles and of the dysentery which he contracted there and for which he was hospitalized, which matches Drieu's own war service. Although there is a fleeting reference to the division's high casualties and to the horror of mechanized warfare, the tone is mostly light-hearted and the atmosphere relaxed. Even the closing pages of chapter III, which describe the final hours of life behind the front lines and the subsequent march of the narrator's unit to Verdun, have a distant, rather unemotional tone. Chapter IV takes place after the armistice upon the narrator's return to France after a lengthy stay in America. He is invited by a friend to watch the first showing of a film about Verdun. He is immediately transported back in time to February 1916 when his own unit was sent to Verdun, which offers a link to the previous three chapters. The horror of the conflict is vividly recalled by the narrator as his mind quickly translates the film sequences into reality. He observes:

Ces hommes n'étaient plus des hommes, et de voir en nous des hommes éveilla dans leurs yeux une lueur vacillante, prête à retomber. Ils étaient plus désespérés que des naufragés de la mer ou du désert, des enfouis de la mine ou du sous-marin, car ils savaient que nous ne les sauvions pas et qu'ils retourneraient, après nous qui allions y tomber, à cette vertigineuse inhumation parmi les trombes du fer.(pp. 148-9)

There is again criticism of mechanized warfare, how it no longer provided the individual with an equal role to play on the battlefield, how it destroys faith and hope in the goodness and courage of mankind. It is this faith and trust which is entirely absent throughout the novel as a whole, and which, in 1933, according to Drieu, was incompatible with the modern world. In the cinema his immediate reaction to the film is one of scepticism and doubt. He

questions the possibility of any art form to recreate the truth, and concludes:

L'oeuvre d'art la plus réussie est une déception pour qui a tenu dans ses mains la misérable vérité; elle peut pourtant lui apporter une ivresse favorable à ses chers souvenirs. (pp. 149-150)

This leads him logically to consider those who surround him in the cinema and his own individuality. There is a progressive deepening of the mood of demoralization and a growing disillusionment with post-war society. He muses:

Qui étais-je? Que suis-je devenu? Et quels sont ces êtres autour de moi dont je remarque peu à peu le voisinage, à cause de ce silence extraordinaire dont ils m'entourent ...

Comprennent-ils? Savent-ils? Se rappellent-ils? Réfléchissent-ils? Ces femmes ont-elles jamais deviné? Ces hommes, s'ils y furent, peuvent-ils raconter? (p. 150)

The narrator's feeling of nostalgia towards the war years and a sense of emptiness and unreality in the materialistic atmosphere of the postwar era, is further intensified by his awareness of a couple sitting behind him who speak of the war with little understanding of its grotesqueness and little depth of feeling. The man paints a glamorous and inaccurate picture of his war experience in answer to his companion's questions, clearly determined to impress and sustain admiration. The narrator is even more distressed when he learns that the boastful individual is no other than Grummer, the terrified and weak-willed individual of the earlier three chapters. The experience serves to confirm the narrator's belief in the insecurity of man in the modern world, in the fact that life is inherently meaningless as Western civilization slips more and more into an almost irreversible hold of decadence.

"Le Voyage des Dardanelles"

The second longest account in the novel, the opening chapter, describes the inertia of the narrator's unit during the opening months of 1915, after the battles of Champagne, and before the spring offensives. Volunteers are requested for the expeditionary corps to be sent to Turkey, and the narrator quickly becomes one of twenty of his company which forms a new regiment to contribute to the army corps bound for the Dardanelles. In chapter II the mood is one of growing demoralization which generates the darker comedy of derision. There is much cynicism and self-disgust. The narrator's squad now includes former criminals, Pietro an ex-clown with the Medrano circus and Muret who has previously been an acrobat and pimp. As they make their way to Marseille by train the drunkenness and debauchery gradually increases:

Les hommes descendaient pour rigoler, pisser. L'éternel civil de bonne volonté arrivait pour remplir les bidons. Mais j'étais soucieux.

Pietro, sur le ballast - encore un qu'on avait touché à Rouen - était soûl. Pietro, clown au cirque Medrano, était haut comme ma botte. (pp. 169-70)

The loose syntax conveys the appallingly low levels to which the troops have fallen. They are an insult to the military ideal. (p. 174) Chapter III briefly deals with the arrival of the soldiers in Marseille prior to their embarkation for Turkey. The fragmentation and absurdity of contemporary life is distinctively conveyed:

Il y avait là des femmes qui avaient perdu leur mari et n'avaient pas trouvé à le remplacer, d'autres qui le remplaçaient sans l'avoir perdu. Il y avait des orphelins. Des prostituées. Des bourgeois inquiets. Des ouvriers engraisés. Des nouveaux riches, très affairés ...

C'était plein de nègres, de Chinois, d'Hindous, et d'un tas de gens qui ne savaient pas d'où ils étaient - ils étaient nés dans le grand tunnel où entre les deux tropiques la misère et le lucre se battent et copulent ... Tout ce rythme affolé des usines, du port, des bordels, de la police, des hôpitaux, des cafés, des familles, se tassait dans le rythme de notre clique.(pp. 174-5)

The atmosphere of degradation and immorality is continued into chapter IV where the narrator describes his involvement with a Marseille prostitute. After a somewhat fleeting and sordid relationship, he turns to drink. He continues:

Ainsi je sortis vraiment de l'adolescence et j'entrais dans la vie. Se soûler était le signe que j'entrai dans l'irrémédiable ... Nous allions dans les mauvais lieux. Je payais à boire.(p. 185)

By the time that the regiment leaves Marseille, the majority of the troops are drunk and disorderly. Their final parade out of the city is nothing more than a "beau défilé scandaleux, qui zigzaguait dans l'indulgence".(p. 186) The debauchery continues into chapter V when Camier fails to appear at roll call. As this is yet another instance of his misconduct and as the narrator is the only sergeant present, he has no alternative but to report Camier to higher authority. Pietro, however, intervenes. He explains:

"Il va rappliquer. Il était soûl. Hier au soir, on a dû le laisser en bas (de la colline). (Ainsi son caporal a rendu un faux-appel). J'irai le chercher, il doit roupiller dans un coin".(p. 192)

The narrator, like the corporal before him, is persuaded to report a full attendance to the lieutenant in command. His principles and code of morality disappear quickly. With his fellow comrades-at-arms, he busks in order to obtain more money with which to buy drink:

Après cela sans vergogne, nous faisons la quête. Puis nous buvions le produit de la quête et nous rentrions souls au camp, et en retard. On se glissait à quatre pattes entre les tentes.(pp. 192-3)

Scenes of mob intoxication and aimless riot are frequent occurrences. The narrator describes with coarse humour one such occasion when a small incident in an isolated bar leads to mass looting and destruction:

Les amateurs entraient chez les bistrots grecs qui ne pouvaient servir tout le monde en même temps.

"Si on me fait attendre, je me sers moi, dis-donc, eh là, le père. T'as donc pas soigné ta jaunisse".

Delplanque a attrapé un litre derrière le faible comptoir de planches.

"Il a pas de monnaie, c'est pas la peine de la payer", me dit-il, en repoussant doucement ma main.

Au même moment, dans la bourgade dix farceurs avaient la même idée que Delplanque. Et une idée en amène une autre; du moment qu'on ne paie pas, aussi bien se servir soi-même. Un quart d'heure après, tous les bistrots étaient au pillage. Des bandes sôles, chanteuses, insulteuses, querelleuses dégringolaient les ruelles, ou les remontaient. On commençait à se heurter, à se provoquer dans tous les coins.(pp. 193-4)

The world appears to have become a totally static and demoralized place where disorder and disrespect reign. The cafe scenes gradually spread to the streets, oblivious of the local populace. There is a mutual lack of trust and understanding. When the narrator enters a grocer's shop in order to buy provisions, the Greek shopkeeper attempts to overcharge and to cheat him of his money. At the very same instant, however, Mauvier, who has entered the same shop, steals from the Greek behind his back. "C'est de la reprise individuelle" explains the narrator to Mauvier, later.(p. 198) This breakdown in communication and deceit without questioning one's motives is also reflected by what is happening in the war itself. In chapter V, the narrator deplores the excessive use of "bourrage de crâne". He sees

this as the complete degradation of mankind. Although the troops are already beginning to sense the failure of the Dardanelles expedition, although they realize that they are most unlikely to reach Constantinople, nevertheless the newspapers and communiqués continue to lie shamelessly, in order to keep up morale and confidence. The effect that this "brainwashing" has, however, is completely the opposite from that which is desired. In such an atmosphere of deceit and trickery, everyone lies and no-one can be trusted. The narrator admits:

Nous mentons tous. Je mens tout le temps.(p. 201)

When the "lieutenant" and the "capitaine" give the command for roll-call and Camier still does not appear, the narrator instinctively explains that Camier has dysentery and is otherwise occupied, that he will appear soon.(p. 203) It is one of the rare examples in the account where man is actually seen to be helping and attaching himself to a fellow comrade. Normally, it is the very opposite. The narrator craves anonymity both in the army and in the modern world. He explains:

Plus de famille, plus de souci de métier ni d'argent. Plus de vanité, plus d'avenir. Si j'ai le courage d'être, inconnu, je serai terriblement.(p. 189)

He continues:

J'ai donné à ma famille, une fausse adresse, un faux numéro de secteur. Cruel jeune homme. Ainsi je suis nu, je ne reçois pas de lettres. C'est peut-être ma manière d'être un moine?(pp. 189-90)

His negative nature is a result not only of the war, which he despises, but of the debased and vile environment which surrounds him

and constantly envelopes his personality. The one perpetuates the other. Turkey, for the narrator, is representative of the modern world, he describes it as:

... un pays de salopards. Un de ces pays où il n'y a rien, une méchante terre sèche et des cailloux sur des carcasses de monticules ...

Terre pauvre, pays perdu, aventure moche.(p. 211)

The war has reached a similar stalemate. Its static, barren nature disgusts the narrator. He deplores the filth and devastation of the front lines and regards the unit's new trenches as "un sébastopol concentré et modernisé".(p. 213) He continues:

Ils sont sales les boyaux, pleins de trous ces débris abominables que la guerre accumule aussitôt qu'elle est là: boîtes de conserves, bras, fusils, sacs, caisses jambes, merdes, culots d'obus, grenades, chiffons et même des papiers.(pp. 213-14)

The war has put on test the moral scruples of humanity and few have responded well to the challenge, the narrator included. Towards the end of chapter V he shows his determination to break free from the devastation and demoralization of the modern battlefield in a lone attempt to silence an enemy machine-gun. Ignoring the cries for help from a wounded comrade, he continues to press forward, uncertain of his aims yet confident in the belief that he must stand aside and act positively. His actions, however, prove ineffective and short-lived. The individual is again no match for the machine. The following morning, the narrator ends up in a shellhole which is reminiscent of the degrading end of the charge in "La Comédie de Charleroi". In spite of his efforts and forward thinking, man still remains a "prisoner" in the modern world and a "pawn" on the field of battle.

"Le Lieutenant de Tirailleurs"

The account is set in Marseille, May 1917, and revolves around a discussion that the narrator has with a "lieutenant de tirailleurs", whom he meets in a bar and whom he discovers has also fought at Verdun. Like the narrator, the lieutenant is also demoralized by the modern patterns of warfare, and as they exchange views and experiences, the story becomes little more than a diatribe against mechanized combat and the general degradation of the modern world. The lieutenant believes that trench warfare and strategies of attrition are incompatible with a soldier's expectations and desires, be he an infantryman or member of the cavalry. He contests that the war is perpetuated and favoured by bureaucrats in high office, but that it is not a war admired by those who actually participate. He advocates a return to the philosophy of the Middle Ages:

Rencontres bien réglées, selon des principes bien admis et humains. Peu de personnel, bien choisi, largement pourvu de valetaille. Pertes minimes, beaux pillages.(p. 240)

Whilst the narrator cannot agree in entirety with his companion's sentiments, nonetheless he confirms his strong views about the demerits of modern combat. He affirms:

C'est plutôt une guerre d'usines qu'une guerre d'hommes. On fabrique en masse de la ferraille dans les usines, et puis on se la jette à la tête, de loin, sans se regarder et en geignant. La part laissée à l'humain n'est plus bien grande. Quelques coups de main. Quelques bousculades. Quand à la longue un bombardement réussit, ceux qui ont lancé le plus de ferraille massacrent les survivants dans leurs abris. Ce sont les seuls contacts humains. Nous sommes loin de la guerre décrite par Joinville ou même par Montluc.(p. 241)

There is nothing noble, nothing heroic about this kind of warfare. The human element has been almost completely removed. Man no longer

needs to be in full view of his adversary to kill. The anonymity of modern warfare has transformed the battlefield into a kind of wilderness where there is little action and few signs of life. The narrator exclaims:

Qui n'a vu le vide d'un champ de bataille moderne ne peut rien soupçonner du malheur perfide qui est tombé sur les hommes et qui anéantira l'Europe. Il y a là des milliers d'hommes des centaines de milliers d'hommes. Et on ne les voit pas. Où sont-ils? Cachés, ensevelis dans la terre, déjà ensevelis. Et ils ne remuent pas, ils ne remueront pas pendant des jours. S'ils remuaient, on les verrait. La terre cache les hommes. Et pourtant la terre est réduite à rien.(p. 249)

The role of man in the great conflict has diminished too. It is ironic that as more and more countries join the war and more and more troops become involved, the role of the individual becomes less and less important. The narrator explains that the word "courage" takes on a new meaning, the patience to wait without movement. He reasons:

Un soldat, c'est un homme. Un homme, c'est un corps. Or, qu'advenait-il de mon corps? Je n'avais pas à m'en servir. Il était voué à une lourde et sournoise et continue blessure, hideuse et lente comme une maladie. Je n'avais ni à courir, ni à sauter. Je n'avais à remuer ni mes bras, ni mes jambes. Mes muscles ne me servaient à rien ... Et cette absence de l'ennemi, qui causait une désorientation perpétuelle de tout l'être humain en moi - c'est-à-dire l'impossibilité de donner un sens à mon courage, l'inutilité de toute précision, de toute articulation, la paralysie en moi de l'action, de la liberté.(p. 255)

Throughout there is the theme of powerlessness, of total inactivity. The soldier's body does not respond to his wishes or ideals, it is as if rendered infirm by some horrific illness. The frequent use of negatives placed alongside verbs of movement strengthen this feeling of impotence. Finally, the very fact that the enemy remains anonymous, out of view, destroys any attempt, any desire to search for a meaning, to discover hidden reserves of tenacity and culminates

in body "paralysis". It leads the narrator to reflect on man's position in the modern, mechanized world. He concludes that, instead of harnessing the power of new industrial developments, man has allowed himself unknowingly to become their slave. He reasons:

Des mots absurdes deviennent vrais: mécanisme, matérialisme. C'était un déchaînement inattendu, épouvantable. L'homme au moment d'inventer les premières machines avait vendu son âme au diable, et maintenant le diable le faisait payer. Je regarde, je n'ai rien à faire. Cela se passe entre deux usines, ces deux artilleries. L'infanterie, pauvre humanité mourante, entre l'industrie, le commerce, la science. Les hommes qui ne savent plus créer des statues, des opéras, ne sont bons qu'à découper du feu en petits morceaux. Ils se jettent des orages et des tremblements de terre à la tête, mais ils ne deviennent pas des dieux. Et ils ne sont plus des hommes.(p. 256)

Amidst such absurdity, man's identity is completely sacrificed. As the narrator bewails his deceived youth and shattered ideals,(pp. 233, 258) he concludes that the folly of modern warfare is merely a reflection of the much greater "malaise" of civilization and of the universe.(p. 250) The world has lost its sense of decency, of proportion. This is no better signified than by those who perpetuate the misery and suffering, by relentlessly forcing troops forward against overwhelming odds, whilst they remain comfortable and safe in the rear zones. He comments:

Les chefs ne risquent plus guère leur peau.(p. 242)

and continues:

J'ai lu quelque part dans Voltaire qu'une bataille vers 1660 fut notable parce que pour la dernière fois on y vit les généraux charger à la tête de leurs escadrons. Aujourd'hui, un général est comme un homme d'Etat. Il y a la même distance entre l'homme d'Etat et la place publique ... qu'entre le général et le champ de bataille, et la place publique ... qu'entre le général et le champ de bataille.(pp. 242-3)

This absence of the traditional concepts of honour and courage disgusts the narrator as much as it bitterly disappoints him. He writes:

Oh, ma pauvre jeunesse déçue. Je m'étais donné à l'idéal de la guerre et voilà ce qu'il me rendait: ce terrain vague sur lequel pleuvait une matière imbécile. Des groupes d'hommes perdus. Leurs chefs derrière, ces anciens sous-lieutenants au rêve fier, devenus de tristes aiguilleurs anxieux chargés de déverser des trains de viande dans le néant...(pp. 258-9)

He is obliged to acknowledge the unheroic acceptance of a passive role in a dehumanizing war, yet the opposition between the élan and flight of traditional patterns of battle, between heroism and malingering pride and cynicism, and its deflation, is ever present. In a wider context, choice in the world is reduced to the passive acceptance of an inhuman event or its refusal. Drieu describes bombardment in the front lines, expanding his portrayal to comment on the state of mankind and the society to which he belongs:

Je n'avais rien à faire ... Mon courage, c'était d'attendre immobile. Je trouvais ce courage laid et faible, je ne l'aimais pas, il ne me tenait pas chaud au coeur. Il ressemblait singulièrement à l'inertie de tous ces hommes autour de moi. Je ne pouvais rien commander, rien entreprendre. Perdu au milieu d'une foule immense, au fond d'une hiérarchie stupéfaite. C'était la société moderne qui était là, éparpillée, à plat sur cette lune ... La société moderne aussi bête que n'importe quelle société. Avec sa peste, sa lèpre, sa gale, son an mille.(pp. 251-2)

On two occasions the "lieutenant de tirailleurs" expresses his disdain for this society. He admits:

Je haïssais le monde moderne. Tout cela, c'est le monde moderne.(p. 239)

and:

Je me fous de cette bagarre qui me fait horreur.(p. 261)

His refusal to accept the war and society for what it is and his decision to seek refuge in Africa, in flight, meets with approval, almost admiration from the narrator. He comments:

C'est délicieux d'être un homme et de se moquer de la société ... Bienheureux péché, bienfaisante trahison. Vous allez échapper au déluge européen. Je vous salue, Noé.(p. 262)

"Le Déserteur"

Set in 1932, the episode takes place in South America where the narrator has been sent on an economic mission. During his stay he is confronted by a former deserter from the French army who wishes to speak with "un Français intelligent". Drieu uses the incident to emphasize his total commitment to peace during the 1930's and to express his personal determination to refuse military service in any future war. The deserter explains that he deserted in August 1914 because he did not want to be killed. Life is the all important factor for him:

"Respirer, marcher, étendre les bras, manger, boire fumer, faire l'amour".(p. 271)

He asks for no more. He shows no affiliation towards society whatsoever and affirms:

"Elle demande trop, je lui donne le moins possible".(p. 271)

He goes on to expose the evils of modern warfare(pp. 274-5) and suggests that it is bred by nationalism:

"... cette maladie qui se balade du Groenland à la Terre de Feu, de Pékin à San Francisco".(p. 277)

The "deserter" attempts to prove that nationalism and war are synonymous. The narrator agrees:

"Si l'on accepte la patrie, on accepte la guerre. Car point de patrie sans guerre et pas de guerre sans patrie. Qui aime la patrie aime la guerre".(p. 276)

Fully aware of the changing political situation in Germany and the growth of the Nazi party, Europe, for the narrator, has reached a "cul-de-sac", where war is about to exceed all proportions. Patriotism has become "un fléau monstrueux, disproportionné, qui n'est plus du tout à l'échelle de l'humanité".(p. 276) Life appears to have stopped momentarily. The climate of Europe in the 1930's is most apparent. The deserter comments upon the evils of socialism and nationalism which have irreversibly come together as a result of the rapid growth of the new bourgeoisie. He continues:

"Je suis Goethe, se dit le petit boutiquier, puisque je suis la nation, et je suis millionnaire puisque je suis l'Etat. Enfin, je suis Hitler. Il n'y a rien de plus bas, comme produit de la démocratie, qu'un dictateur ..." (p. 280)

Confronted by a deteriorating international situation following Hitler's accession to power and a world slump, Drieu was mortified at the rottenness of the modern world. Throughout the chapter, structure, narrative and stylistic techniques all contribute to the exposure of the debased nature of modern war and society, the recognition of which, in the author's eyes, is an essential prerequisite for any renewal of the human spirit. He bewails the indecisiveness of the French nation:

Ces vieux jardiniers, ces vieux cuisiniers, ces vieux gardiens de musée ... qui sont aussi incapables de se décider pour la paix que pour la guerre.(p. 279)

and extols the virtues of patience and level headedness. No longer does he view the conflict as one "between two opposing forces of Nietzschean Supermen who would perform great deeds of heroism".³⁹ His overriding concern appears to be to reconcile the conflict between the nationalism that he had supported in the years leading up to 1914 and his now hatred of modern technological warfare. With this in mind, there is more than a similarity in the train of thought and reasoning between "le déserteur" and the author. The former categorically admits to the narrator that his life is nothing else but a living protest, and that he does not regret his refusal to fight. He links past with future when he confesses:

"En 1914, j'ai été un des rares dont il y aura des milliers d'exemplaires à la prochaine guerre ... à la prochaine, nous formerons des corps de déserteurs."(p. 292)

He wants no part in a European war, no role in military socialism. His philosophy of life is not complicated:

"On circule facilement sur la planète, maintenant, pourquoi ne pas en profiter? Je vais là où je peux vivre selon ma raison".(p. 293)

He deplores the dehumanizing tendencies of twentieth-century science and technology, and expresses disdain at political manoeuvres which he regards as:

"... le jeu le plus grossier parmi les jeux qu'offre cette planète".(p. 285)

39. See F. Field, op. cit. p. 86

"La fin d'une guerre"

The final part of La Comédie de Charleroi focusses upon October 1918. The author/narrator provides Blow, an American officer, with a short synopsis of his war service since being evacuated from the front in 1916 with a "blessure heureuse", which was, nevertheless, serious enough to warrant exemption from future duty in the trenches. He describes how he eventually became an interpreter with the American army. Blow proves to be the antithesis of the traditional soldier. He is portrayed in an almost theatrical fashion. The narrator observes:

Il rôdait partout à l'arrière avec sa tunique trop courte qui rejoignait difficilement sur son ventre son pantalon trop court. Pour se ficeler, il devait faire coudre ensemble deux ceinturons. Et sur la tête, son casque trop petit était comme une écuelle, là où il aurait fallu une marmite.(p. 293)

Heroic zeal is treated with a deep irony. The narrator's demand to be drafted back into active service meets with scorn and suspicion.

He explains:

Mon chef de service ... tomba dans une pâmoison admirative, mais dans les couloirs du centre de réforme, tout le monde me regarda avec horreur ... Personne en 1917 ne croyait plus à de pareils élans. Et personne n'avait tort, car il y avait longtemps que se de pareils élans étaient entiers, ils étaient enterrés.

The narrator, however, has little intention of fighting. Within eight days of his posting to the front lines, he falls in love and succeeds in obtaining a transfer to the auxiliary services. He contemplates his good fortune at being removed from the danger zone at frequent intervals during the fighting:

Que serait-il arrivé si des accidents heureux ne m'avaient pas retiré du front? En 1914, deux blessures coup sur coup, en 1915, une maladie, en 1916, une nouvelle blessure? Je crois que j'ai frôlé le crime.(pp. 305-6)

His cynicism and indifference grows rapidly as the armistice approaches. He reasons:

Nous n'étions que de bas exécutants. Pourquoi risquer ma peau, là où il n'y avait pas grand intérêt.(p. 307)

The closing pages of the novel end on rather a negative note. Whilst the narrator welcomes the armistice, there is more than a hint of regret that the opportunity to distinguish himself on the field of battle has been surpassed. Rather conversely, the end of the war appears to herald a final death for all those who manage to survive. It would seem that there is no way back to an ideal which existed in the past and that the future also holds little promise of a return to former glory. The narrator explains:

... j'entrerais dans la paix avec une âme morte, car l'armistice allait venir. Encore quelques jours à attendre qu'on pouvait sans doute compter sur ses doigts et le tour serait joué. Se sauver de la mort, c'est mourir.(p. 309)

Drieu la Rochelle came away from the First World War with the idea that a new generation, tempered in the trenches, should seize political power and regenerate France. His generation had achieved a grandeur that their elders had never known which gave them the right to rule, to create a more dynamic nation that would reflect the vitality of youth. The country's salvation lay in a rupture with the past and in revolt against tradition. La Comédie de Charleroi is therefore an attack upon contemporary individual and national

decadence which bears witness to a transformation of the heroic mode of war fiction, under the pressure of reality, into pacifist protest. Although the description of Drieu's reactions at the beginning of the war was written twenty years afterwards in 1934 when he had just been converted to Fascism, he does not exaggerate the impact that the experience of battle had originally made upon him. As Grover points out,⁴⁰ an artist can be much more truthful under the veil of fiction. He must paint man in all his humanity; he must see the two sides of any questions, and if he is a great artist he sees more than two sides. After the war Drieu was full of sympathy for his former enemies and repeatedly urged for a rapprochement between France and Germany during the 1920's. With Hitler's rise to power in January 1933 and the Nazi seizure of power in Germany, February 1934, however, Drieu looked for a new political movement to rally together those discontented with the Third Republic and to unite nationalism with socialism. Fascism, he believed, taught life must be lived in terms of heroism, risk and adventure. Throughout the novel he oscillates between newly founded pacifist tendencies and a deep seated desire for action. If there is a "third side" to his writing it is an inner turning towards a sense of human brotherhood in order to help overcome a growing despair and an ever increasing feeling of isolation in the modern world.

40. Op. cit. p. 249

CHAPTER XI

War and the despondency of the human condition

Céline: VOYAGE AU BOUT DE LA NUIT - An exacerbated, imaginative response

Louis-Ferdinand-Auguste Destouches did not pursue formal studies far and, having obtained the "baccalauréat" in 1912, a few months later enlisted for three years in the 12th regiment of "the Cuirassiers", a cavalry unit based in Rambouillet. By the time war broke out, he had been promoted to the rank of sergeant. In November 1914 at Poelkapelle, Flanders, he was wounded whilst returning from taking an order under violent enemy shellfire from his infantry regiment to the brigade. He was cited for bravery and awarded the military medal by Joffre himself. Like Bardamu, his chief protagonist of *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, he was to spend the rest of the war in hospitals and in the reserve lines until dismissed from active war service in 1916. In his essay "Louis-Ferdinand Céline et la Guerre-Cauchemar",¹ Maurice Rieuneau draws attention to several similarities between author and narrator. Both fought in Flanders, both received the military medal and were ultimately hospitalized in neurological wards, and neither joined up initially due to patriotic urges. Rieuneau refers to the novel as "un nouveau roman-témoignage sur la guerre".² The narrator proves quite incapable of resisting or seriously influencing events, except in a negative way. He can only voice a feeling of helplessness, that he believes the reader must share. Céline appears to identify with the narrator. He makes no

1. See *Guerre et Révolution, dans le roman français de 1919 à 1939*, op. cit. pp. 295-313

2. Ibid. p. 296

real effort to dissuade the public from confusing him with his central character. He does in fact share his first name, Ferdinand.

Céline believed that the novelist had no right to sentimentalize the experience of war. In Voyage au bout de la nuit military conflict is shown to be simply monstrous. From the outset Bardamu's experiences assume nightmarish features. When his initial curiosity begins to waver as he enters an army barrack following enlistment, and his negative attitude towards life begins to assume the upperhand, it is already too late to make an escape:

J'allais m'en aller. Mais trop tard! Ils avaient refermé la porte en douce derrière nous les civils. On était faits, comme des rats.(p. 19)

The narrator protests about what has befallen him incessantly, and in personal terms, with the knowledge that his protest really accomplishes nothing beyond the celebration of failure and defeat. He questions the reasons for fighting a nation of people with whom he has had little connection and to whom he has shown no animosity in the past. From the very beginning, his vision of what has taken place accords with his painful realization that life is futile and that man is a totally defenceless creature, moved about at the bidding of forces he neither fully comprehends nor has the ability to resist. He admits:

La guerre en somme c'était tout ce qu'on ne comprenait pas ...
Jamais je ne m'étais senti aussi inutile parmi toutes ces balles et les lumières de ce soleil. Une immense universelle moquerie.(p. 22)

Rieuneau points out that it is the "non-sens essentiel de la guerre" which Céline denounces vehemently, and that:

Le thème de la folie, du délire forme ... une des notes de fond du livre.³

Bardamu contemplates the initial enthusiasm and excitement of the masses in August 1914 with incredulity. He views human existence as completely devoid of grandeur and the inevitable consequence of this is profound despair:

Serais-je donc le seul lâche sur la terre? ... Perdu parmi deux millions de fous héroïques et déchaînés et armés jusqu'aux cheveux? Avec casques, sans casques, sans chevaux, sur motos, hurlants, en autos, sifflants, tirailleurs, comploteurs, volants, à genoux, creusant, se défilant, caracolant dans les sentiers, pétaradant, enfermés sur la terre comme dans un cabanon, pour y tout détruire, Allemagne, France et Continents, tout ce qui respire, détruire, plus enragés que les chiens, adorant leur rage ... cent, mille fois plus enragés que mille chiens et tellement plus vicieux! Nous étions jolis! Décidément, je le concevais, je m'étais embarqué dans une croisade apocalyptique.

On est puceau de l'Horreur comme on l'est de la volupté. Comment aurais-je pu me douter moi de cette horreur en quittant la place Clichy? Qui aurait pu prévoir, avant d'entrer vraiment dans la guerre, tout ce que contenait la sale âme héroïque et fainéante des hommes?(p. 24)

The naïvety of Bardamu's youth collapses under the pressure from the brutal realities of war. Basically an idealist, he is deeply hurt by the evidence all around him that forces him little by little to recognize and acknowledge the painful truth about mankind. From his sense of hurt erupts an explosive protest. The main weight of his outcry falls upon those in senior military positions. He draws attention to the absurdity of commanding officers who sacrifice human lives without remorse:

Ce colonel, c'était donc un monstre! A présent, j'en étais assuré, pire qu'un chien, il n'imaginait pas son trépas! Je conçus en même temps qu'il devait y en avoir beaucoup des comme lui dans notre armée, des braves, et puis tout autant sans doute dans l'armée d'en face ... Avec des êtres semblables, cette imbécilité infernale

3. Ibid. p. 306

pouvait continuer indéfiniment ... Pourquoi s'arrêteraient-ils? Jamais je n'avais senti plus implacable la sentence des hommes et des choses.(pp. 23-4)

Bardamu becomes gradually obsessed with the fact that there are certain forms of absurdity in human life which he is powerless to escape. War brings him face to face with the monstrous, apparently unnatural. The appalling discovery which he makes, however, is that the monstrous is not at all unnatural, that it has become accepted and to a large extent ignored by those in high command. The letters which his colonel receives from the general make no mention of a cease fire or a withdrawal from the heat of battle. Bardamu finds it difficult to comprehend that any member of society can sanction such horror. He admits:

Je venais de découvrir d'un coup la guerre tout entière. J'étais dépucelé. Faut être à peu près seul devant elle comme je l'étais à ce moment-là pour bien la voir la vache, en face de profil ...

Il y a bien des façons d'être condamné à mort. Ah! combien n'aurais-je pas donné à ce moment-là pour être en prison au lieu d'être ici, moi crétin! ... De la prison, on en sort vivant, pas de la guerre.(p. 25)

War quickly convinces Bardamu that callous individuals, unaffected by terror and suffering, like the colonel with whom he finds himself caught under fire, must be insane. His indifference shown towards the cavalryman who reports the death of Barousse, "maréchal des logis", is particularly hideous. The cavalryman explains:

- Il a été tué en allant chercher le fourgon à pain sur la route des Etrapes, mon colonel!

- Et alors?

- Il a été éclaté par un obus!

- Et alors, nom de Dieu!

- Et voilà! Mon colonel ...

- C'est tout?

- Oui, c'est tout, mon colonel

- Et le pain? demanda le colonel.(pp. 27-8)

The narrative changes continually between the horrific and the farcical as Céline constantly brings our scale of values under severe scrutiny. Heroism is meaningless. Soldiers are brutally killed regardless of rank and experience. In death, the colonel, his belly ripped open, seems to embrace, in an ironically fraternal gesture, a common soldier whose head has been blown off. General des Entrayes is portrayed in a similarly grotesque manner. Bardamu describes him as eating the rations of forty men; despite the army's fighting in retreat, he still insists upon the finest sleeping and eating facilities in each area visited. Commandant Pinçon is a symbol of the hideousness of life. The men under his command are not spared a moment's respite. Bardamu avows:

Si on avait dit au commandant Pinçon qu'il n'était qu'un sale assassin lâche, on lui aurait fait un plaisir énorme ... on avait découvert sur la terre un homme bâti comme vous et moi, mais bien plus charognard que les crocodiles et les requins qui passent entre deux eaux la gueule ouverte autour des bateaux d'ordures et de viandes pourries qu'on va leur déverser au large ...(p. 38)

Capitaine Ortolan epitomizes all the incomprehensible forces that weigh upon human destiny. He is spurred on by killing and the forces that sustain war. Bardamu affirms:

En vérité, il était infatigable ... Il nous aurait envoyés prendre du feu à la bouche des canons d'en face. Il collaborait avec la mort. On aurait pu jurer qu'elle avait un contrat avec le capitaine Ortolan.(pp. 48-9)

He recalls the Aztec warriors, who frequently made 80,000 weekly sacrifices to their rain god, drawing a comparison with the commanding officers along the western front and describing them as:

... une horde de fous vicieux devenus incapables soudain d'autre chose, autant qu'ils étaient, que de tuer et d'être étripés sans savoir pourquoi.(p. 51)

Such men generate disgust and horror. Bardamu concludes:

Le canon pour eux c'était rien que du bruit. C'est à cause de ça que les guerres peuvent durer.(p. 53)

Bardamu's sanity is endangered by his wartime experiences. He repeatedly finds himself condemned to suffer through the experience of others, as well as in his own misfortune. In chapter II, such is his frustration at the uncertainty of the duration of the hostilities that he refuses to take it upon himself to bring the war to an end.(p. 26). He dreams of a triumphant return to Paris and a hero's welcome.(p. 30) He is condemned, however, to what appears to be a futile existence in a world distorted by apparently unavoidable fear and suffering. Enraged he resorts to throwing the monstrous back in men's faces, in protest, in an attempt to salvage some form of dignity, but finds little satisfaction as his words go unheeded:

Serait-ce ici la fin de tout? Combien y passerais-je de temps, dans cette solitude, après qu'ils m'auraient fait mon affaire? Avant d'en finir? Et dans quel fossé? Le long duquel de ces murs? Ils m'achèveraient peut-être? D'un coup de couteau? Ils arrachaient parfois les mains, les yeux et le reste ... Qui sait?(p. 55)

Self-examination leads directly to self-disgust as well as to the firm belief that life is worthless. The war quickly convinces Bardamu to look upon fear as natural in any intelligent individual and to appreciate that it is an eminently healthy state. He makes no attempt to hide his sentiments from Lola, an American girl whom he

meets in Paris whilst on leave. Accused of being a coward, he retorts:

"Oui tout à fait lâche, Lola, je refuse la guerre et tout ce qu'il y a dedans ... Je la refuse tout net, avec tous les hommes qu'elle contient, je ne veux rien avoir à faire avec eux, avec elle. Seraient-ils neuf cent quatre-vingt-quinze millions et moi tout seul, c'est eux qui ont tort, Lola, et c'est moi qui ai raison, parce que je suis le seul à savoir ce que je veux: je ne veux plus mourir".(p. 88)

Rieuneau points out the danger of an over-patriotic civilian attitude, in particular amongst women. He writes of "le mensonge suprême de la guerre",⁴ and explains:

Les civils souhaitent féroceement la mort des soldats, se nourrissent de gloire imaginaire et de sang véritable. Leur folie patriotique prend le sens d'un vaste appétit de meurtre et de carnage.⁵

Lola shows a total lack of sensitivity and understanding as Bardamu recounts his unedifying war service. The more hostile her reaction, the more loudly and violently Bardamu utters his cry of protest, and the more clearly he asserts his inner sense of dignity, at the risk of allowing his vulgarity appear:

Alors vivent les fous et les lâches! Ou plutôt survivent les fous et les lâches! Vous souvenez-vous d'un seul nom par exemple, Lola, d'un de ces soldats tués pendant la guerre de Cent ans? ... Avez-vous jamais cherché à en connaître un seul de ces noms? ... Non, n'est-ce pas? ... Ils vous sont aussi anonymes, indifférents et plus inconnus que le dernier atome de ce presse-papiers devant nous, que votre crotte du matin ... Voyez donc bien qu'ils sont morts pour rien, Lola! Pour absolument rien du tout, ces crétins! Je vous l'affirme! La preuve est faite! Il n'y a que la vie qui compte.(p. 88)

Anguish is implicit in Voyage au bout de la nuit, in the emphasis given to the gulf dividing civilian reactions and beliefs in the rear from those of the troops in the front line. To Céline, the fatal

.....

4. Op. cit. p. 300

5. Ibid. pp. 300-1

flaw of existence, of what Malraux termed the "human condition", is inherent in man himself, not simply implicit in his situation. The bleakness of outlook, the breakdown in communication, the complete lack of understanding, of appreciation, is an indication of man's inhumanity to man, a projection of the basic nature of mankind. The total lack of favourable perspective in the way civilians view soldiers on leave or those whose wounds necessitate rest and treatment well away from the front lines, is quite inescapable in its effects. Céline writes:

... eux, à l'arrière, ils devenaient, à mesure que la guerre avançait, de plus en plus vicieux.(p. 67)

Between Bardamu and Lola come the forces that will bring the collapse of all their aspirations.

... la guerre ... cette foutue énorme rage qui poussait la moitié des humains, aimants ou non, à envoyer l'autre moitié vers l'abattoir.(p. 69)

The novel proposes no constructive means by which man may hope to make positive sense of existence. There is no optimistic solution to propose to the ever-present problem of survival in a hostile world. For, in the author's eyes, it is not the universe but man himself that is absurd. And so, from the very beginning of their relationship, there is little hope of a reconciliation between Bardamu's awareness of external reality and Lola's exacerbated imagination. Bardamu affirms:

Pour Lola, la France demeurait une espèce d'entité chevaleresque, aux contours peu définis dans l'espace et le temps, mais en ce moment dangereusement blessée et à cause de cela même très excitante. Moi, quand on me parlait de la France, je pensais

irrésistiblement à mes tripes, alors forcément, j'étais beaucoup plus réservé pour ce qui concernait l'enthousiasme.(p. 72)

Lola is a product of an alien environment which brings about the collapse of man's aspirations, invalidating all positive effort and draining every gesture of meaning. Bardamu attacks the callous indifference and hypocrisy of all levels of society:

On mentait avec rage au-delà de l'imaginaire, bien au-delà du ridicule et de l'absurde, dans les journaux, sur les affiches, à pied, à cheval, en voiture. Tout le monde s'y était mis. C'est à qui mentirait plus énormément que l'autre. Bientôt, il n'y eut plus de vérité dans la ville ...

Tout ce qu'on touchait était truqué, le sucre, les avions, les sandales, les confitures, les photos; tout ce qu'on lisait, avalait, suçait, admirait, proclamait, réfutait, défendait, tout cela n'était que fantômes haineux, truquages et mascarades ... Le délire de mentir et de croire s'attrape comme la gale.(pp. 74-5)

In the military hospital where Bardamu recovers from his wounds, there is more sanity among his fellow patients who suffer from all kinds of mental and physical pain than among the doctors and nurses who surround him. He paints a picture which fails to keep within recognizable proportions. The absurdity here is the excessive patriotism mouthed by the attending staff. The new "médecin chef" exhibits his patriotic tendencies to the full, delighted to have received a fourth "galon". He takes great pleasure in delivering a daily lecture to his patients:

"La France, mes amis, vous a fait confiance, c'est une femme, la plus belle des femmes la France! ... Elle compte sur votre héroïsme la France! Victime de la plus lâche, de la plus abominable agression. Elle a le droit d'exiger de ses fils d'être vengée profondément la France! ... Aidez-nous à votre tour dans la mesure de votre bonne volonté! Je le sais, elle nous est acquise votre bonne volonté! Et que bientôt vous puissiez tous reprendre votre à côté de vos chers camarades des tranchées! Votre place sacrée! Pour la défense de notre sol chéri. Vive la France! En avant!(p. 114)

Bardamu and his fellow patients vie with one another in responding to this over-enthusiastic rhetoric with far-fetched tales of their own gallantry. Branledore invents episodes which are exaggerated beyond all measure. These culminate farcically in a performance, at the Comédie Française, of an epic poem written by an earnest young soldier in honour of Bardamu. Bardamu explains:

Nous vivions un grand roman de geste, dans la peau de personnages fantastiques, au fond desquels, dérisoires, nous tremblions de tout le contenu de nos viandes et de nos âmes. (pp. 130-1)

Throughout the novel he finds himself time after time drawn into disillusionment, into the degradation that marks his progress along the road to death. He appears to stumble through life without hope of redemption. Nevertheless, his anti-patriotic sentiments remain constantly high. His inner moral sensibility is fully awakened to the external scandals of war. Rieuneau writes:

Bardamu devient ainsi l'anarchiste antipatriote et défaitiste qui refuse la guerre, refuse coûte que coûte de mourir, persuadé qu'en face de sa vie à sauver, il ne rencontre que mensonges et haines. S'il est parti par curiosité et bravade, il a vite compris qu'il s'est pris au piège du sentiment.⁶

Céline uses him as a figure of protest, a representative of reason and humanity in a world perverted by the folly of war and monstrous injustice. To Céline, the "absurd" forces weighing down on man's destiny were at the very essence of his being. Matthews claims that he considered the human condition "irremediable" and life "an inoperable disease".⁷ Rieuneau points out that the author's disillusionment was derived from his first encounters with war. He writes:

.....

6. Ibid. p. 301

7. The Inner Dream, Céline as Novelist, New York, Syracuse University Press, 1978, p. 54

La guerre fournit à Céline deux expériences fondamentales qui ont modelé sa vision du monde et engendré son angoisse: l'Absurde et la Mort, les deux étant, bien entendu inséparables. Céline est obsédé par le néant qui ôte tout sens à la vie. La guerre est, à l'intérieur de la condition absurde de l'homme, une sorte de parodie frénétique de son destin.⁸

His responsibility, as a medical officer, to soothe pain and restore health, was to form the basis of his later pacifism and staunch anti-militaristic beliefs. From the very beginning of the novel he shows signs of a total commitment to a view of reality that is coloured by his sensitivity to the underlying violence of existence. War, for Céline, imposes a complete reversal of values. There is no heroism or glory in the traditional sense of the words. The first hundred pages of Voyage au bout de la nuit, therefore, cannot be considered, in any way, as a simple "témoignage de guerre". Instead, the war serves as an initiation to universal disgust and the revelation of original sin. Egoism, selfishness, the absence of generosity and of innocence are all by-products of war which are experienced by Bardamu and confirmed by his life in exile. Vandromme writes:

La guerre, que décrit Céline dans Le Voyage, ce n'est pas un défilé militaire avec cavaliers à pompons; ce n'est pas non plus un discours sur les vertus viriles. C'est une prophétie de mort, la ronde des éventrés, des décapités, des amputés, le cortège de la démence pouilleuse. Il n'y a rien de noble là-dedans: c'est une saloperie infecte, un charnier putride dans lequel de pauvres types perdent pied.⁹

The absurdity of an existence in the mud of Flanders,(pp. 30-1) the folly of troops being shot at and killed by their comrades by mistake,(p. 43) stories of executions in order to raise morale,(pp. 44-5) the deaths of innocent young children,(p. 56) civilian opportunism and profiteering,(p. 57) allegations of artillery incompetency,(p. 60) the temptation to desert,(p. 64) are all themes

8. Op. cit. p. 306

9. "Céline, la guerre et le pacifisme", Ecrits de Paris, December 1962, p. 111

which find their way into the opening chapters of the novel and which tarnish the traditional idea of the glory of fighting for one's country, of patriotic duty. There is little objectivity in the way in which they are depicted. Céline's criticism and disgust manifest themselves openly throughout. His view of the novelist's craft being a witness to life, obliges him to show things as they appeared to him, although not necessarily as they were, but more the way they, impressed themselves upon his sensibility. Matthews points out that objective techniques engendered by authorial detachment would have required repudiation of his very function as a writer.¹⁰ Céline's preoccupation with the "absurd", not only that of war, but of death, of civilization in general, consequently imprints itself continually upon the narrative. It is the leitmotif of the opening chapters of Voyage au bout de la nuit. Vandromme comments:

C'est un tableau, noir de suie, rouge garance, invraisemblable - un tableau en désordre, qui bouge, qui traverse les pages des livres comme une émeute, qui mugit, qui râle, qui rêve, qui délire ... c'est un cauchemar.¹¹

Rieuneau expresses the bleakness of Céline's antimilitaristic expression as "la hantise du condamné à mort",¹² which can be found on every page. Humanity itself has become gangrenous. Peace proves almost as unworthy as war, as decadent and as distasteful. Both secrete the same misery and reveal the same disgraceful state of mankind. All visions of courage and heroism are converted into disgust and derision. Céline's protest would appear to be that of a man in great anguish, in severe metaphysical despair. In the preface

.....
 10. Op. cit. p. 26
 11. Op. cit. p. 114
 12. Op. cit. p. 307

to the Russian translation of Voyage au bout de la nuit, Ivan Anissimov claims that the novel, whilst overflowing with genuine criticism of war and of those who prolong such horror and suffering, proposes only one fundamental issue, that of the despondency and despair of the human condition.¹³ It must not be forgotten, however, that it was his war experience which truly initiated Céline to the folly of the world, and perhaps, as Rieuneau suggests, it would not be too exaggerated to say that the force of his entire literary vision relies greatly upon this.¹⁴

.....
 13. See Rieuneau, op. cit. p. 312
 14. Ibid. p. 313

CONCLUSION

In 1945 Read wrote that there was no doubt that there existed in society a love of vicarious suffering and violence, that from an early age we delight in stories of strife and bloodshed.¹ War literature pre-1914 was full of ennobling qualities and ideas. As we saw in chapter II, an exotic decor, an idealistic atmosphere, patriotic exultation were dominant features of the works of writers such as Déroulède, Péguy, Barrès and Psichari. Their chief starting point was "expression projetée" rather than "expérience vécue". They wrote with confidence and enthusiasm, using patriotic and proclamatory vocabulary. They were intent on promoting an image of glory and honour, of optimism and excitement, in order to appeal to the patriotic conscience of the nation. War literature at the turn of the century extolled the will to suffer, encouraged heroism and devotion to one's country. There were few details of death, of pain and suffering. The tone was not analytical or interpretative but largely colourful and ideological. There was little controversy. Traditional militaristic views were promoted for the main part and virtues of military pomp and splendour upheld. In order to test the genuineness of these images, one would have had to have known the realities of war through personal experience. 1914 made this immediacy possible for the first time on such a large scale.

The purpose of this thesis has been to examine the images of war created by those who wrote from the inner fact of things, who spoke with immediacy of experience and concern; to "test" the genuineness of the images and, in doing so, to assess the level of

1. "The Failure of War Books", in A Coat of Many Colours, London, Routledge & Kegan, 1945, p. 74

literary and moral deceit. In concluding we must, at all times, take into consideration the adequacy of fictional techniques for the transcription of war experience, in particular the problems of language and the outmoded battle rhetoric which no longer corresponded to the truth of experience. We must question the author's starting point, his initial purpose for writing, and how this has been affected, perhaps even modified by external events, and pressures. We must assess the extent to which his own personality affects the narrative, directly and indirectly, in his overall desire to communicate the truth effectively, and finally, to question the very nature of this truth he seeks to depict.

In chapter IV we examined four quite different depictions of the events during July 1914, leading to the declaration of hostilities at the beginning of August. The events which each author chose to record differed considerably. In Clarté, Barbusse mentions few historical details and generalizes when describing the reactions of the public. The emphasis throughout is the chauvinism of the French nation, the respect for the ideals of Déroulède and the desire for "revanche". Germany is portrayed as very much the aggressor and France, the splendid defender. Not only is the presentation unbalanced, offering little credibility, but the rapid time sequence of events leads, almost inevitably, to an overall distortion of the picture that Barbusse creates. There is the distinct impression that the entire episode has a purely incidental function in the novel and serves the purpose of linking pre-war France with trench warfare upon which Barbusse wishes to focus his main attention. Chevallier, even with the advantage of a decade of retrospection, like Barbusse, appears little concerned with historical detail. The facts which are

mentioned appear to have been carefully selected and fashioned to suit his own anti-war sentiments. Several are mentioned only briefly to be followed by an expansion of the author's own subjective and evaluative reasoning. The omission of events and rapid time sequence between the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia and mobilization, between mobilization and the declaration of war, clearly distorts the whole presentation of the July crisis. Facts do not "speak for themselves" but there is constant manipulation by the author. As with Barbusse, it is evident that Chevallier's intention is to pass over the build-up to war as quickly as possible in order to devote attention to the hostilities and their effects. Martin du Gard differs completely from Barbusse and Chevallier in his treatment of the outbreak of war. The title of the novel, L'Eté 1914, indicates that attention will be principally focused on the events of the summer of 1914, indeed, only in the closing pages does the reader glimpse the first days of battle. The constant reference to dates, historical figures, facts, newspaper headlines and reports, creates an overall atmosphere of verisimilitude. There is no major distortion of events as with Barbusse and Chevallier, but a tendency to modify the roles of the respective French and German governments, a lack of sensitivity, at times, towards the socialist movement, resulting in a shaping of their position and views, and a general inclination to transform theory into certitude. The overall effect is a less gilded representation of reality, nevertheless, a comprehensive treatment of the July crisis, rendering it more intelligible, more personal for the reader who seeks survey rather than detail. Romain's depiction of the outbreak of war is clearly not of the same integral importance to Le Drapeau Noir and Prélude à Verdun as with Martin du Gard. Many

details are omitted and the consequently rapid time sequence of events results in an overall distortion. Nevertheless, Romain's use of historical figures does help to create, to some extent, an illusion of reality, although by the same token this is partially destroyed by their integration with fictional characters. The personages of Jaurès, Wilhelm II, Lenin, whilst clarifying certain views held at the time, fail to shape the account as a whole. Romain is much more interested in portraying the horror of battle in the subsequent two volumes of Les Hommes de Bonne Volonté. In each of the above examples, literature, in the form of the novel, fails to produce an accurate transcription of events leading up to the declaration of hostilities. Each author has an initial purpose in writing which does not focus uniquely on the portrayal of events without change. There is also a linguistic inadequacy which revolves around the author's chosen discourse. Barbusse's language is symbolic and artistic throughout. He frequently uses simile, personification, repetition, hyperbole, in order to create tension and surprise. This colourful use of language develops into an imaginative, dramatic, style of writing, almost continued in places and melodramatic towards the end. The rather elaborate, inflated rhetoric is ironic and indicative of the author's own emotion and bitterness, writing in 1919. While he does not openly evaluate, his disenchantment indicates to the reader the folly of Europe during the summer of 1914, to the extent that in many passages there is not only a distortion of reality but a substitution of meaning, as his anger becomes more important than the subject matter. Chevallier's discourse is also extremely colourful and emotional. The passages depicting the outbreak of war in La Peur contain personification,

simile, repetition, imagery, rhetorical questioning and several are poetic even melodramatic in nature. This elaborate style results in a dramatization of the summer of 1914, as the author makes a conscious effort to fashion the reader into a way of thinking. Chevallier shows little concern for authenticity and, in places, directly imposes his own personality on the narrative, openly concluding and evaluating the French reaction to the events of July/August 1914. His acrimony and exasperation are all too apparent in several passages which could perhaps be interpreted as anti-war propaganda. Martin du Gard's style of writing offers a contrast to that of Barbusse and Chevallier. There are few openly emotional, rhetorical passages in L'Eté 1914 and Martin du Gard, writes, for the most part, with coherence and precision. The sober tone occasionally gives way to the dramatic when the author's passionate demands for peace, expressed via Jacques Thibault, result in emotional outbursts which become exaggerated in the closing pages. Whilst Martin du Gard strives for objectivity and an ideological style of writing, his own awareness of the ominous threat of a second war during the 1930's influences his medium to the extent that there is an exaggeration of certain ideas and an interpretation and evaluation of the entire crisis, which, taken as a whole becomes almost important, if not more important than the actual depiction of events. Jules Romain's account follows a similar pattern to that of Martin du Gard, although much shorter and with far less detail. Most of the passages in Le Drapeau Noir and Prélude à Verdun that refer to the outbreak of war, are written in a sober style, with lucidity and orderliness, although there is a marked increase of adjectives and exaggeration for effect as the outbreak of war draws near and the build-up of events reaches

a climax. The entrance and exit of historical figures not only adds a level of interpretation but creates a theatrical atmosphere during the final chapter. Early objectivity gives way to a more subjective approach as in L'Eté 1914.

It follows from discussion of the above four novels that there is not one privileged way of depicting the events of the summer of 1914 and that the use of language and the time of writing project, almost inevitably, a secondary meaning on the final work. Whilst each novel succeeds in calling to mind images of the July crisis, not one achieves a balanced view of that moment in history. In Clarté, Barbusse's immediacy of response results in an over-emotional style designed to achieve public outcry and reflection, but not an illusion of reality. Chevallier, in his preface to La Peur, states that his intention is to tell the truth; the retrospective nature of his account, however, when viewed alongside the political developments in Germany towards the end of the 1920's, increases the omnipresence of the author, his reflections and conclusions. The finished work, written with hindsight, is almost an elaborated form of Clarté. Martin du Gard perhaps comes closest to an arrangement of reality by constructive imagination, but writing retrospectively during the mid-1930's posed several problems: a weakness in the quasi-historical account, an increase in personal interpretation, and the inability to prevent the intrusion of 1936 from constantly invading the narrative, an over-indulgence in the use of hindsight. The result is a less emotional, more intelligible account than offered by Clarté and La Peur, but because of the length of treatment, a greater shaping of material imposed by the author's own personality and by the climate in which he was writing. Romain's strict selection of events and use

of historical figures, emphasizes the incidental nature of the account of the outbreak of war in relation to the work as a whole. Whilst Romain Rolland avoids the emotional outbursts of Barbusse and Chevallier, for the most part, he lacks the detail of Martin du Gard. His appearance of objectivity is, as with Martin du Gard, marred by the influence of the political situation in Europe during the late 1930's and the almost impossible task of preventing hindsight from entering his narrative. At best, the relevant sections of Le Drapeau Noir and Prélude à Verdun are interesting due to the inclusion of historical characters who play active roles; the limitations of these roles, however, (Rolland is, after all, placing himself in the consciousness of these characters and imagining what their thoughts are), and their contact with fictional counterparts, stresses the artificiality of the works, all the more.

In section II, chapters V to IX, we examined four different responses to the physical horrors of trench warfare which all soldiers experienced during the hours spent in the front lines. We must now analyse the extent to which they effectively communicate what the front was like. In Le Feu, Barbusse pays little attention to historical detail (probably because it was scarcely historical at the time), there is no mention of dates, facts, real people; the chapter headings serve as a reminder of the fictional propensity of the work. The emphasis throughout is on the horror of life along the western front. More so than in Clarté, Barbusse devotes many pages to the natural horrors of life in the trenches. There is no gradual build-up to the exposure of the troops, no depiction of their initial enthusiasm or of the progressive destruction of their ideals. Similarly, in Clarté, despite the strong use of a first person

narrator, Paulin, hardly any attention is devoted to the individual's reaction to the horrors of the battlefield or to the personal degeneration of the soldiers. In both novels attention is focussed primarily on the group and the magnitude of events in general. Nevertheless, in neither work does Barbusse succeed in portraying an image of war in all its entirety. There is scarcely any positive acknowledgement of the courage of the troops. Man is seen very much as an anonymous entity, subordinate to the somewhat apocalyptic forces of nature. Dorgelès, like Barbusse, places little emphasis on historical detail, nevertheless, from the opening pages of the novel which describe the enthusiasm and patriotism of the soldiers as they leave for the front, there is a patient augmentation of the physical horrors of war which has a cumulative effect upon the troops. Their disillusionment gradually increases. Whilst it cannot be said that Dorgelès duly stresses the courageous and heroic character of the men at the front, there is more compassion and sympathy in his descriptions than in Le Feu or Clarté. In Les Croix de Bois, the individual becomes shaped by his war experience rather than completely dominated and destroyed. Duhamel makes little attempt to portray anything other than what he directly witnessed as an army surgeon and therefore Vie des martyrs and Civilisation are for the most part confined to the scenes within the compass of the casualty clearing stations near the front lines or the base hospitals in the rear. Unlike Barbusse and Dorgelès, Duhamel is uniquely committed to humanitarian goals and acknowledges the heroism of the wounded and the dead in the midst of adversity. He is much more sensitive to the emotional repercussions within the individual than the physical pressures of life in the trenches. In Vie des martyrs few facts are

dated, in Civilisation, although occasional references are made to the month and year, the war becomes very much a backdrop against which the individual dramas are acted out, and attention focusses more on the wider implications of the "malaise" of society as a whole. Chevallier differs from Barbusse, Dorgelès and Duhamel in the fact that he is writing retrospectively, with over a decade of hindsight. The passage of time allows for a less impulsive and more reflective response. The large use of the present tense and first person narrative bestows an air of immediacy and veracity upon the account which describes most of the physical horrors of trench life, without stressing the heroic endurance of the soldiers. Chevallier's engagement in retrospect, however, leads to a conflict in his intentions. Whilst he wishes to portray, in all sincerity, "the truth" about the war, his attempt to render memories convincing and poignant results in an almost over restrained, over controlled reaction. If Barbusse, Dorgelès, Duhamel and Chevallier approach collectively the full horror of having lived through the Great War as a front line soldier, they fail individually to reach an effective transcription of war experience. A further reason for their failure resides in their chosen discourse. Barbusse's language is highly figurative. His use of imagery, symbolism, personification, repetition, hyperbole is an attempt to describe graphically the indescribable, to express in words, feelings and sights that only direct experience can afford. He tends to expand the horror of a situation in an attempt to seduce the reader emotionally. His indignation and moral outrage at the suffering of humanity in the face of impersonal, destructive forces, result in a passionately inflated rhetoric whose high diction often masks and distorts the

reality of the situation. In Le Feu the sense of the epic and the visionary romanticizes or fantasizes attempts at portraying concrete reality into an ornate vision of the brutal truth. In order to intensify his protest, Barbusse constantly interprets the events that he portrays and, at times, directly intervenes in the narrative in order to add further comments or explanations. In Clarté speculation becomes more important than observation as Barbusse resorts to the use of dream, delirium and hallucinatory imagery. The attempt at a graphic description of the physical horrors of war subsequently gives way to an elaboration of the superior forces at work and to prophetic pretensions, indeed almost open propaganda, concerning the more general distemper of mankind. Dorgelès, on the other hand, writes with less emotive expression, rarely showing bitterness of feeling and a sense of moral outrage. With minimal authorial content he lucidly depicts the physical horrors of life in the trenches, allowing the reader freedom of response, to a large extent. The result is an overall discourse of rational and moral persuasion. The illusion of reality, however, is seriously threatened in episodes where Dorgelès depicts the dead. Here, the sobriety of his style gives way to the dramatic, the theatrical, even the sensational. It is almost as if an artificial backdrop takes over certain passages, with the insertion of actor-like characters, as Dorgelès uses personification and even poeticizes the macabre. Such exaggeration and dramatization is a distortion of the factual field. The medium through which Duhamel chooses to express his thoughts and ideas, and his chosen discourse, differs in the two novels in question. In Vie des martyrs, his literary style is rarely excessive. For the most part he maintains a sense of proportion and guards against

exaggeration and melodrama. Description of the wounded and dying, however, is sometimes so calm and lucid with little graphic detail designed to shock and impress, that we are led to question whether the use of such rhetoric corresponds directly to the truth of experience. There is minimal sentiment in his use of imagery and vocabulary and where he does interpret for the reader, the message is, for the most part non-prescriptive. The bond created between patient and doctor has, in particular, an emotional impact upon the reader, and serves to underline the strong personal condemnation of war which runs throughout the novel and thereby provokes reflection and possibly action, on the part of the reader. Civilisation allows Duhamel to take his feelings a stage further. The tone is much more casual and familiar, almost flippant and ironic in places. The language is more figurative and many of the episodes described border on the melodramatic and sensational, even the incongruous. Whilst some of these explore to a considerable extent the truth of experience, the majority fail to communicate what the front was really like. Alongside such exaggerated and elaborate scenes, Duhamel inserts short bursts of cool, realistic analysis. Towards the end of the book the ideas originally developed in Vie des martyrs are expanded into a more philosophical attack on scientific rationalism and discourse on the meaning and purpose of life in general. Literary concern no longer corresponds to a quest for the truth of experience but more so to the testing of the theory that the regeneration of society must come from individuals themselves. Chevallier's conflict in intention in La Peur has already been touched upon. Whilst stating in the "preface" his aim of re-creating the truth, Chevallier's language is highly figurative, his overall

discourse full of literary technique. In his desire to portray the brutal horror of war, his use of colourful, emotive vocabulary does not result in rendering the scene more poignant. On the contrary, the appalling suffering and misery is toned down by the somewhat poetic descriptions, taking the reader further away from reality and thus failing to effectively communicate a truth. Unlike Barbusse, Chevallier's passion is not the reason for this distortion. Indeed, in many passages the author's control and restraint is admirably exercised, his thoughts expressed in a careful, structured manner via the narrator. Nevertheless, the position of retrospection which allows this detachment (indeed prevents, at times, a more compassionate, sympathetic response), is ironically at the very base of Chevallier's imaginative writing. His whole-hearted, enthusiastic commitment to the narration of his memories results in an inflated rhetoric designed to create the desired visual effect. The use of this high diction masks the horror of the original situation, spreading a mantle of literary deceit across many of the novel's pages. In addition, although direct comment and evaluation is mostly avoided, there seems little doubt that Chevallier's enthusiasm for his task succeeds in manipulating the reader throughout. The facts are not allowed to speak for themselves. The author's constructive imagination would appear to impose an order on events and re-arrange them in order to convince.

Literary creation permits all four writers to search for a deeper truth which goes beyond the specific. In *Le Feu* Barbusse has a dual aim, to portray the brutality of war and, in doing so, to use his experiences to invite change. His emotional rhetoric, however, goes beyond that which is immediately comprehensible. His

impassioned speech (a mixture of the popular and high forms of diction), and highly imaged vocabulary (explanatory devices aimed at rendering the unparalleled more intelligible) conversely forces the reader away from reality to abstraction; from destruction to almost admiration. Burke has already pointed out that a book wholly based on the repellent may partially close the mind to the repellent and, indeed, call forth as its response a "protective crust of insensitiveness".² In *Clarté*, the war becomes merely a pretext for the author's ideas about society. The passionate outbursts of *Le Feu* become more authoritative and doctoral, as observation proves secondary to speculation and the visionary takes over from the realist, with the emphasis upon the concepts of justice, logic, equality and truth. Duhamel moves from a stance of direct honest witness, from a depiction of the heroic manifestations of the human spirit with a desire to shock people out of their complacency and move them to self-pity, to a re-evaluation of scientific rationalism and the appalling degradation which it brings about. *Vie des martyrs* portrays the pain and suffering of the troops in moderation, with clinical control and restraint, whilst still arousing the compassion and pity of the reader. *Civilisation*, however, contains much more figurative language of a more forceful nature, particularly in the closing chapters, where Duhamel asserts that true progress should be measured in moral and spiritual terms rather than material concepts. In *Croix de bois* there is a cumulative effect. Dorgelès gradually increases the dejection of the soldiers who he shows willingly marching to the front at the beginning of the novel, allowing their

2. *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, Louisiana, Louisiana State University Press, 1941, p. 206

vision of a past and noble conflict to be slowly destroyed. War is therefore seen as an educative process. Whilst there is no overt moralizing, but rather a continuous genuine human protest, nevertheless, amidst the atmosphere of despair and pathos lies a feeling of deep indignity, and, in places, intense anger. Chevallier's personality is quite forcefully imprinted throughout *La Peur*. Despite writing with ten years of hindsight and a veneer of apparent calm and composure, Chevallier's inner emotions still run high. His elevated expression and highly figurative diction are purposely designed to manipulate the reader's reaction and to give emphasis to the outcry of shame which is deeply rooted in his past. The influence of author upon medium is most apparent. If any of the novels studied in this section can hold claim to semi-autobiography, *La Peur* is probably the closest.

We may conclude our analysis of section II by pointing out that all the authors in question desire to tell the truth about war, in their own individual way. The type of language differs from the colourful to the ideological, to the emotive and the imaginative, from the analytical and interpretative to the exaggerated and distorted. The more forceful and vivid the author's impressions, the more influence he has over his medium and the more the ensuing fiction modifies the novel's final value as "direct witness". Nevertheless, to learn by experience is the method of the animal. In so far as we hope to be more than animals we must learn by what is greater than passive experience, by imaginative experiment.

To "learn" by imaginative experiment would appear to be one of the fundamental premises behind Drieu la Rochelle's *La Comédie de Charleroi*. In section III, literature provides the author with a

vehicle for expressing the values which he considers to be essential for a revitalization programme for society. The outcome is a diatribe against mechanized warfare and against the general loss of decency and proportion in the modern world. Whilst there is evidence of "expérience vécue", the vast majority of the novel is taken up by "expression projetée". Drieu writes chiefly to expose the moral wounds of war, to explore the miseries of abandoned man. His preoccupation with the reflective mode reinforces his personal disenchantment which imposes the general atmosphere and themes within the novel as a whole. For Drieu, by the 1930's, war could no longer be viewed in total isolation. It was just one aspect of a corrupt and decadent section of society lost and confused by its experience of the 1914-18 conflict. Voyage au bout de la nuit recollects little of the war other than the grotesque and farcical aspects of battle. Céline's selection of events is designed to denounce the fatal flaw of existence inherent in man and to scrutinize his scale of values which appear to be devoid of all grandeur. There is little objectivity but instead an open manifestation of criticism and disgust for the hideousness of life.

There is an enormous difference between the images of war contained in pre-1914 literature and those which appeared during the years of conflict and the aftermath. We have seen that a major reason for this stems from what the individual deems worthy of being noted, of recollection; how he selects and shapes his material and how he imposes an order. Equally important, is his choice of language for the purpose he holds in writing. All works of literature consist of words, the same as those employed in everyday speech. However, the fact that daily language becomes literary

language pre-supposes a certain change, a certain distance. This distance differs amongst authors and the time lapse in which they respond to their subject matter. It is the distance between that which is worthy of being signified and its ultimate depiction which is of crucial importance. This may be said of all language which is used for aesthetic ends, which results in the creation of an illusion. Even the metaphor and the image introduce distance between the word and what is meant to be signified. In the introductory chapter we stressed the dangers of searching for accurate representation. The images of reality depicted in the novels of the Great War studied in this thesis are not intended to stand as indisputably accurate portrayals of the conflict, as much as to serve as faithful presentations to the reader, and to recreate in him the feelings and reactions that this event initially inspired in the writer himself. If the fictional and semi-autobiographical can never be totally true to events, as suggested in this thesis, then it can indicate an accurate account of the mentality of a certain author in front of his chosen subject matter. It is this "expression projetée" which is perhaps of more value than the "expérience vécue", almost impossible to capture accurately and meaningfully in written form. The former helps to render the latter more intelligible. Perhaps we should concentrate more upon arriving at an intelligibility of history, when we consider our images of reality, rather than delude ourselves with the possibility of discovering a reasonably accurate transposition of the "truth". Although it is not the purpose of this thesis, it would be interesting to analyse and compare the treatment of World War I in the French novel after 1940, to study, in particular, the influences upon literary technique that the Second

World War brought about. Others may be encouraged to extend the subject of response to the French novel of the Second World War along the lines of Margaret Atack's analysis of the Occupation in fiction³ or Anthony Cheal Pugh's work on Claude Simon and Marc Bloch,⁴ and to draw comparisons with the present thesis. One might consider whether problems of expression have become easier as we have grown more accustomed to the horrors of mechanized warfare that have come to characterize twentieth century writing in general, or whether the inadequacies of fictional techniques still and will always remain. A comparative study of the English or German novel, similar to Geraldine Murphy's forthcoming book World War I Literature in France and Germany⁵ or S. James' research on the First World War novel in France and Germany,⁶ would confirm whether literary inadequacy is more acute in one language than another or whether it is a general feature of war fiction.

3. "The Occupation in fiction: an analysis of the changes in perspective 1940-50, with special reference to the concept of *témoignage*". Ph.D. Leeds, 1986

4. "The representation of war: fact and fiction" in Claude Simon: New Directions, (ed.) Alistair B. Duncan, op. cit. See also J. Mayhew's research "The French Writer and the Second World War", Ph.D. Manchester

5. Geraldine Murphy is a member of the French Department at Edinburgh University

6. M. A. Birmingham, 1977

BIBLIOGRAPHY

GENERAL

Bibliographie de la littérature française du Moyen Age à nos jours, 1966-1980
Bibliographie der Französischen Literaturwissenschaft, 1956/8-1984
Bibliothèque Nationale, 1897-1981
Catalogue général de la librairie française depuis 1840
French XX bibliography 1969
Modern Language Association of America 1963
National Union Catalog
Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France 1894
Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie: Supplementheft:
Bibliographie 1875/6-1956/60

PRIMARY SOURCES - Major

Agathon, (pseudonym of Massis H. and de Tarde A.), *Les Jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui*, Paris, Plon-Nourrit, 1913

Barbusse H., *Clarté*, Paris, Flammarion, 1919
Le Feu, Paris, Flammarion, 1916
Lettres de Henri Barbusse à sa femme 1914-1917, Paris, Flammarion, 1937
Paroles d'un Combattant, Flammarion, Paris, 1920

Céline L.-F., *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, Paris, Denoël et Steele, 1932

Chevallier G., *La Peur*, Paris, Delamain et Boutelleau, 1930

Dorgelès R., "Autour des Croix de Bois", *Conferencia*, II, 1932, pp. 495-509
Bleu Horizon, Paris, Albin Michel, 1949
Ce que j'ai appris à la guerre, Paris, Editions Montaigne, 1927
Les Croix de Bois, Paris, Albin Michel, 1919
Le Cabaret de la Belle Femme, Paris, Edition Française illustrée, 1919
Le Réveil des Morts, Paris, Albin Michel, 1923
Souvenirs sur Les Croix de Bois, Paris, La Cité des Livres, 1929

Drieu la Rochelle P., *La Comédie de Charleroi*, Paris, Gallimard, 1934

Duhamel G., *Anniversaire*, Paris, Champion, 1925
Civilisation 1914-17, Paris, Mercure de France, 1918
Essai sur le roman, Paris, Marcelle Lesage, 1925
"La juste idée de ma conception littéraire", *La Table Ronde*, no. 131, Nov. 1958, pp. 33-37
Positions françaises, Paris, Mercure de France, 1940
Vie des martyrs 1914-1916, Paris, Mercure de France, 1917

Martin du Gard R., *L'Été 1914*, Paris, Gallimard, 1936

Romains J.,

L'Epilogue, Paris, Gallimard, 1940

Le Drapeau noir, Paris, Flammarion, 1937

Prélude à Verdun, Paris, Flammarion, 1938

Verdun, Paris, Flammarion, 1938

PRIMARY SOURCES - Minor

- Alain, *Mars ou la Guerre Jugée*, Paris, Nouvelle Revue Française, 1921
- Apollinaire G., *Calligrammes*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1918
Souvenirs de la Grande Guerre, Montpellier, Gilbert Boudar, 1980
- Barrès M., *L'Amitié des tranchées*, Paris, Emile-Paul Frères, 1916
L'Appel au Soldat, Paris, E. Fasquell, 1900
Au Service de l'Allemagne, Paris, A. Fayard, 1905
La Bataille sous Nancy, Paris, Maison du Livre, 1916
Chronique de la Grande Guerre, Paris, Plon-Nourrit, vols. 1-2, 1920
vols. 3-4, 1921
Colette Baudoche, Paris, Felix Juven, 1905
1914 Une défense héroïque, Paris, E. Figuière, 1915
Les Déracinés, Paris, Felix Juven, 1897
En regardant au fond des crevasses, Paris, Emile-Paul Frères, 1917
Leurs Figures, Paris, Emile-Paul Frères, 1902
La Lorraine Dévastée, Paris, Félix Alcan, 1919
Mes Cahiers 1914-18, Paris, Plon, vol. 11, n.d.
La Minute Sacrée, Paris, Société Littéraire de France, Paris, 1919
Les Traits Eternels de la France, Paris, Emile-Paul Frères, 1916
Une Visite sur un champ de bataille, Paris, Sansot & Cie, 1905
- Benjamin R., *Les Soldats de la guerre*, Gaspard, Paris, Fayard, 1915
- Bernier J., *La Percée*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1920
- Bertrand A., *L'Appel du sol*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1916
- Bessières A., *Le Chemin des dames*, Paris, Bloud et Gay, 1918
- Bloch M., "Souvenirs de Guerre 1914-15", *Cahiers des Annales*, 26, Paris, Colin, 1969
- Boasson M., *Au soir d'un monde*, Paris, Plon, 1926
- Bonnet G., *L'Ame du soldat*, Paris, Payot, 1917
Lettres à un bourgeois de 1914, Paris, Payot, 1919
- Boucheron G., *L'Assaut*, Paris, Perrin, 1917
- Bourceret J.-M., *Sur les routes du front de Meuse*, Paris, Perrin, 1917
- Bourget P., *Lazarine*, Paris, Plon-Nourrit, 1917
Le Sens de la mort, Paris, Plon-Nourrit, 1915
- Bréant P., *De l'Alsace à la Somme*, Paris, Hachette, 1917
- Buteau M., *Tenir*, Paris, Plon, 1918

- Capy M., *Une Voix de femme dans la mêlée*, Paris, Paul Ollendorff, 1916
- Cazin P., *L'Humaniste à la Guerre*, Paris, Plon, 1920
Hauts de Meuse 1915, Paris, Plon, 1920
- Chaîne P., *Les Mémoires d'un Rat*, Paris, L'Oeuvre, 1917
- Chauveau L., *Derrière la bataille*, Paris, Payot, 1917
- Claudel P., *Poèmes de Guerre*, Paris, Gallimard, 1921
- Courteline G., *Les Gaîtés de l'Escadron*, Paris, Flammarion, 1905
- Deauville M., *La Boue des Flandres*, Brussels, Maurice Lamertin, 1922
Jusqu'à l'Yser, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1917
- Déroulède P., *Chants du Soldat*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1872
L'Hetman, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1877
Le Livre de la Ligue des Patriotes, Paris, H. Deloncle, 1887
Nouveaux Chants de Guerre, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1883
Poésies Militaires, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1896
Refrains Militaires, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1889
- Desaubliaux R., *La Ruée*, (Etapas d'un combattant: La Meuse, l'Yser, l'Artois, La Somme, Verdun), Paris, Bloud et Gay, 1919
- Doussain G., *Castel Pépère*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1918
- Driant E., *Petit Marsouin*, Paris, Delagrave, 1920
- Dubrulle P., *Mon régiment dans la fournaise de Verdun et dans la bataille de la Somme*, Paris, Plon, 1918
- Dumoulin G., *Carnets de Route, 40 années de vie militaire*, Lille, Editions de l'Avenir, n.d.
- Dupin G., *La Guerre Infernale*, Paris, Société Mutuelle d'Edition, 1920
- Faure E., *La Danse sur le feu et l'eau*, Paris, Crès et Cie, 1920
- Fourier M., *Avec les chars d'assaut*, Paris, Hachette, 1919
- Franconi G., *Un Tel de l'Armée Française*, Paris, Payot et Cie, 1918
- Gaëll R., *Les Soutanes sous la mitraille*, Paris, Gautier, 1915
- Galtier-Boissière P., *En rase campagne*, Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1917
- Gaudy G., *Les trous d'obus de Verdun*, Paris, Plon, 1922
- Genevoix M., *La Boue*, Paris, Flammarion, 1921
Les Eparges, Paris, Flammarion 1923
Nuits de Guerre, Paris, Flammarion, 1917
Sous Verdun, Paris, Hachette, 1916
- Genty R., *La flamme victorieuse*, Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1917
- Géraldy P., *La Guerre, Madame*, Paris, Crès et Cie, 1916
- Giono J., *Le Grand Troupeau*, Paris, Gallimard, 1931
- Giraudoux J., *Bella*, Paris, Grasset, 1926
La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu, Paris, Grasset, 1935
Siegfried, Paris, Grasset, 1928

- Suzanne et le Pacifique*, Paris, Emile-Paul Frères, 1921
- Granvilliers de J., *Le prix de l'homme*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1919
Grasset A-L., *Vingt jours de guerre aux temps héroïques*, Paris Berger-Levrault, 1919
- Guilloux L., *Le Sang Noir*, Paris, Gallimard, 1935
Hallé G., *Là-bas avec ceux qui souffrent*, Paris, Garnier, 1917
- Henches J-E., *Lettres de Guerre*, Cahors, A. Couselant, 1917
Jamet R., *La sublime hécatombe*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1917
- Joubaire A., *Pour la France*, Paris, Perrin, 1917
Jubet R., *Verdun (mars-avril-mai 1916)*, Paris Payot, 1918
- Kessel J., *L'Equipage*, Paris, Nouvelle Revue Française, 1923
- Kimpflin G., *Le premier souffle*, Paris, Perrin, 1920
Laurentin M., *Le sang de France*, Paris, Bloud, 1919
Lefebvre-Dibon M., *Quatre pages du 74^e R.I.*, Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1921
- Le Lieutenant E. R., (pseudonym of Charles Tuffrau) *Carnets d'un Combattant*, Paris, Crès et Cie. 1917
- Lintier P., *Ma Pièce*, Paris, Plon, 1916
Mac Orlan P., *Les poissons morts*, Paris, Payot, 1917
Maillet A., *Sous le Fouet du Destin*, Paris, Perrin, 1919
Mairet L., *Carnet d'un Combattant*, Paris, Crès et Cie., 1919
- Malherbe H., *La Flamme au Poing*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1917
Malraux A., *La Tentation de l'Occident*, Paris, Grasset, 1926
- Marot J., *Ceux qui vivent*, Paris, Payot, 1919
Martinet M., *Les Temps Maudits*, Paris, P. Ollendorff, 1919
Massis H., *Le Sacrifice 1914-16*, Paris, Plon-Nourrit, 1917
- Maurras C., *L'Etang de Berre*, Paris, E. Champion, 1915
Maurois A., *Les Discours du Docteur O'Grady*, Paris, Grasset, 1922
Les Silences du Colonel Bramble, Paris, Grasset, 1918
- Meyer J., *La Biffe*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1928
Montherlant de H., *Chant funèbre pour les morts de Verdun*, Paris, Grasset, 1963
L'Exil, Paris, Editions du Capitole, 1929
Le Songe, Paris, Grasset, 1922
- Muenier P., *L'Angoisse de Verdun*, Paris, Hachette, 1919
Päraf P., *Sous la terre de France*, Paris, Payot, 1917
Pawlowski de G., *Dans les rides du front*, Paris, La Renaissance du Livre, 1917
- Péguy C., *L'Argent*, Paris, Cahiers de la Quinzaine, 1913
L'Argent Suite, Paris, Cahiers de la Quinzaine, 1913
Notre Jeunesse, Paris, Cahiers de la Quinzaine, 1910
Notre Patrie, Paris, E. Payen, 1905

- Pézard A., *Nous autres à Vauquois 1915-16*, Paris, La Renaissance du Livre, 1918
- Pic E., *Dans la tranchée*, Paris, Perrin, 1916
- Psichari E., *L'Appel des Armes*, Paris, G. Oudin, 1913
- Radiguet R., *Le Diable au Corps*, Paris, Grasset, 1923
- Rimbault M., *Journal de campagne d'un officier de ligne*, Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1916
- Rivière J., *L'Allemand*, Paris, Gallimard, 1918
- Rolland R., *Au-dessus de la mêlée*, Paris, P. Ollendorff, 1915
- Clerambault*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1920
- Le Journal des années de guerre, 1914-19*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1952
- Ronarch P., *Souvenirs de la Guerre*, Paris, Payot, 1921
- Rostand E., *Le Vol de la Marseillaise*, Paris, Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1919
- Roujon J., *Carnet de Route*, Paris, Plon-Nourrit, 1916
- Schmitz P.-A., *Sous la rafale*, Paris, Bloud, 1918
- Suarès A., *Ceux de Verdun*, Paris, Emile-Paul Frères, 1916
- Tézenas du Montcel P., *Dans les tranchées*, Paris, Champion, 1925
- L'Union des Pères et des Mères dont les fils sont morts pour la Patrie, la Ligue des Chefs de Section et des Soldats combattants (ed.), *La dernière lettre 1914-18*, Paris, Flammarion, 1922
- Vuillermet F.-A., *Avec les alpins*, Paris, Lethielleux, 1918
- Vercel R., *Capitaine Conan*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1934
- Verhaeren E., *Les Ailes Rouges de la Guerre*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1916
- Volatier H., *Au Vieil-Armand*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1918
- Werth L., *Clavel Soldat*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1917

SECONDARY SOURCES - Major

BARBUSSE

- Brett V., "A Propos du Feu de Henri Barbusse", *Philologica Pragensia* 3, 1960, pp. 129-140
Henri Barbusse: Sa Marche vers la Clarté, son mouvement Clarté, Prague, Editions de l'Académie Tchecoslovaque des Sciences, 1963
- Carassus E., "Avant le Feu: Trois articles de Barbusse sur la Guerre", *Europe* July-August 1969, vol. 483-4, pp. 192-206
- Clemens J., "Une lettre d'Henri Barbusse à un poilu agenais en 1916", *Revue de l'Agencais*, October/December 1917, 97^e tome, 4^e Bulletin, pp. 309-12
Henri Barbusse, Paris, Editions Sociales, 1946
- Duclos J. & Fréville J., "Barbusse: *Le Feu*", in *Writers and Politics in Modern France*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1977, pp. 38-43
- Flower J. E., "Mythic Vision and Ironic Allusion: Barbusse's *Le Feu* and Zola's *Germinal*", *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 28, no. 2, summer 1982, pp. 215-18
- Jones, T. H., "Henri Barbusse: *Le Feu* and the crisis of Social Realism", in Holga Klein's *The First World War in Fiction*, London, Macmillan, 1976, pp. 43-52
- King J., *A propos d'un livre. Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse*, Angoulême, Vincent, 1917
- des Lys A., "Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse", *Europe* 477, January 1969, pp. 16-67
- Meyer J., "Henri Barbusse", *Europe* 477, January 1969, pp. 3-15
 "Hommage à Barbusse", *Revue des Lettres*, CVIII, 2, April-June 1973, pp. 6-21
- Paraf P., "Comment *Le Feu* d'Henri Barbusse révèle un grand romancier", *Beiträge zur Romanischen Philologie*, XIV/1975, Heft 1, pp. 5-12
 "Le Feu d'Henri Barbusse: Une Epopée Réaliste?", *La Pensée*, February 1963, vol. 107, pp. 63-105
- Relinger J., "La Postérité du Feu: Révolte et Pacifisme", in *Guerre et Révolution dans le roman français de 1919-1939*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1974, pp. 168-171
- Rieuneau M., "25^e anniversaire de la mort de Barbusse, *Le Feu*", *La Pensée* 93, September-October 1960, pp. 102-15
- Tersen E., "Le Style du Feu de Barbusse", *La Pensée* 172, December 1963, pp. 125-134
- Van Rutten P., *Henri Barbusse: Soldat de la Paix*, Paris, Les Editeurs Français Réunis, 1953
- Vidal A.,

CELINE

McCarthy P.,
Rieuneau M.,

Céline, London, Allen Lane, 1975
"Louis-Ferdinand Céline et la Guerre-
Cauchemar", in *Guerre et Révolution dans le
roman français de 1919-1939*, Paris,
Klincksieck, 1974, pp. 295-313

Vandromme P.,

"Céline, la guerre et le pacifisme", *Ecrits
de Paris*, December 1962, pp. 111-16

CHEVALLIER

Rieuneau M.,

"Gabriel Chevallier", in *Guerre et
Révolution dans le roman français de 1919-
1939*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1974, pp. 203-7

DORGELES

Arnoux A.,

"A propos des *Croix de Bois*", *Les Amis de
Dorgelès*, 3, 1974

Despert J.,

"A propos des *Croix de Bois*", *Les Amis de
Dorgelès*, 21, 1984

Dubeux A.,

Roland Dorgelès, son oeuvre, Paris,
Editions de la Nouvelle Revue Critique, 1930

Dupray M.,

"L'Empreinte des *Croix des Bois*", *Les Amis de
Dorgelès*, 11, 1979

Flower J.,

"The Soldier's Stage: Roland Dorgelès, *Les
Croix de Bois*", in Holgar Klein's *The First
World War in Fiction*, London, Macmillan,
1976, pp. 53-62

Meyer J.,

"*Les Croix de Bois*", *La Nouvelle Revue des
deux Mondes*, January-March 1977, pp. 67-80

Rieuneau M.,

"Du carnet de route au roman: Roland
Dorgelès", in *Guerre et Révolution dans le
roman français de 1919-1939*, Paris,
Klincksieck, 1974, pp. 29-51

DRIEU LA ROCHELLE

Andreu P. and
Grover F.,
Dale J.,

Drieu la Rochelle, Paris, Hachette, 1979

"Drieu la Rochelle: The War as "Comedy", in
Holgar Klein's *The First World War in
Fiction*, London, Macmillan, 1976, pp. 63-70

Flower J. E.,

"Drieu la Rochelle: *La Comédie de
Charleroi*", in *Writers and Politics in Modern
France*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1977,
pp. 22-26

Grover F.,

*Drieu la Rochelle and the Fiction of
Testimony*, California, University of
California Press, 1958

Rieuneau M.,

"Drieu la Rochelle", in *Guerre et
Révolution dans le roman français de 1919-
1939*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1974, pp. 539-43

- Sims R., "The Myths of War and the Hero in Drieu la Rochelle's *La Comédie de Charleroi*," *Les Bonnes Feuilles*, vol. VIII, no. 1, Fall 1979, pp. 63-77
- Soucy R., *Fascist Intellectual: Drieu la Rochelle*, California, University of California Press, 1979

DUHAMEL

- Clark Keating L., *Critic of Civilization: Georges Duhamel and his writings*, Kentucky, University of Kentucky Press, 1965
- Dorgelès R., "Une tâche d'homme", *Mercure de France*, 1967, pp. 161-6
- Duhamel B., "Le Témoignage Humaniste de Georges Duhamel", *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, 6-13 September 1979, no. 2702
- Eleanor M., "Le réalisme délicat de Georges Duhamel", *Revue de l'Université Laval*, vol. 13, 1958-9, pp. 784-803
- Genevoix M., "Georges Duhamel et *Vie des martyrs*", *Mercure de France*, 1967, pp. 21-25
- Knapp B. L., *Georges Duhamel*, New York, Twayne, 1972
- Jour J., "Duhamel vu de la médecine à la littérature, de l'idéalisme à la sagesse", *Marginales*, 109, September 1966, pp. 43-5
- Maurois A., "Un écrivain, un médecin, un Français", *Mercure de France*, 1967, pp. 15-19
- Santelli C., "Adieu à Georges Duhamel", *Mercure de France*, 1967, pp. 129-155
- Simon P.-H., "Modernité de Salavin", *Mercure de France*, 1967, pp. 85-99
- Wolff E., "Le Centenaire de Georges Duhamel", *Revue des Deux Mondes*, May 1985, pp. 317-22

MARTIN DU GARD

- Barbarete G.-J., "A remembered talk with Roger Martin du Gard", *Books Abroad*, vol. 32, 1958, pp. 379-81
- Becker J.-J., "L'Été 1914 de Roger Martin du Gard, Un Ouvrage d'Histoire?", *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, April-June 1978, pp. 213-34
- Boak D., "Les origines de la première guerre mondiale dans l'Été 1914", *Relations internationales*, no. 14, 1978, pp. 143-158
- Borgal C., *Roger Martin du Gard*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1963
- Borgal C., *Roger Martin du Gard*, Paris, Editions Universitaires, 1957
- Brée G. and Guiton M., "Roger Martin du Gard: The Corneille of the Bourgeois novel", in *An Age of Fiction*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1958, pp. 76-84

- Brenner J.,
Garguilo R.,
Gibson R.,
Johnston J.-L.,
Lalou R.,
Martin du Gard M.,
McMurray G.,
Picon G.,
*Nouvelle Nouvelle
Revue Française*
Roza R.,
Savage C.,
Schalk D. L.,
Schlobach J.,
Wood J. S.,
- Martin du Gard*, Paris, Gallimard, 1961
*La Génèse des Thibault de Roger Martin du
Gard*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1974
Roger Martin du Gard, London, Bowes and
Bowes, 1961
"Fiction as Testimony: Roger Martin du
Gard's *L'Eté 1914*," *Folio*, October 13 1981,
pp. 51-69
Roger Martin du Gard, Paris, Gallimard, 1937
"Roger Martin du Gard", *Revue des Deux
Mondes*, October 1958, pp. 463-74
"The Role of History in the Works of Roger
Martin du Gard," *Xavier University Studies*,
vol. 5, 1966, pp. 27-36
"Roger Martin du Gard", *Mercure de France*,
vol. 334, 1958, pp. 5-25
"Hommage à Roger Martin du Gard, 1881-
1958", December 1958
*Roger Martin du Gard et la Banalité
Retrouvée*, Paris, Didier, 1970
Roger Martin du Gard, New York, Twayne, 1968
Roger Martin du Gard, New York, Cornell
University Press, 1967
"Roger Martin du Gard et l'histoire," *Revue
d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, 1982, pp.
773-788
"Roger Martin du Gard", *French Studies*, vol.
14, April 1960, pp. 129-140

GENERAL - Other works

- Adam P.,
Ashworth T.,
Auerbach E.,
Bann S.,
Barthes R.,
Becker G. J.,
Becker J.-J.,
Bénéton P.,
Bloch M.,
- La littérature et la guerre*, Paris, Crès et
Cie, 1916
Trench Warfare 1914-18, London, Macmillan,
1980
Mimesis, Berne, Francke, 1946
"Analysing the Discourse of History",
Renaissance and Modern Studies, XXVII, 1983,
pp. 61-84
"The Discourse of History" (Trans. S. Bann),
Comparative Criticism 3, 1981, pp. 3-20
Realism in Modern Literature, New York,
Frederick Ungar, 1980
Les Français dans la Grande Guerre, Paris,
Laffont, 1980
*Comment les Français sont entrés dans la
guerre*, Paris, Presses de la Fondation
Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1977
"La Génération de 1912-1914, image, mythe et
réalité," *Revue Française de Science
Politique*, XXI, no. 5., October 1971, pp.
981-1009
*Apologie pour l'histoire ou métier
d'historien*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1949

- "Dire l'indicible", *Preuves* 160, June 1964, pp. 32-43
- Blond G., *La Marne*, Paris, Presses de la Cité, 1962
- Brogan D. W., *Verdun*, Paris, Presses de la Cité, 1961
- Cruikshank J., *The Development of Modern France 1870-1939*, London, Hamilton, 1940
- "Critical Approaches to Some Novels of the Great War", *Literature and Society*, 1980, pp. 140-152
- "Saying the Unsayable. Problems of Expression in Great War Fiction", in *Mélanges de Littérature Française Moderne offerts à Garnet Rees*, (ed. Pickford C. E.), Paris, Minard, 1980, pp. 59-77
- Variations on Catastrophe*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1982
- Ducas A., *La Guerre racontée par les combattants*, Paris, Flammarion, 1932
- Ducas A., Meyer J. and Perreux G., *Vie et Mort des Français 1914-18*, Paris, Hachette, 1962
- Falls C., *The First World War*, London, Longmans, 1960
- Farrar-Hockley A.H., *The Somme*, London, B. T. Batsford, 1964
- Ferro M., *The Great War 1914-18* (Trans. N. Stones), London, Routledge and Kegan, 1973 (First published as *La Grande Guerre*, Paris, Gallimard, 1969)
- Field F., *Three French Writers and the Great War*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1975
- Flower J. E., *Writers and Politics in Modern France*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1977
- Fussell P., *The Great War and Modern Memory*, New York and London, Oxford University Press, 1975
- Gibson R., "The First World War and the Literary Consciousness", in *French Literature and its Background* (ed. J. Cruickshank), vol. VI, London, Oxford University Press, 1970, pp. 55-71
- Hart Liddell B., *A History of the First World War*, London, Faber and Faber, 1934
- H.M.S.O., "The French Yellow Book", in *Collected Diplomatic Documents relating to the outbreak of the European War*, London, H.M.S.O., 1915, pp. 121-264
- Horne A., *The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916*, London, Penguin, 1962
- Isay R., "La guerre de 1914-18 et le Mouvement Intellectuel", *Revue des deux Mondes*, 1 June 1965, pp. 390-443
- Johnston J. L., "The Cultural Legacy of World War I: A Comparative study of selected war novels", Ph.D., Stanford University, 1975
- Klein H., (ed.) *The First World War in Fiction*, London, Macmillan, 1976
- Lavis E., *Histoire de France Contemporaine*, Tome 9, Paris, Hachette, 1922

- Markoff R. A., "Opposition to the War in France 1914-18", Ph.D. University of Pennsylvania, 1962
- Martel G., *The Origins of the First World War*, London, Longman, 1987
- Meininger R. A., "The Theme of the Absurd in the French Novel of World War I", Ph.D. University of Nebraska, 1969
- Morgan D., "World War I and its consequences in selected European and American novels and memoirs", Ph.D. University of Minnesota, 1977
- Norton Cru J., *Témoins*, Paris, Les Etincelles, 1929
- Panichas G. A., (ed.) *Promise of Greatness: The War of 1914-18*, London, Cassell, 1968
- Pedroncini G., *Les Mutineries de 1917*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1967
- Perreux G., *La Vie quotidienne des civils en France pendant la Grande Guerre*, Paris, Hachette, 1966
- Peyre H. M., *French Novelists of Today*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1967
- Pomeau R., *The Contemporary French Novel*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1955
- Pomeau R., "Guerre et Roman dans l'Entre-Deux-Guerres", *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, Fasc. 109, 1963, pp. 77-95
- Poulet R., "Guerre nationale et guerre idéologique", *Ecrits*, June 1984, pp. 59-67
- Pugh, A. C., "Facing the matter of History: Les Géorgiques", in *Claude Simon: New Directions*, (ed. A. B. Duncan), Edinburgh, Scottish Academic Press, 1985, pp. 113-131
- Pultzer P. G. J., "Defeat, May 1940: Claude Simon, Marc Bloch and the Writing of Disaster", *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, vol. XXI, no. 1, pp. 59-68
- Pultzer P. G. J., "German History from Bismarck to the Present", in *Germany: A companion to German Studies*, (Pasley M. ed.), London, Methuen, 1972, pp. 249-368
- Remak J., *The Origins of World War I 1871-1914*, New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1967
- Renouvin P., *La Crise Européenne et la Première Guerre Mondiale*, Paris, Felix Alcan, 1934
- Riegel L., *Guerre et Littérature*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1978
- Rieuneau M., *Guerre et révolution dans le roman français de 1919-1939*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1974
- Rockwell J., *Fact in Fiction*, London, Routledge and Kegan, 1974
- Rowe B., "Testimony to War: Literature by French Soldiers in the Great War 1914-18", Ph.D. University of Massachusetts, 1979

- Rutherford A., *The Literature of War*, London, Macmillan, 1978
- Schinz A., *French Literature of the Great War*, London, Appleton and Co., 1920
- Sims R. L., "War and Myth in the Twentieth Century", *Neophilologus* LXVIII, 1984, pp. 179-91
- Slater C., *Defeatists and their enemies*, London, Oxford University Press, 1987
- Stromberg R. N., "The Intellectuals and the coming of war in 1914", *Journal of European Studies*, June 1973, pp. 109-22
- Suffel J. (ed.) *La Guerre de 1914-18 par ceux qui l'ont faite*, Paris, Plon, 1968
- Taylor A. J. P., *The First World War - An illustrated history*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1963
- Terraine J., *White Heat: The new warfare 1914-18*, London, Book Club Associates, 1982
- Thale J., "World War I and the Perception of War", *Southern Humanities Review*, Summer, 16, (3), 1982, pp. 185-199
- Thoumin R., *La Grande Guerre*, Paris, Julliard, 1960
- Tint H., *The Decline of French Patriotism 1870-1940*, London, Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1964
- Wellek R. and Warren A., *Theory of Literature*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1942
- White H., "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality", *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn 1980, pp. 5-27
- "The question of narrative in contemporary historical theory", *History and Theory*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1984
- Metahistory*, Baltimore and London, Hopkins University Press, 1973
- Tropics of Discourse*, Baltimore and London, Hopkins University Press, 1978
- Williams J., *Mutiny 1917*, London, Heineman, 1962
- Winter D., *Death's Men*, London, Allen Lane, 1978
- Winter J. M., *The Experience of World War I*, London, Macmillan, 1988
- Winter S. K., *The Realistic War Novel*, Seattle, University of Washington, Chapbooks, No. 35, 1930
- Wolff L., *In Flanders Fields*, New York, Viking Press, 1958

SECONDARY SOURCES - Minor

GENERAL - Other works

- Bainville J., *Histoire de France*, Paris, Fayard, 1924
 Barnett C., "A Military Historian's View of the Literature of the Great War", *Essays by Divers Hands*, (M. Stocks ed.), XXXVI, 1970, pp. 1-18
- Baumont M., "Maurice Barrès et les Morts de la Guerre de 1914-18", *L'Information Historique*, January-February 1969, pp. 30-5
- Berger M., *Real and Imagined Worlds*, Harvard, Harvard University Press, 1977
- Bergonzi B., *Heroes' Twilight*, London, Constable, 1965
- Burke K., *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, New York, Vintage Books, 1957
- Cambell P. J., *In the Cannon's Mouth*, London, Hamilton, 1979
- Charvet P. E., *A Literary History of France*, vol. V., London, Benn, 1967
- Cobb R., *French and Germans, Germans and French*, Hanover, University Press of New England, 1983
- Collingwood R. G., *The Idea of History*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1956
- Contamine H., *La Revanche 1871-1914*, Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1957
- Cooke J. J., *France 1789-1962*, Devon, David and Charles, 1975
- Coppard G., *With a Machine Gun to Cambrai*, London, H.M.S.O., 1969
- Daugherty W., *A Psychological Warfare Casebook*, Baltimore, Hopkins, 1958
- Davidson M., *The Poetry is in the Pity*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1972
- Dédéyan C., *Une Guerre dans le Mal des Hommes 1914-18*, Paris, Editions Buchet-Chastel, 1971
- Dolden Stuart A., *Cannon Fodder*, Dorset, Blandford Press, 1980
- Ellis J., *Eye-Deep in Hell*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1976
- Engler W., *The French Novel*, New York, Frederick Ungar, 1969
- Ferguson J. (ed.) *War and the Creative Arts*, London, Macmillan, 1972
- Ferry A., *La Guerre vue d'en bas et d'en haut*, Paris, Grasset, 1920
- Foch F., *The Memoirs of Marshal Foch*, (Translated T. Bentley-Mott), London, Heinemann, 1931
- French A., *Gone for a Soldier*, Warwick, Roundwood Press, 1972
- Genette G., *Discours du récit*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1972
- Graeme Ritchie R. L., (ed.) *France*, London, Methuen, 1951
- Greicus M. S., *Prose Writers of World War I*, London, Longman, 1973

- Grierson F., *Illusions and Realities of the War*, London, John Lane, 1918
- Guéhenno J., *La Mort des Autres*, Paris, Grasset, 1958
- Halévy D., *Péguy et les Cahiers de la Quinzaine*, Paris, Grasset, 1941
- Hammerton J. A., *A Popular History of the Great War*, London, Fleetway House, n.d.
- Hampden Jackson J. (ed.) *A Short History of France from Early Times to 1958*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1961
- Haste C., *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, London, Allen Lane, 1977
- Heath S., *The Nouveau Roman - A study in the practice of writing*, London, Elek Books L.T.D., 1972
- Hiscock E., *The Bells of Hell go Ting-a-ling-a-ling*, London, Arlington Books, 1976
- Jerrold D., *The Lie about the War: A note on some contemporary War Books*, London, Faber, 1930
- Johnson D., *France*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1969
- Lalou R., *Histoire de la littérature française contemporaine 1870 à nos jours*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1947
- Lamarque P. (ed.) *Le Roman Français depuis 1900*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1947
- Lefebvre G. Pouthas C. & Baumont M., *Philosophy and Fiction*, Aberdeen, Aberdeen University Press, 1983
- Levin H., *Histoire de la France (2)*, Paris, Hachette, 1950
- Lukács G., *The Gates of Horn*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1963
- Macdonald L., *The Historical Novel*, London, Merlin Press, 1962
- Macdonald L., *The Roses of No Man's Land*, London, Macmillan, 1980
- Macherey P., *They Called it Passchendaele*, London, Macmillan, 1978
- Marks T. P., *1914*, London, Guild Publishing, 1987
- Mayeur J.-M., *1914-18 Voices and Images of the Great War*, London, Michael Joseph, 1988
- McAfee H., *A Theory of Literary Production*, London, Routledge and Kegan, 1978
- Moore H. T., *The Laughter goes from Life*, London, Kimber, 1977
- Nadeau M., *Autonomie et politique en Alsace*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1970
- Nolte E., *"The Literature of Disillusionment"*, *Atlantic Monthly*, 132, August, 1923
- Noter di H., *Twentieth Century French Literature*, London, Heineman, 1969
- Noter di H., *Le Roman Français depuis la guerre*, Paris, Gallimard, 1963
- Noter di H., *L'Action Française*, vol. 1, Paris, Julliard, 1970
- Noter di H., *La Littérature et la guerre*, Paris, Editions de l'Union des intellectuels pacifistes, 1934

- Obuchowski C. W., *Mars on Trial: War as seen by French Writers of the Twentieth Century*, Madrid, José Porrúa Turanzas, 1978
- Paraf P., "Le Journal de Guerre de Romain Rolland", *Europe* 515, March 1972, pp. 197-201
- Parsons I. M. (ed.) *Men who march away*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1965
- Pingaud B., "Le roman et le miroir", *Arguments* 6, February 1958, pp. 2-10
- Read H., "The Failure of War books" in *A Coat of Many Colours*, London, Routledge, 1945, pp. 72-6
- Recouly R., *La Troisième République*, Paris, Hachette, 1927
- Rivière J., *The Ideal Reader*, London, Harvell Press, 1962
- Russell A., *The Machine Gunner*, Kineton, Roundwood Press, 1977
- Saurat D., *Modern French Literature 1870-1940*, London, Dent and Sons Ltd., 1946
- Simon P.-H., *Histoire de la Littérature française au XX^e siècle*, tome II, Paris, Armand Colin, 1963
- Southwell K. A., *Signposts in French Literature*, London, Oxford University Press, 1950
- Toland J., *No Man's Land*, London, Methuen, 1980
- Tomlinson H. M., "War Books", *Criterion* vol. IX, No. 36, April 1930, pp. 402-19
- Troux A. & Girard A., *Histoire de la France*, Paris, Hachette, 1948
- Tuchman B. W., *August 1914*, London, Macmillan, 1980
- Turnell M., *The Novel in France*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1950
- Tylden-Wright D., *The Image of France*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1957
- Vansittart P., *Voices from the Great War*, London, Cape, 1981
- Ward A. C., *The Nineteen-Twenties: Literature and ideas in the Post War decade*, London, Methuen, 1930
- Weber E., *L'Action Française*, Paris, Stock, 1964
- Williams D. A. (ed.) *The Monster in the Mirror*, London, Oxford University Press, 1978
- Williams J., *The Home Fronts 1914-18*, London, Constable, 1972
- Williamson H., "Reality in War Literature" in *The Linhay on the Downs*, London, Cape, 1934, pp. 224-262
- Wolle F., "Novels of Two World Wars", *Western Humanities Review*, vol. 5, no. 3, Summer 1951, pp. 279-96