

OUR PRE-WAR



memoires of

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BOOKS



TO MY FRIENDS

It is not usual to write one's memoirs at thirty. So it is not a memoir that I am beginning, in this billet on the Line where, in a little while, only the two blue lights of war will be watching over the crossroads. But it seems to that, since it is our turn to experience an era that is now closed, twenty-five years after the other, on the repetition of so errors and follies of the past, we can try to fix its features. These traits will necessarily be personal, and I've never been too keen on generalisations. I know of thirty-year-old boys who have known something different about life, its pleasures and its hopes, than my friends and I have. Yet I don't think they will refuse to rediscover some of the aspects of those fifteen years that have just been brutally cast into the shadows. This is in no way a confession. I don't have to say absolutely everything that was close to my heart, I'm just putting together the images of a few friends, some known, others as unknown as the characters in a novel for those who start it, and I would like this book to be read like a novel, like a series of sentimental and intellectual educations. I'd like it to be read as a story broader than mine, although I'd like to stick to what I've seen. Above all, just as we sometimes breathe in a half-forgotten song, in an old photograph, in old pictures, the scent and memory of the pre-war years of 1914, I would like us to breathe in the memory of a particular time. This time is perhaps different from what has been called the post-war period. It is our youth, it is our pre-war period.

I..., 13 September 1939.

I

THE DEEP MORNING

You can't acquire a taste for the past. The child has it, who is sad at seven to have reached what is known around him as the age of reason, who doesn't want to grow up, who wants to hold on to an elusive and beautiful world around him, his toys, his young mother. She owns the little girl, who knows that tomorrow her dolls will be nothing more than an assemblage of wood, oakum and porcelain. Perhaps even, contrary to common opinion, the passing of time is more sensitive to the adolescent who, at twenty, regrets his eighteenth year, to the young man of twenty-five who, with a pang in his heart, looks back on his own youth, than to the mature man settled in his solid life and possessor of the present. So I've been told. I believe rather that the sense of the past is born at the same time as some people, and that others will never know it except in the form of a banal and fleeting nostalgia.

There are times in our lives, however, when the past, even the most proximate, forms such a deep shelter that the rest of the universe seems to have disappeared. If I turn back to it at this moment, it's because I have the impression, for a few months, that this past forms a whole that has now descended, come what may, into the irrevocable. What has been will be no more, in peace or in war. If it hadn't been for the events of September 1939, would I have thought of bringing these images together here? Obviously not, that was a task for much later. But September has come, and I allow myself to think of that time so close by. Fourteen or fifteen years ago, in a grey and black study, I leaned in much the same way, with tenderness and without bitterness, towards a purely personal world that had also just disappeared. But this time, it doesn't seem to me that I'm the only one at fault, and many things have also disappeared for people other than myself, whose history has no doubt not yet been written. That's why I can let the images of fifteen years rise up around me without remorse, scarcely powdery backdrops that these others will perhaps recognise.

I don't need to think very hard to revive the Paris of my seventeenth year. Has it changed that much? If I saw it again, I'd probably be able to experience its metamorphoses better,

as in those accelerated films in which the life of plants is condensed. Sometimes I try to find the tiny details where everything that was an apparent existence hangs on. It's not very important for some people to remember that in those days the city was criss-crossed by trams (where the conductor handed out pink, yellow and blue tickets), that the AA bus was called AI *bis* and that the AX started at the bottom of the rue Soufflot, in front of a café that has now disappeared, the Taverne du Panthéon. It seems to me that these insignificant facts are the very key to a lost Paradise. I still remember that stamps for franking letters were blue and cost six sous, then eight the following year. The Boulevard Haussmann had not yet been pierced, and in the Rue Rataud a goatherd was still leading his goats up the slopes of the Sainte-Geneviève hill in the early hours of the morning. The Seine was dominated by a strange, pot-bellied monument with two towers, a cross between the Coliseum and Saint-Sulpice: it had come to us from a distant Universal Exhibition, through much mockery and ridicule, and was called the Trocadero. It was 1925, the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs had just closed its doors, it was 1925, it was Paris.

It was not in vain that we disembarked there after this Exhibition, very likely the only one for a long time to have had an influence on the decor of an era. It brought together research that had already ceased to be haphazard; it was not a discovery, it was a consecration. It taught the naïve crowd, who were astonished, many things, but it taught even more to the shrewd industrialists who were going to copy this naked style, these pieces of furniture, these fabrics, to accentuate even more a massive aspect whose first manifestations, moreover, seemed so flimsy, to launch in the cheap shops light-coloured woods, colourful fabrics, beautiful raw materials, iron and nickel, in short, to put cubism within everyone's reach in furnishings and in the home. An art historian would be quite right to say that the summer of 1925 was the last inventive season of the post-war period, and the years that followed did no more than exploit what was now commonplace. Behind Le Corbusier loomed M. Lévitán, with his furniture guaranteed to last a long time. This was precisely the time we were arriving at, the time of the gentrification of anarchism, the time from which we can undoubtedly date the beginning of the pre-war period.

Is it so difficult, moreover, to classify these frivolous years in time? Those were the days of illusions, and we must never forget them.

at the same time as the start of the new school year, the students of that year, on 17 October, learned of the signing of the Locarno Pact, which abolished the realities of war and, in a guinguette atmosphere, benefited English and German bankers. France was rich and ready for the wastefulness of euphoria, it had completed its occupation of the Ruhr, it had played with everything, and it had finally elected, tired of its veterans and its horizon-blue chamber, a Cartel Parliament, a friendly alliance of bourgeois revolutionaries and radicals. In the provinces and in Paris, we looked on with laughter at the albums and drawings of the greatest historian of the time, de Sennep. *À l'abattoir les cartellistes!* was published on butcher's paper, and all the puppets of the regime, and Briand forever immortalised, and the little Painlevé, and M. Herriot turned cow, and Léon Blum as Cécile Sorel, and M. Caillaux before the Rubicon (those were the days when we had high hopes of him), danced in our memory to the fashionable tunes, as seen by Sennep. Jazz was becoming languorous, Hawaiian guitars were making their mewling sounds, and already the first summary dances of the post-war period were over, and people were swaying to the Negro style. Low-cost exoticism penetrated the simplest circles: people sang *Nuits de Chine* and *Jardins de l'Alhambra*, they sang *Dinah* and *Ukulele-lady*, they danced the charleston and the upa-upa, and dominoes had given way to mah-jongg, where people juggled with the winds and flowers. Crosswords were born, presented in the form of drawings: the elephant, the landscape, the dragonfly, the spider. Tristan Bernard advocated a new, literary form, hiding secrets and allusions, and defined the evening as "demanded by the grief of the son-in-law of a general (1)". {Be wise, O my sorrow, and hold yourself quieter; You called for evening, it comes, here it is... BAUDELAIRE (*son-in-law of General Aupick*)}. The women wore knee-length dresses in the form of shirts, with low waists and their hair often cut "à la garçonnette", as it was called in those days, because we had not forgotten a scandalous novel of that title, which today would seem more ridiculous than mean. The Eiffel Tower inscribed in the night the coat of arms of a large Jewish house. Belote had replaced manila and sometimes bridge, and Mistinguett made it fashionable in her then-famous java. Songwriters took it as a target, with M^{me} Cécile Sorel and Maurice Rostand, but it still reigned on its giant staircases, in the music hall, in its feather parades, or as a stoner in the suburbs, as did Maurice's skilful fantasies.

Chevalier, while a new star was rising, well suited to the times: the kinky, agile, black twenty-year-old Josephine Baker. At the crossroads of Montparnasse, the cosmopolitan crowd continued to flock, foreigners were shown Lenin's place, all the taxi drivers were Russian princes, the *Six Characters in Search of an Author* had been played out, the expressions "climate" and "under the sign of" were used extensively, everything was said to be "formidable", drugs, pederasty, travel, Freud, running away and suicide were still being discovered. In short, all the elements of the good life. Alain Gerbault was going off alone in a boat across oceans, and the young French, who had seen the Soviet revolution, the march on Warsaw and the march on Rome slip through their fingers, thought that the times were calm and dull. They had no faith in the imagination of fate.

And what were they, the newcomers to this unknown world, of which a few newspapers, especially a few weeklies (*Candide* was born in 1924, and Arthème Fayard had created the formula for the modern weekly) had offered them tantalising, fragmentary images? In 1925, we were between sixteen and twenty years old, never more. We were perhaps the last generation to have retained any direct memories of the war. After us, the war would be history. For us, even for those of us who had spent our childhoods in remote, quiet provinces, they were a few glimpses of our *own lives*, something childish, no doubt, but linked to a living tragedy: we had known leave, some of us the nights of alert, others the evacuations, the long processions of carts through the soggy countryside, the siren in the dark shadow, the wounded in the streets of convalescence, - the bereavements. We were the last contemporaries of the war, and most of us had no memories that went back further than the war itself. Our elders had opened their eyes to the world before it, and for Radiguet, the war meant four years of holidays, interrupting his previous life. For those of us who weren't eight, or even five, in 1914, there was no previous life, and it took quite a change of scenery for me to retain my previous beautiful images of Morocco at the time of the conquest. It was the first sight to which we had been able to open our eyes, and that is perhaps why, for so many of us, peace seemed for twenty years to be something precarious, always under threat, - for so many of us, it was the first time we had been able to see it.

of us who were in or just past our thirties around 1939.

And we arrived, to prepare for our personal existence, in a life that we thought was crazy and full of exuberant ardour, where money was easy and all pleasures were permitted. The books, at least, had told us so, and the newspapers. We would find, to begin with, work and separation from the world, but we would know how to make our happiness and our youth from very little, because we would know that everything is eternally in danger, and that we must enjoy the simplest shelter, the shortest party, the least visible fire, and the most modest alcohol in its iron cup.

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I sometimes meet my double, at the end of the day, in winter, under a grey sky, at about four o'clock, when I pass along the darkening rue Saint-Jacques or the already lit boulevard Saint-Michel. A little later, I can see him coming back, already in a bit of a hurry because of the time, climbing out of the deep underground towards the high buildings where young people are locked up. As a sixteen-and-a-half year old baccalaureate holder who had arrived at the Gare de Lyon one morning in November 1925 to prepare for the competitive entrance exam to the Ecole Normale Supérieure at Louis-le-Grand, I was cautious in my approach to the city. I had just finished a happy childhood, swinging between a small Burgundy town and the bright beaches of my native Mediterranean. Above all, I had just spent my last year among friends and young girls, running up and down hills, going for walks, dancing in the evenings, making friends and romantic discoveries. In Paris itself, I prolonged the echoes, and my friends of the first months were not the companions brought to me by chance and study. I'm not sure that for several months I lived for anything other the Sundays when I left Paris or the Sundays when people came to see me, not only, it seemed to me, from *places* in my immediate past, but also from the *time of* that past itself.

Today, however, I think with pleasure of the Louis-le-Grand of my adolescence, where I led a life so contrary to all my habits, and where I experienced so many joys, the discovery of the world, the discovery of Paris, the

discussions, youthful excitement and friendship. No doubt we can describe what a preparatory class for the Grandes Écoles was like in 1925: it's already history. The old lycée hadn't had time to change in fifteen years: it still had its old main courtyard from the great century, with its clock, and its two courtyards with arcaded floors below: the one on the left was reserved for students preparing for the Grandes Écoles. It's a big, beautiful house, where discipline was not too strict at the time. We were free all day Sunday and all afternoon Thursday. We got up at six o'clock, summer and winter (sometimes earlier, if we wished), and went to bed at nine.

We worked a lot. The competitive entrance exam for the École normale supérieure has a fairly broad syllabus: it combines and expands on the subjects from the two baccalauréats. Sometimes we spent ten or eleven hours a day working on our history notebooks (2). {In principle, you can take the competitive entrance exam after a year of preparation: the Première Supérieure class is called the *Khâgne* (spelling

"This was known as 'sçavante', going back to Leconte de Lisle's graphic quirks, and was known as 'reçu K₁'. This is quite rare, and was not the practice at Louis-le-Grand, where the Première Supérieure class was preceded by a 'Première Vétérans' class called *hypokhâgne* (HK). Students entered the competitive entrance examination in the second year only as K₂, but it was accepted that the École was prepared in three years, and that most students passed as K₃. Teaching, in fact, based on this principle, and the Khâgne class was thus made up of old and new students, with the new ones at the back of the room, and fairly evenly ranked at least at the beginning, and the last ones in the compositions. The promotions were clear-cut, and although we lived on very good terms with other, we actually formed closed circles of hypokhâgneux, K₂ or K₃. There were even a few K₍₄₎, respectable ancestors of all, who were either unlucky or excessively scrupulous, and who didn't want to take part because they weren't sure of themselves, and because you're only allowed to take the competitive entrance exam three times. We completely ignored the candidates for Normale Sciences, who didn't live with us at all and whose class was called *Gnouf*. As far as our relations with the administration were concerned, we had a head elected president of our class, who bore the title of *sekh de khâgne*. }

Forty-five in the hypokhâgne, ninety in the khâgne (the highest class in the world).

Most of the pupils came from fairly modest backgrounds, the sons of petty bourgeoisie, civil servants, teachers or professors. Good 'subjects', as they say, at least thirty excellent pupils, quite a few on scholarships, a few Jews, a few well-off pupils too, generally day pupils, who brought us newspapers, books and news from outside. We got on well.

Working hours at Louis-le-Grand hardly coincided with school hours. Especially in summer, it was rare for half the students to attend classes. Classes were a rest and a distraction. We didn't always listen to the teachers, and in philosophy I alternated between reading Bergson and *Arsène Lupin*. Even when we did listen, there was no connection between this passive osmosis and the hard, real work (3). {Well

Of course, in principle, boarders were obliged to attend classes on pain of punishment. But absences were never recorded in the notebooks, and everyone turned a blind eye. Everyone knew that those who were absent had managed to isolate themselves in some study and that they were working there. In the large khâgne class (which was too small, however, because extra chairs and a wooden plank called *pons Sublicius* had to be placed between the tables), there were even two small angled thurnes behind the pulpit, reserved for acoustic reasons, where we often worked in twos or threes. Even when he heard a noise, a shuffling chair or cough, a teacher would never allow himself to go and have a look, and he would just smile discreetly}.

The only class we attended regularly, which always played at closed office, with a room full of its ninety pupils, was the history class. Our teacher didn't tolerate absences. Of all the teachers who tried to teach me something, I have to say that Mr Roubaud is the one to whom I feel I owe the most. Not only did this admirable man teach me a bit of history, but he forced us to compose, be clear, to divide up our reasoning. We all owe him this mysterious favour, which we used to talk about with half-ironic respect, and which we called the Method.

Almost all of us knew his course by heart. Jacques Talagrand's extraordinary memory enabled him to answer the most baroque questions. He knew the colour of the robe of a mortal president under Louis XV, and if you asked him: "Who extinguished what?", he knew that it was the extinguishing of the fire sacred by Theodosius in 376. It was said he could even answer the question:

"What happened next? His father had been a companion of Péguy's at the Ecole Normale, and, a non-believer, read Voltaire aloud during thunderstorms, according to the Tharauds. A few years later, he would take the name Thierry Maulnier.

The summer months in particular, close to the competition, were favourable to such extravagant methods. We were no longer allowed to work as a , but in groups of five or six, in *thurns* spread out over a large area.

throughout the lycée. The names of the occupants were inscribed on the blackboard, preceded by the ritual Latin inscription: *Hac in thurna strenue laboraverunt...* In 1928, we occupied the khâgne class in this way, but more ambitiously, we decorated it with a Greek inscription (4). {It said that 'outside' the class (because we were standing on the gallery in the courtyard) and in the two small cupboards on either side, six good and handsome khâgne students (*tès d'exô tès thournès te kai mikroîn ekaterothi thalamoîn sphodr'eirgasanto hex khagnaioi kaloi kagathoi*), - and one other (*kai tis allos*), worked hard. This other, neither beautiful nor good, was a Hebrew who didn't know Greek, and whom we kept a little apart from the group made up of Maurice Bardèche, Thierry Maulnier, José Lupin, Jean Martin, Paul Arousseau and myself}.

We were revising the subjects for the competition, focusing on the surprises. We remembered, with terror and indignation, the questions proposed by sadistic examiners, who might have asked candidates to speak for ten minutes on "the streets of Alexandria" or "the games of Greek children". At the concours oral, you draw lots for a subject, work on it for ten or twenty minutes, and then present it for the same amount of time. Louis-le-Grand prepared us very well for this exercise, and almost every day, independently of our class hours, the teachers gave us miniature exams, called 'colles', on all the subjects on the syllabus. Our regular teachers were assisted in this task by others from outside the school, some of whom were young, friendly and amusing, like our French 'coller', Pierre Gastinel, who written a fine thesis on Musset and was a professor at the Faculty of Lille when the war broke out in 1939. But our personal 'colles' were no less useful. We chose the most difficult subjects and those about which we clearly knew nothing. Because it's important not to remain mute at the exam (5). {I remember talking for ten

minutes, in front of Maurice Bardèche, of Hippodamos of Miletus, who designed the streets of Piraeus for Pericles. My science did not go beyond that, but one can embroider}. It has been said that this oratorical exercise was very dangerous and very 'normal', because it accustomed us to speaking with aplomb about what we didn't know. I would readily agree, but it also gave us a not inconsiderable assurance, tempered by irony. In fact, if you think about it, that's how you could define those years of hard work - hard work constantly tempered by irony.

Our teachers were generally good teachers, and the least hard-working of them always seemed to me to be ascetics of conscience to the Sorbonne professors. There is no doubt that it is through secondary education that the French university 'holds together' best. It seems, moreover, that our hypokhâgne philosophy teacher was a very remarkable man. But the sentence he began with the time of his lesson was not always finished when he finished, and he used obscure language. What's more, his classes usually took place in the hubbub of private conversations, or even public competitions in various games, and this true philosopher attached no importance to them. He even spoke one day in a room we had decorated with garlands and leaves. As for me, I was reading *the Nouvelles littéraires*. So I can only speak of this excellent man with a little remorse.

But we knew, when we arrived at Louis-le-Grand, that we would be entering the class of André Bellessort, who taught Latin and French in the hypokhâgne. There were a lot of stories about him, not all of which were true, but which gave him a very special character. We lived in sacred fear of his tantrums, but we liked him because he had a reputation for being disrespectful of the established powers, a reputation that was quite justified. It was said that, the previous year, when the Académie had preferred M. Célestin Jonnart to Charles Maurras, André Bellessort had arrived in class, furrowed his thick eyebrows under his V-shaped wrinkle, opened his briefcase and declared:

- Gentlemen, the Académie française has just elected Mr Jonnart. Let me read you some Charles Maurras.

And he had spent the whole lesson commenting to his pupils *Anthinéa* and *Les Amants de Venise*.

We ourselves not have the benefit of such a stroke of brilliance. But it was enough for us to see him shake up the general inspectors and ready-made ideas for us to be very grateful to him, and we didn't hold a grudge against him for not correcting all our homework and sometimes thinking about something else while we were explaining Tacitus. Most of us arrived convinced that Edmond Rostand was a great poet and Henry Bataille a great playwright. We were retarded provincials. It would be a great mistake to believe that 1925 was devoted exclusively to the cult of the great men of the N.R.F. and it is certain that the province ignored them. With a gesture, André Bellessort brushed off this dust,

he would give us essays on poetry to write, and he didn't mind being reminded of the quarrels of Abbé Bremond, whom he was to succeed at the Académie, and he would explain the ancient authors to us with a rounded, lively verve.

- You will not understand the situation of Corneille's Nicomède returning home," he told us, "if you do not imagine that he finds a court analogous to a Hindu court dominated by the coloniser. His brother Attale is the son of a rajah who was educated in England and returns convinced that nothing is better than the English army, English diplomacy, English prudence and English plum pudding.

We had an erudite discussion about Hermione, who, according to Jules Lemaître, is a young girl without a man, whose ardour is that of the untamed and pure woman - but in whom André Bellessort saw, on the contrary, the fever, the red and marbled cheeks, the despair of the seduced girl who has not a minute to lose and who *must*, you hear me well, who must marry Pyrrhus.

We had fun when he read us an act from the *Tour de Nesle* with such consummate acting talent that I can never think without evoking his voice of Dumas's exclamations: "In 1293, Burgundy was happy... Holà! tavernier du diable". He used to leaf through the *Anthology of pastiche* with us, and in his Monday afternoon class, which lasted three hours, his great pleasure was to read to us at the end. He also didn't like to be disturbed and treated the inspectors badly (6). {I remember that one day when we had 'explained' aloud, while he was visibly thinking about something else, nearly four acts of *L'Illusion comique*, which was then on the undergraduate syllabus, the Inspector General arrived as the third hour was about to ring. André Bellessort glared at him, the other one made himself as small as possible, and the explanation of texts continued. Regaining his nerve, the poor inspector tried to raise his voice, to give his opinion on some particularly confusing sentence. - What do you think?" he asked our teacher kindly.

- I think Corneille is babbling," replied André Bellessort in his bass voice. Please continue}.

It is for these sparkles that we have kept André Bellessort's I hope that those who knew him then will remember him as he arrived in the tiered classroom, his umbrella and his briefcase under his arm, striding to his table like an old sea dog. When he was seized by the urge to explain, he would get down from his pulpit, stroll up and down in front of us, and improvise a few solid, well-written truths.

picturesque. He was, as we know, an excellent lecturer: but his classes, never prepared, always new, were even superior to his lectures. He found Proust's notes in a line of Virgil describing ivory turning pink next to purple, the men of the Convention in those of Tacitus, Baudelaire in Boileau, and he made no secret of his reactionary opinions. Without ever appearing to do so, he taught us many things.

Outside the classroom, we were quite free to organise our work.

We used to go to Sainte-Geneviève, whose gummint smell still reminds me of those years, and to the Sorbonne library. The joys of the Nationale were unknown to us. We weren't cold in winter, and in spring we sometimes hid under the charcoal trees in the Cour d'Honneur, right on the grass, to work. In June, when I walk through the Luxembourg, I always look at the young men and women sitting on the iron chairs under the statues of the stone queens. We were like them, dragging our history notebooks under the trees on warm days, working in the open air, suddenly softened a whiff of perfumed air, in front of the children around the pool, the sailing boats, the coconut sellers. We needed three or four chairs. We were ruining ourselves. Sometimes we even slept soundly, to the scandal of the municipal guards, who were more exhausted by the work than by the heat. But it was youth, irreparable youth, and the round, pure faces, and the mist of youth around our features, and all the quarrels of time, all the curiosities of the past, that dissolved under the green trees and the grey statues. I never pass through these enchanted places, along the thick railings, without remembering those rare afternoons when we escaped the classroom for a bit of air, freedom and study.

Then, under the arcades of the well-shaped courtyard, we turned round, holding each other by the arm and talking about all things knowable and unknowable. At the beginning of the *Protagoras*, which was on the syllabus at the time, Plato describes the comings and goings of the young men listening to Socrates, at that hour of dawn that the Greeks call 'the deep morning'. I've never forgotten that word, or the exquisite description of the movements of a free youth. We didn't have Socrates among , we didn't have the sun, but it was morning.

yet the eternal, deep morning of youth. We were not dressed like young Platonists. Some wore long white coats, others grey, others black. I still remember that I had a little black woollen jacket in which I had had the owl of Athena, the symbol of the class, embroidered in blue. But no matter what we wore, it was deep morning.

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It strikes me, from a distance, how tolerant we were of each other. To say that there was bullying would be an understatement. Not only did we, of course, have the greatest indulgence with regard to opinions, and we had friendly discussions, Catholics and non-Catholics, royalists and communists, but also accepted all individual habits, even the most bizarre ones. We had a 'hut' at the back of the study, a cupboard locked with a padlock, where we kept our books, notebooks and personal objects. I sometimes made tea there over a spirit lamp, at the risk of setting fire to my papers. In the 'box' at the head of my bed, I sometimes put my ties there. We wrote, we occupied ourselves with other things, without anyone ever interfering, and if I walked through the study with the Moroccan leather briefcase in which I placed my papers, they did joke about "the complete works briefcase", but without malice, and without even imagining the slightest joke. It was the same when, with two or three comrades, we set up a sort of roulette wheel that we made ourselves, where we played in the evening in the cloakroom, where endless conversations sometimes continued, especially on Sundays, when everyone had gone to bed, between two passes of the night watchman. We only gave up roulette when we realised that we were losing what little money we had to the sole benefit of the landlord. It goes without saying that we were not rich, and that on Sundays we learnt not to dine in order to be able to go to the theatre or a concert, and I feel very sorry for anyone who has not, in their youth, paid for Mozart, Claudel or René Clair with a meal of café-crème. My friends and I know that this teaching was the sacred lesson of our eighteenth year, and the one we hope never to forget.

Such were the habits of a small group of us in the middle of the class. Others lived differently, but all participated to a greater or lesser extent in this life. Our distractions were, of course, sometimes rather learned, if not pedantic. Yet I regard them with as much friendship today as I do the big student songs, because you have to be eighteen and hard at work to be able to entertain yourself so conscientiously.

At the start of the school year in 1926, we decided to write, in our spare time, a huge parodic serial novel, which, from day one, took the title of *Fulgur*. We weren't sure at the time whether *Fulgur* would be a man, a deity or a motto, and one of us even suggested that it should be the name of a dog, an idea that was unanimously judged grotesque. *Fulgur* would be a righting of wrongs, something akin to the *Judex* of our childhood cinema. I think the idea had come to us while reading the issues of *Fantômas* that our friend Roger Vailland had brought us. Such jokes are not uncommon: rarer, it seems to me, are the seriousness and constancy with which this one was pursued. Our working method was simplistic: I wrote the first chapter, a friend wrote the second, which had nothing to do with the first, and a third took on the task of linking the two adventures. After a few days, Thierry Maulnier returned to school late, threw himself into *Fulgur* with all his seriousness, and first wrote chapters in slang, forerunners of Louis-Ferdinand Céline, before describing, in a style imitating Hugo and Flaubert, a great naval battle in which the Afghan fleet beat the English *Home Fleet*. There's no way of telling the story of *Fulgur*, in which the most absurd adventures, sentimental episodes and pseudo-scientific inventions were intertwined. Some time later, as fate would have it, we realised that our series was becoming too clear-cut. Thirteen of us got together and at the same time wrote a chapter each, using new characters and with no connection to the first part. The rest of the novel was spent untangling this considerable imbroglio. There were even a few fragments that we couldn't use, like the one about the underground train that disappeared between two stations. First prize unanimously awarded to our comrade Jean Martin, who assembles the members of the government in the lift of the Eiffel Tower, and ends his chapter with this sentence: "Arrived at the third platform, the lift does not stop..."

We were amused to discover, however, as we wrote our parody, a few laws of the art of writing. We had turned our detective into a great genius, an emulator of Sherlock Holmes. After fifteen serials, he had been wrong so many times that we had to admit he was a complete fool. That's how characters escape their creator, we explained gravely to ourselves. For we were living in Pirandello's time.

Our comrades who were not collaborators followed our game with amusement. Under the title *Une armée digérée*, Roger Vailland wrote some highly surrealist pages that were to have a strange effect on the work. It is true that we were soon to proclaim quite loudly its prophetic aspect. We had made a revolt in Catalonia one of the mainsprings of our action, and it was soon Colonel Macia's conspiracy to establish a Catalan republic. We announced unrest in Indochina, which soon erupted. And above all, we made a banker disappear by plane two years before Lœwenstein. We shamelessly copied the octopus chapter from *Les Travailleurs de la mer*, and we even borrowed a description of a murder in a novel I've forgotten from Philippe Soupault, who never knew anything about it. Today, among the staff of Louis-le-Grand, there are several agrégés des lettres, journalists, and perhaps even some very serious characters (7).

{For posterity's sake, I would remind you that their names, apart from the one who signs these lines, are those of Jacques Talagrand, who is now called Thierry Maulnier, José Lupin, Pierre Frémy, and, more briefly, Antonin Fabre, our tutor, who must be a headmaster somewhere, Fred Sémach, Jean Martin, Paul Gadenne, and Roger Vailland. When Roger Vailland, under the name of Robert François, wrote some perhaps ironic reports for *Paris-Soir*, I recognised Fulgur}.

Our work, moreover, was not to be ignored by the masses. I proposed it to a provincial newspaper whose editor murmured after reading the first part:

- It's *bit* extraordinary, but it's sure to please.

This sentence seemed to us modest and definitive, and *Fulgur* appeared, from April to August 1927, in *the Tribune de l'Yonne*, where ten years later, one of our fellow teachers in Sens went to dig it up and read it aloud to his pupils. In the early months of the war, I received a letter from a professor in Luxembourg who asked me for the text for a dissertation he was writing.

doctorate on the adventure novel. I do not despair of seeing this immortal work on the agrégation syllabus.

Last year, Thierry Maulnier and I wrote another parody. We'd just seen *Hamlet* and we immediately decided to give a performance. After a quickly established outline, the day before we left for the Christmas holidays, we performed *Hamlet's Tragic Resurrection*, which showed all the disadvantages and catastrophes that the resurrection of the Prince of Denmark could have caused. Jean Beaufret imitated Ludmilla Pitoëff's voice quite well in the role of Ophelia, and I tried to imitate Georges' voice in that of Hamlet. Thierry Maulnier played the Spectre. I remember *Hamlet's* great monologue, which began with that Shakespearean cry: "*Still alive... So we must always return to earth...*". After New Year's Day, we put the finishing touches to this performance, conceived as a *commedia dell'arte*, and we wrote what we had just performed, following the translation rules of the "Shakespeare collection", in prose, rhymed verse and blank verse. Unfortunately for posterity, this interesting masterpiece, which this time came about thanks to the collaboration of Thierry Maulnier and myself alone, was entrusted to a friend who lost it without a care in the world.

Thierry Maulnier always had a keen talent for parody. He was, in particular, unrivalled in his pastiche of Hugo. He used to recite the craziest poems from *the Légende des siècles*, those in which Hugo seemed to be parodying himself:

*When the Cid entered the Generalife, he
went straight to the point and killed the
Caliph,
The black Caliph Ogrul, hated by his subjects...*

This allowed one of our classmates, gifted with a great talent for imitation, to give us a lecture on the Ogrul in the manner of our history teacher. Thierry Maulnier, for his part, wrote a long poem in imitation of *Kanut*, describing the rape of one of our teachers and the birth of one of our classmates, who was joked about being very tall. We also composed rhyming pieces based on fairly difficult rhymes, along the lines of the poems with no head or tail, of which there were many versions in circulation in the Latin Quarter at the time, celebrating arthritic flats and petrol sitting on the side of the road. I've forgotten a lot of the poems I admire, and I'll probably remember for the rest of my life sonnets rhymed by

Thierry Maulnier, around 1927, in the study room at Louis-le-Grand.

The lycée, however, is not enough to describe our life. We certainly had our regular days out, but there were others too. I'm not talking about the various methods that boarders have always used to invoke the family visit or the dentist (8). {The best lesson of this kind was given to us by a philosophy student, an Albanian by the already Italian name of Peppo, whom we had led to believe that he had just been sentenced to death in his country and that he had to defend himself. He went straight to the general supervisor, who was stunned. But with an Albanian, you never know? Peppo, who had believed his sentence for twenty-four hours, went out for eight days to 'defend himself' with his consul. In this way, this ingenious Balkan used the innumerable pranks that were played on him, and he wasn't going to stop there}.

In the first year, it was established by tacit agreement that a supervisor Every Friday, the general who had taken Molière's name of M. Josse signed a list of students who wanted to go out to 'check their enrolment at the Sorbonne'. It seems to me that this was the strange excuse he was given the first time. Later on, even the excuses were spared. We would go for a walk in Luxembourg or, more generally, to work at the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, because we were studious souls. We only allowed "pleasure" trips in the spring, exams were due (9). {At that time, there were two sessions of bachelor's certificates, one in March and the other in June. The March session was later abolished and replaced by an October session. Students preparing for Normale Supérieure generally prepare two or three bachelor's certificates at the same time in order to save time. Almost all of us did this, at least in the second year, and our teachers chose the classical authors from among those on the licence programme. (There is no authors' programme for the competitive examination at the École)}.

In March and June, the boarders presented a list each morning to the general supervisors: this was the list of exam candidates authorised to spend the day outside. But the exams in the various subjects lasted a week or more. Undaunted, we went out every morning, and no censor or invigilator was ever seen to check the curious intellectual bulimia that rushed the students every day towards every conceivable certificate, from classical literary studies to Chinese music. At seven o'clock we were served a

A hearty breakfast that always included an omelette and jam (many of them, who really had no decency whatsoever, came to breakfast without even having the modesty to leave the room and shamelessly bore the name of "omelette licensee"), and, at quarter past seven, we were let loose on the Paris pavement.

It's one of my fondest memories of that time. We used to go on foot, through the Boulevard Saint-Michel and the crowded Halles, to have a café-crème at the Maison du Café, on the Boulevard Montmartre, and we would discover the morning Paris, the one that was most secret to us, with its cries, its mountains of vegetables, the fresh smell of the open shops, the meat in heaps, the grey and white fish. On fine spring days, the Seine between the books, the little rusty churches, the grey and unique city, all loomed up before us.

We also went rowing in the morning, which was what we called passing the licence at the Bois de Boulogne. The big thing was to get hold of the fifty-franc note that you left as a deposit when you hired one of those heavy flat-bottomed boats that go round the lake and cost only a hundred sous. The ticket was returned when the boat was returned, but you still had to have it.

We would spend an hour or two there, in the morning wood, around the round islands, through the cool morning. We'd forget about our studies and work, discover the birds and the freshness, and this Parisian wood would take us back to the countryside of our childhood, to the rivers and past pastimes. It was the licence at the Bois de Boulogne, where we sometimes came across the students who were imitating us, in very short, light-coloured dresses, as we wore them, boats similar to ours. The pleasures of the great outdoors were not then as important as they have become since. It's true that very few of my comrades knew anything about snow and even that many didn't know anything about the sea. Not many of us knew how to light a fire, cook or make coffee, or had pitched a tent on a beach. I believe that swimmers would have formed a very humble minority. I'm not talking about camping, certainly unknown (10). {It was a great event when Thierry Maulnier, José Lupin and two or three others decided, one fine Thursday, to walk around Paris (38 km 5). I prepared sandwiches for them in the back of the French class and, not wishing to take part in this performance, I went to wait for them at the Porte d'Orléans at around five in the afternoon. For I must say that they had progressed at a youthful pace, formally inadvisable to all keen walkers}. The Bois was generally just a of fresh air in our lives.

The same kind of studiousness that very few people experienced on Sundays in June on the Marne or the Seine.

This was how the Paris of the time was built. When they changed out of their black or white smocks, the boys of the time, even the most modest, were happy to wear mauve or old rose coloured suits and "batik" ties, light fabrics printed with wax, worn with very small hard collars half a centimetre high. In 1925, trousers were tapered at the bottom. Suddenly, the following year, they became very wide. I also remember with amazement that students at the time often carried walking sticks, and that the Latin Quarter was sometimes the scene of fights. The king's pedlars carried the big curved cane. Almost all of us were already "va-nu-tête". We were discovering some of the pleasures of fashion, as far as our generally small means would allow. No doubt we read in the newspapers and magazines that the youth of the time liked cocktails, cars and sometimes drugs. Our youth, poor and locked up at school, was more reserved. We didn't drink many cocktails, of course we didn't know about drugs, and I'm sure there wasn't a single boy between the ages of seventeen and twenty who knew how to drive a car. Many of them liked to dance, and indulged in their pleasures in places without luxury, frequented by women who were not very picturesque. One or two Sundays, I went with some friends to the Moulin Rouge ball, which was a vast crowd of employees, whores and salesgirls. And sometimes I'd go with Jean Beaufret and Jean Valdeyron to a little tea house on Boulevard Saint-Michel, les Yvelines, or with some young girls to an honest English ladies' salon on Rue Boissy-d'Anglas, where we danced the dances of the day and perfected our Charleston skills. During the holidays, on my long-ago beach, I would take these Parisian pleasures back to the provinces. Around Christmas, Louis-le-Grand used to hold a ball, so we could go to the theatre or cinema at night, an unusual pleasure, before getting our classmates' sisters, cousins or girlfriends to dance. Once a term, moreover, Louis-le-Grand offered a compulsory concert in the great amphitheatre of the Sorbonne (a notion which always seemed to me as prodigious as that of the compulsory conjuring sessions I attended as a child). It wasn't foolishly put together, most of the time using big celebrities who were not always despicable, and it was a pleasant mix of music, music hall and theatre. I remember

having heard Sacha Guitry explain to us that he had always been a dunce and that it had worked out well for him (which was considered inappropriate by our teachers). He had come with Yvonne Printemps and he told us:

- In life, the most important thing is to choose the right job and the wife.

And for the more daring spirits, who weren't afraid of far-flung explorations, there were still other naïve pleasures to had in this Paris, such as going to have Arab tea or Moorish coffee at the Mosque, which was almost new at the time. When my sister came to see me in Paris, I took her there too, and it was there that I introduced her to my friend Maurice Bardèche in 1928.

Those were the years of friendship. But how do you talk about friends? That's more difficult than anything, especially when you think of the ties that were to be woven between us as time went on. We went round the courtyard, holding each other by the arm, talking about everything, about poetry and God and the nation, and we were very close to forging the strongest and most beautiful bonds that have ever existed, those of young friendship. I was talking, going out, discovering German cinema and the Pitoëff theatre with a young Syrian Jew, Fred Sémach, who was probably my first classmate at Louis-le-Grand. He took me to see Pirandello and *Sainte Jeanne*. And we used to walk along the quays, which were perhaps the first place in Paris to attract me, and where I hardly spent a week without following the steel-coloured river, without leafing through forgotten books, always too expensive, and authentic or fake pictures. I did it without order, without skill, as one should do anything, left to the slender discoveries of chance, at those hours when the fine Japanese pattern of naked trees is cut out on the grey sky. But at the same time, I was learning about *Action Française*, discussing the kings of France and the best regime with José Lupin and Thierry Maulnier. Thierry Maulnier had a brother in the same class, almost as long as him, who is now a magistrate. He himself tortured the first-year and philosophy students with a real knowledge of Chinese torture and an unflappable seriousness. Our lycée included a few children from Martinique, whom he pursued, for some reason, with extremely vigilant persecution. In everything else, moreover, he had a cold sternness that delighted us. Immensely and imperturbably lazy, he showed himself capable of continuous work that would have seemed beyond human strength, and generally prepared his eight Greek or Latin authors of the

licence in forty-eight hours, day and night, at the cost of Apache-like tricks to find light. As for José Lupin, if I try to remember, after so many years together, what he was like at that time, I think I should remember him above all as the most cheerful of our companions. From his home town in Savoie, he would tell us stories of huge drinking parties, invent mocking fables and, with his childhood friend Georges Blond, compose obscene songs in 'old French'. With us, of course, he read Valéry, the Surrealists and Gide. But to the *Return of the Prodigal Son*, he preferred another version, which seemed to us to be full of meaning:

- The fatted calf, faced with the fate in store for him, ran away, he told us. He wandered through the fields for months, enduring a hard life and losing weight. One fine day, he couldn't stand it any longer, he came home. The whole family was lined up on the porch to welcome him, in rows by height. And to celebrate the return of the fatted calf, the prodigal son was eaten.

Everyone played their part in the class comedy. There were the historians, who were serious people, and the philosophers, who argued with their teacher and, it seems to me, crushed him with great ease. One of the latter, Roger Lefèvre, became a Socialist MP in 1936. The other, Jean Beaufret, recited the prayer of Iphigénie with the voice of Ludmilla Pitoëff: he was a pink and blond boy; we went to see plays at the Studio des Champs-Élysées, he loved *Pelléas*, he had understood our philosophy teacher the previous year, he was ingenious, subtle, smiling and graceful. Professor Lecène's son, our liaison with the outside world, brought in Proust and the outside air. I can easily recall these friends of yesteryear, who are often the friends of today, and who seem to me to have changed very little (11). {To this picture of the 1925 khâgne, we will add, for the benefit of today's reader, a few names that the author did not mention in this book written in 1940, but which may be of interest today. In hypokhâgne, our classmate was Lucien Paye, an excellent student and the class prize-winner, who later became Minister of and ambassador. The following year, in khâgne, we were joined by Paul Guth, Henri Queffélec and Georges Pompidou, all of whom went on to careers in politics and literature}. Sometimes it's hard to distinguish between those years and the years that followed. However, I remember well what Maurice Bardèche was like, around 1926, even before he became my friend and then my brother. He used to make fun of me for walking around with a spirit lamp and making tea while studying; he wore a black smock with a tight belt,

he was lively, furious, subtle and stubborn. At the time, he was waving his horribly bristly, bushy hair over a thin face. We travelled through Paris together, day and night! I remember as the most beautiful moments of my life that evening when we were returning from *the Annunciation to Mary at the Work*, stopping for oysters and white wine in the sloping streets of Montmartre. I remember eve of 14 July when, in 1927, we used to go to the little balls on Sainte-Geneviève hill, drinking red wine at fourteen cents a glass, on rue Mouffetard, under pink and blue lanterns, to the sound of accordions and dashing violins. It was there that I picked up a few things about working-class Paris, its festivals and its characters. Maurice was, and still is, a great wanderer. Following in his footsteps, but to a lesser extent, I sometimes wandered aimlessly through the smoky streets and under the overhead trains of outlying districts. I've since returned to Vaugirard or Montrouge, but it's to that period that I attribute certain huge, empty streets, drenched in rain, where I wandered interminably, since the eighteenth year is the age of hopes, but also of torments and escapes. Maurice was discovering Pantin and Belleville at the same time, and it was he who took me to the cinema, which I didn't know, and it was he who taught me how to work, because he was a hard worker, which he remained, and it was he who made me read Proust and Barrès, and together we went to see the Parisian bistros, the baskets of shellfish along the green counters, the Bois de Vincennes and its popular crowds. On Sundays, I often had lunch at the house of a childhood friend of my family, whom I'd known all my life, and whose youthful character and charming bohemianism were a source of delight to me: we had orgies of two-franc oysters and Catalan dishes, which I helped to prepare, in a narrow room in the sixth floor near the Place de la République. So I continued to get to know the great working-class districts of Paris, for which I had a great love. The future would no longer grant us the same zeal to seize, conquer and drink life. All forms of this life seemed almost equally desirable to us, and we prolonged by letters the memories of our days studying or wandering, during the holidays.

It's hard for me to put these things and these people back on the plane that was theirs at that time, now that life has made differences between friends, and some are far away, others together, - before the war of 1939 dispersed them. There were others. With José Lupin, I

sometimes saw, at the Louis-le-Grand ball or in some café, his old childhood friend, Georges Blond, who was not yet a midshipman in the navy, let alone a journalist. On Sunday evenings, when we came home around ten o'clock, we would talk at length in the cloakroom about our afternoon, the theatre, politics, even God, with an ardour that we would never find again.

We weren't liberal, but we were tolerant. At the time of the 1928 elections (I wasn't old enough to vote), as the ballot boxes were entrusted to the youngest voters who turned up, they were guarded in the V^e arrondissement by two very good friends, my comrades José Lupin, who was a royalist, and Jean Martin, who was a communist. They were both fooled, by the way, because the deputy elected was an infamous radical. But we discussed things with passion and friendship, and with an intellectual sympathy and kind of honesty that I never encountered again.

I was never too involved in the political struggles of the students at the time. José Lupin and Georges Blond attended the Joan of Arc celebrations *that the A.F.* so courageously imposed on Paris. I wasn't sure enough of myself and of my opinion to take sides. However, my first political reflections came across *Action Française* and Maurras at that time, and haven't left them much since. Suddenly a world opened up, a world of reason, of precision, of truth. I had not suspected this in the provinces before coming here, I admit. On the other hand, a thirty-year-old boy, Pierre Gaxotte, was publishing his book on *the French Revolution*, in which he taught us some salubrious truths. It was in the courtyard of Louis-le-Grand that my friendship with *Action Française* began.

During the 1926 holidays, the condemnation of *l'Action française* by the Archbishop of Bordeaux, and then by the Holy See, was to bring us more serious subjects for discussion. Was it true that Maurras was trying to capture the souls of young people? Should a Catholic submit to the ban on reading the paper and joining the League? Or should he think that this was a reserved domain, not religious, but political? Did not the official approval given on 1st January by the Nuncio to Mr Briand's policy prove that this was an inadmissible condemnation? But was there not a danger in the naturalism of the doctrine? We asked ourselves these various and contradictory questions.

There were Catholics among us who suffered from the event. There were unbelievers, or lukewarm ones, who were astonished. *The A.F.* was an important part of our intellectual life, whatever our opinions. We were still passionate - it was the time of the Bajot trial - about the murder of little Philippe Daudet. Léon Daudet's escape, which made the whole of France laugh, met with only enthusiastic and amused approval. But in all sincerity, I don't think that Rome's condemnation did much harm to the *A.F.*'s reputation in France. Although some people stopped reading the paper, at least on a regular basis, the influence of the doctrine was not shaken.

But we were also receiving more distressing news. Old royalists, who had sometimes given up their lives for the Church, at the time of the inventories, for example, were being refused a priest at their deathbed. Civil burials caused a scandal in villages where they were unknown. Priests were torn apart by the conflict. In his admirable book, *Les Manants du Roi*, Jean de La Varende left a poignant account of this immense crisis, which was the great spiritual crisis of the period. He painted a magnificent picture of these old people dispossessed of their national faith, their religious faith in turmoil, and the disarray caused in the Catholic conscience of the French. Thereafter, even before reconciliation, the rigours lessened, without ever disappearing altogether. Nothing is harder than ecclesiastical persecution. At that time, clergyless coffins were seen passing by, which the League members placed in front of the closed church doors, while the crowd loudly recited the psalms or the rosary. Behind this door, there was sometimes a priest as tormented, as moved as those he was rejecting. The door would not open. Meanwhile, in Paris, the old fighters continued their patient struggle, with the same violence and the same courage, under the sarcasm of the Christian democrats, the laughter of the anticlerics, the applause of the anti-patriots. Now that peace has been restored, with dignity, by the charitable and beautiful decision of a great pope, we can ask for silence on all this. I don't think we can reasonably ask for those who have suffered to be forgotten.

We knew that it had just held triumphant meetings, and even those who did not support it recognised its supremacy. The parties of the right seemed bourgeois and old-fashioned to us, Italian fascism

In France, there was only a flimsy imitation of it, led by a highly suspicious lunatic, Georges Valois, about whom we used to gossip a lot, but who, I later found out, was joined by a few brave dupes, the same ones who joined the P.S.F. ten years later. I don't forget, however, that in the Quartier we used to meet young men in blue mackintoshes, who always left victims in political attacks: they were the *Jeunesses patriotes*, the J.P. We liked to get on with them, but there were none at Louis-le-Grand, and we couldn't find anything that represented the youth of nationalism better than *the A. F.* Even the communists were aware of this, and the precision of the fascist or national-socialist idea has always been our great research.

And yet we were in the midst of a briandist euphoria. Or rather, the whole world was, from Catholics to defeatists. In Germany, a man of genius, Gustav Stresemann, was patiently rebuilding his country, and was having lunch with the old Briand in the sentimental little inns on the Swiss lakes. I must confess, however, that I have never met any faithful followers of the League of admirers of the politics of the day among my friends. Revolutionaries and nationalists alike scorned the League of Nations.

Mr Briand, to laugh at the precious ones of Geneva. We read René Benjamin's books on democratic madness and the age of augurs with great relish - and to learn to be disrespectful, we added them to those he had written on justice or the Sorbonne farce we were about to embark on. Many of us were fairly indifferent when it came to politics: I suspect that we were above all anarchists by temperament, and we read *the Canard enchaîné* as willingly as *the Action française*. After the disastrous experience of the Cartel, Mr Poincaré had come to allow the French economy to breathe, but there were too many things missing from the French government.

M. Poincaré to enthuse young people. The Union Nationale was just another democratic compromise. On the whole, we stayed pretty far away from active politics: if I remember correctly, the major events took place precisely in our absence. The only ones we knew about were Léon Daudet's escape, which put a stop to all work on preparing for the competition, and threw us into a huge and satisfying laugh, - and, on another note, the false news of

the arrival in New York, after the first Atlantic crossing, of the Nungesser and Coli airmen, which aroused an enthusiasm throughout Paris no doubt equal to that of the armistice, and which our lycée experienced like everyone else, until the sudden disillusionment of the following day. Apart from that, the demonstrations in 1926 against the Cartel interested us, but from a distance; the revolutionary days of August 1927 to protest against the execution of two Italian anarchists, Sacco and Vanzetti, in the United States, found us impartial in regretting the American methods used against the condemned, but I'm not sure that we seriously believed in the revolutionary danger. In those days, moreover, we were not lacking in intellectual friendship for communism, and the great man of the party, Doriot, seemed to us a curious, dangerous (the war in the Rif was coming to an end) and attractive figure. We were eighteen, a little confused, quite disgusted with the modern world, - and with a fundamental inclination towards anarchy.

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* *

Politics was not enough for us, and we know that there were two great literary quarrels in those years. The first was that of pure poetry. Does poetry include reason? Is it totally independent of reason? This was discussed at the Académie and in *Le Temps*. We talked about it, and reflections of our quarrels showed up in our classwork. I'm not very sure that we understood exactly what it was all about. André Bellessort used to chant the magic words in his classes:

*Orléans, Beaugency,
Notre-Dame de Cléry
Vendôme, Vendôme...*

and we pitted the white Oloossone against the daughter of Minos and Pasiphae. But I do believe that we put Mallarmé, Rimbaud and the latest Surrealists on the same side of the scales, which didn't stop us from retaining enough irony to sum up, as Jean Beaufret did, *Le Cimetière marin* :

(This quiet roof where doves walk...)

as an academic opposition between the Roof and the self, and to ask ourselves whether "Midi le juste" really meant something other than "Midi".

just'.

The second quarrel was the defence of the West against the charms of the East. Henri Massis had just published his famous book, but we were also reading translations of Tagore and *Bouddha vivant* by Paul Morand, and the Russian Jew Chestov presented us with a strange kind of Pascal. Roger Vailland extolled the virtues of nirvana, of dissolving into all the calls of nature. We listened to him, and then, as we were curious about theology, we countered these dreams with some hasty constructions, and some pushed the audacity so far as to dispense with the little volumes that were beginning appear, containing *the Summa* of Saint Thomas.

We discussed Freudism, which was still almost new, and Léon Daudet's book *Le Rêve éveillé* with equal enthusiasm. Few of my fellow students had not gone to Sainte Anne on a Sunday morning to see Professor Dumas speak in a room decorated by the boarders. I went myself, but I was unlucky, there were no lunatics there that day, only a trepanate whose skull swelled up when he did a multiplication. Others broke in, at the Lycée Henri IV, to Alain's, who never knew the exact number of his pupils, and to whom the censor arrived from time to time to expel the undesirables. We also talked about La *Trahison des clercs*, which taught us the name of Julien Benda. Our teachers sometimes mentioned Mr Freud's Key to Dreams. It was all a matter of friendly dispute, and I'm not sure that all those students saw anything else in it. On Friday mornings, in philosophy class, we would openly and widely read *the Nouvelles littéraires*, which was in its heyday, and which offered us a new genius every week, in the famous interviews published by Frédéric Lefèvre under the title *Une heure avec...* I have since kept a certain retrospective friendship for this newspaper. It was certainly the most widely read paper in our class at the time. Following its lead, we would embark on the quarrels of the time, and on a variety of readings. I have to say that it was still with a certain timidity. Barrès had not been dead for long, and his glory had been obscured by his public role and by some self-righteous works that we anarchists hardly forgave him for. But we loved *Orontes* and *Inspired Hill*. When it came to modern poetry, we had our work cut out discovering Valéry, and it was Roger Vailland who brought us the first edition of *Charmes*. Baudelaire and Rimbaud remained the deities of youth, and I must have annotated at that time,

which doesn't happen to me very often, the whole *Saison en enfer*. I don't think we knew much about Péguy and Claudel, but we likened Gide's Lafcadio to the gratuitous act of the Surrealists, we read *Les Nourritures terrestres* as we never will again, and the years when *Les Faux monnayeurs* and *Si le grain ne meurt* appeared seemed fertile for discussion and intelligence. We loved Giraudoux, and Colette who had published her most beautiful books, bitter, swollen with leaves and fruit, salty and sunny, sad and wise, *Sido*, *La Naissance du jour*. I defended Anatole France, who was beginning to be shunned. We read the N.R.F. if it was lent to us, we discussed without reading the *Roseau d'Or* collection directed by Henri Massis and Jacques Maritain, and I always remember the impression of torrent and storm that the first book by Georges Bernanos, whom Léon Daudet so passionately introduced to us, suddenly made among us. We were looking at François Mauriac, who for us was taking the place of greater figures. I don't think many of us ventured into Dostoyevsky, and as for Proust, there weren't four of us, probably having discovered him all at once, a little before the whole work had appeared, in a few dazzling and unforgettable days in the summer of 1926. There was still a lot to know, a lot to learn, and a lot of work to do on top of it, and we were less than twenty years old, little provincials who didn't know a lot of things and who were only beginning to like Racine.

We discovered contemporary literature at Picard, the bookseller in the Latin Quarter, a public benefactor if ever there was one, where we leafed through uncut books, getting a view of our times 'by the slice'. Picard replaced the pre-war Galeries de l'Odéon for us, and I never stopped coming there to look at the new releases or leaf through the reviews. In those days, novels were hardly more than two hundred pages long, printed in large alphabet type. In 1927, Rainer Maria Rilke died in Paris, and all we knew about him was an abridged edition of the *Cahiers de Malte* by Laurids Brigge, who, for twenty cents, had brought us his despairing mists and wonderful dreams.

It goes without saying that we loved Alain-Fournier. Not only *the Grand Meaulnes*, but above all the *Correspondance* with Jacques Rivière, which had just been published. I don't think I've ever read a book as much as these four large, fascinating volumes, in which I discovered, for the first time, that pre-war young people had the same discussions, the same

poets than we are. I knew and still know all the details, the obscurities, the gaps. I also found there, and above all, the fever of youth and friendship, the model of the demands of that age, the desires that were ours. Sometimes I identified with one of the missing correspondents, sometimes with the other, and I too wanted to write a story that could have been mine, 'in short, tight, voluptuous paragraphs'. I watched young people running around me, like Augustin Meaulnes in the Berri countryside, like Henri Fournier in the Cours-la-Reine. If all young people have their book, imposed by the resemblance they find with themselves rather than by their genius, mine was, for two or three years, this *Correspondance*.

It was a personal book, and the subject of particular favour. We used to talk to each other about other subjects, and often stranger ones. It was also the time of surrealism.

One day, in the corridor leading to André Bellessort's class, he started talking to me about poetry. Almost all of us had classmates like that. He was only to stay with us for a year and a half, before finishing a degree in philosophy at the Sorbonne, and then turning to journalism. He was Roger Vailland, undoubtedly one of the most extraordinary characters in our class. He would bring us the *Surrealist Manifesto*, *Poisson soluble* and the poems of Paul Éluard. He 'translated' Mallarmé and Valéry for us word for word. Through him, we communicated with other comrades, a small anarchistic and unbridled society, whose main leader was René Daumal. As surrealism quickly seemed out of fashion to him, he readily boasted of having created an ultra-surrealism, which he called *simplism*. In truth, the differences seemed minimal to us when he extolled the merits of the gratuitous act - which he called the pure act - and automatic writing. He was Gide's Lafcadio incarnate for us, and although it's rare to admire someone his age, it's true that we admired him. Moreover, full of genuine seduction and talent, closer to Baudelaire than to the mistakes of the Surrealists, he could undoubtedly have translated many unknown worlds into quite striking accents. I have kept many of his little poems. But I think he preferred to put the picturesque, the restlessness - he would have said: the genius - into his life rather than into his works. When he had

After leaving Louis-le-Grand, his friends founded a luxurious quarterly review, such as still appeared around 1928, called *Le Grand Jeu*. It was adorned with definitive thoughts, such as: "We must beat the dead while they are cold", "We admire Sacco and Vanzetti, but we prefer Landru", and other elements of total anarchism, which, all in all, was fairly easy. I was reminded of this when, in 1939, Roger Vailland (with Colette) covered the trial of the Weidmann killer for *Paris-Soir*.

Le Grand Jeu must not have had more than three or four issues, and died out even before *Bifur*, which we used to leaf through at Picard's, and in which we admired horrible, beautiful photographs and profound, rambling articles. That was our youth.

— There are people," Roger Vailland explained to us, "who, placed in front of two electric buttons, one of which is open and the other closed, if they want to close the open one, will always make a mistake. There are some who will never make a mistake. The first don't have *grace*, the others do.

You can see the abuse that this idle age made of religious terms, sometimes applied to strange domains. We read with him the feverish, seductive works, rich with so many unexplored possibilities, written by René Crevel, who was to kill himself one day in 1935. Not that we were in the least inclined towards this literature, or that *Mon corps et moi* was our Bible. But these were the books of our time, and even though they were far from us, they were fraternal, and our strange comrade served as our intermediary. He struck us so much that José Lupin and I tried to put him into vague novels, which we composed as a study. But how difficult it was to convey what moved us in so much extravagance, sometimes childish and applied! The clichés of Abbé Brémond, the discussions on soul and spirit, on Animus and Anima, the most facile distortions of religious notions, Roger Vailland presented them in a way that amused us and sometimes pleased us, but written in black and white, his sentences became mere puns. It's true that he was not lacking in a certain learned irony either, which appealed to the passionate readers of Jules Romains' *Les Copains* that we were at the time (there are two or three of us who know this book more or less by heart).

— Drunkenness," our doctor explained, "is the best way we know of to catch a glimpse of the soul. In ordinary times, the body is straight,

the spirit too, and the soul is behind it, hidden. When the body wavers under the action of drunkenness, the spirit follows and wavers too. But not the soul. And we can see the soul remaining upright through the oscillations of the spirit, as through those of a pendulum.

Today, we can think with a smile of such words and images, which for me retain so well the colour of the years 1926 and 1927 and which are akin to the most famous 'literary quarrels' of the time.

Are we to believe that we are giving in to all these fables? That would be a big mistake. We had too much irony, and basically too much common sense. Every day, along with Vailland himself, we poked fun at the then-fashionable themes of 'escapism' and 'the anxieties of contemporary youth'. We talked curiously about literary converts, but none of us, I'm sure, ever took *Jean Cocteau's Letter to Jacques Maritain* or *Jacques Maritain's Letter to Jean Cocteau* seriously for a second. It seemed to us to be a rather amusing deception, designed at most to get *the Nouvelles littéraires* going. But, whether we liked it or not, these tightrope walkers' speeches were the rituals of the time, and we participated in them at least as witnesses: that's why we judge them today with a little more indulgence than we did then. They weren't part of our lives, any more than luxury, bars and travel were - we were poor, sober and prisoners - but they were the spectacles we contemplated from afar, through our bars.

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Such discussions have always existed, and that's why I found in the *correspondence* of Alain-Fournier and Jacques Rivière some images of our own youth. But there was one big difference: music seems to me to have played only a very small role in our lives. I'm not in the least a musician, and therefore a poor judge. We certainly had no shortage of friends who went to concerts. But no event could compare to the revelation, for Alain-Fournier and his contemporaries, of *Pelléas*, Moussorgski and the Ballets Russes. Musicians among us were discovering these pleasures as classics of a different kind. In the same way, we did not experience any philosophical passion, such as those who listened to M. Bergson in 1910. We read his books, I

But Bergson was a man like Montaigne, already solemnly withdrawn from our world. Our real emotions of discovery lay elsewhere. And we had our usual four advisers: Edmond Jaloux for books, Lucien Dubech for theatre, and Jean Fayard and Alexandre Arnoux for film.

In those naïve days, we used to go to plays at Gaston Baty's Studio des Champs-Élysées, where a mechanical, even algebraic fairytale was being created that amused us. We discovered Louis Jouvet, who was then playing Marcel Achard with Valentine Tessier, and *Knock*, before being dazzled by the greatest theatrical event of twenty years, the appearance of Jean Giraudoux's theatre, and *Siegfried* in 1928. For the first time (because Claudel's performances were short-lived), we heard *French spoken* on a large stage, a graceful, lively, fresh language. For the first time, we were witnessing the birth of something new and ingenious, something that could be great. How could we not marvel? But we were also going to see Ben Jonson and Aristophanes at Dullin's Théâtre de l'Atelier, which looked like a sub-prefecture town hall on the Place Dancourt. And at *L'Œuvre*, where Ibsen was being performed, and where one day, through a mediocre performance, we saw the dazzling light of *the Annunciation to Mary*. And that's how we discovered the Pitoëffs.

It was only in May 1926, if I remember correctly, that I went to see them, after reading an article by Lucien Dubech in *Candide*. I was with Fred Sémach on a Sunday afternoon, and we had taken six-franc seats at the top of the vast and dusty Théâtre des Arts (12).

{First of all, I remember, there was a little play by Mérimée called *L'Amour africain* (*African Love*), which left us quite surprised for a while. This rather heavy pochade was set up as a parody, but we hadn't been warned, and we were worried to see the actors playing so badly. It was only at the end, at the great massacre where streams of red ribbon represented blood, that our candid souls were reassured}.

The curtain rose on these simplified sets that I preferred to everything else, and these five round tables that made up the entire stage furnishings. I was a little shocked. When I played theatre with my sister's dolls at the age of twelve, I had the clearest memory of having set up a stage.

almost similar. We had dressed round boxes in fabric and placed them in staggered rows on the cramped stage, in the middle of the plain curtains, exactly as Georges Pitoëff had placed his. In the silence, however, Pirandello's play began to unfold, still so surprising at the time, so new to me. I wasn't to see the famous *Six personnages en quête d'auteur* until later, but even today I think *Comme ci ou comme ça*, which is in the same vein, is superior to it. Creatures torn apart by intelligence and doubt suffered in the midst of a sarcastic universe. Through the blue curtains we could see a thin, black man advancing, tilting his head slightly to one side, smiling sadly, and whose low, monotonous voice, a little cracked, left such a strange impression on us. For he sang, he sang his drama and the drama of life, and he wrapped passion and suffering in his sung phrases. We ended up listening, beyond the words, to a certain melodic line, a cantilena akin to Gregorian chant, a slow, unrolled, muted lament that seemed to raise around the action like a funeral dirge, like church music, a religious lamentation. For a long time, I will see him as he first appeared to me, standing in the middle of these hangings, explaining the death of his mother, and the insect drowned in a glass of water that he had looked at for so long, and during which time he had not noticed that his mother was dying. Next to the commentator of the drama a small creature in a large cape had her face consumed with passion, and her eyes immense. And from the stage, in those marvellous years, a deadly and disenchanted poetry rose up, a poetry that was sometimes fake, dead today, but which carried its magic, which we experienced at the same time as the beautiful days of peace, youth and hope, and which we will never find again.

We returned to a kind of sacred enthusiasm that I probably never experienced again at the theatre. I think the whole class went to see Georges and Ludmilla. And we were never to miss many of their shows after that.

There's a card, torn at the corners and yellowed, that I've always kept as a sort of talisman, the sesame of youth. It's on the letterhead of the Théâtre des Arts and dated Thursday 16 December 1926: "*At 1 p.m. sharp,*" it says, "*a matinee offered to the intellectual youth of Paris by Georges and Ludmilla Pitoëff and their company: Shakespeare's Tragic Story of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, in its complete text,*

translation by Eugène Morand and Marcel Schwob; staging, sets and costumes by Pitoëff". And I immediately saw again the courtyard of Louis-le-Grand and its arcades, grey and black study these invitations were brought to us; I saw again the old auditorium of the Théâtre des Arts, filled from top to bottom only by young people, and the most beautiful theatrical performance, the most exhilarating and the most lively I have ever attended. It was there that I understood, not for the first time, nor for the last, but most profoundly, the agreement that had been established once and for all between Georges and Ludmilla Pitoëff and young people.

You have to understand the emotion that seized us when Georges and Ludmilla Pitoëff invited 'the intellectual youth of Paris' to hear *Hamlet*. Much has been said about the 'post-war period', and the author of these lines is not at fault. However, if this period, which was troubled in hearts and souls but alive and rich curiosities, still touches us, I believe it is because of what Georges and Ludmilla Pitoëff brought to it by interpreting it. Decanted in Ibsen, Pirandello or Shakespeare, contemporary troubles, passing through these two voices, one light, the other dark, seemed to us to be the eternal troubles of human life, and those words that came up so often in the literature of the time, the word dream, the word death, took on all their meaning and all their weight, and really became the dream and death of Shakespeare, the dream and death of Racine.

Dressed in black, in the black and grey composition of his synthetic sets, Georges Pitoëff offered his sober gestures to our eyes, and his surprising voice to our ears. His Russian accent, which disconcerted so many of his listeners, enchanted us. He was then the relentless doubter who questioned the emptiness of the sky: to die, to sleep, to dream perhaps. That's why, after having played so many of Hamlet's grandsons, he gave his appearance to the Prince of Denmark. We never met an actor who captured our hearts in the same way, and no theatre was dearer to us than the Théâtre des Arts, where so many storms had passed. That white voice, that look of pain and questioning, that tall, awkward body gave us a unique emotion. Georges Pitoëff seemed to us to embody a certain modern soul, unbalanced by the clash of instincts, dreaming of an ardent life and the absolute. "There are more things under heaven, Horatio, than your philosophy can comprehend", and that is why we have never seen the Prince of Denmark dream so ardently at the end of his life.

It's a restful sleep that dreams don't disturb. We heard him say "Leave me alone" in almost all his roles. And that was symbolic, and then we would try to imitate his voice, his accent, to pronounce those fateful words. He seemed to us the perfect type of a world without support. So he was the eternal Hamlet. So when he played this crushing role, he did more than just interpret it. We can't analyse his performance, but we no longer feel capable of imagining the prince in any other guise than his own. When I reread this work, it is his voice that I hear, it is he whom I see emerge at the first bars of the drama dressed in black, in front of his mother; it is he who, carried by the four white captains of Fortinbras, rises at arm's length, a dead body, when the curtain falls. As Lucien Dubech said on the day of his death, he had thus achieved the interpreter's highest reward. "Thanks to him, we have *seen* Hamlet.

In the letters I wrote tirelessly to Maurice Bardèche and José Lupin during the holidays, it was Georges and Ludmilla we were always talking about. They are inseparable for me from that time, when they brought us so many things, theatre, dreams, mortal enchantments. When we had permission to go out in the evening, which was rare, it was to their house that we almost always ran. We'd repeat *Hamlet's* lines to each other as passwords: "*Economy, Horatio, economy: the funeral roast was served cold on the wedding table...*" and we'd wish each other good night with the *Good night, sweet prince* who leaves the heir to Elsinore to his fate. And we also tirelessly recreated the legend of the Pitoëffs, with their children, their décor, their worries, their dreams. From the top of the cheap seats, it seemed to us that they were making their way across the stage as if on a miraculous raft.

Towards a quarter to midnight, at the end of the evening, there is always a moment when Georges and Ludmilla are face to face, and even if happiness is to await them in ten minutes' time, some obscure regret passes through their voices. They bid each other farewell, they bid us farewell. And when the curtain falls and rises again, between each of their appearances, we see Ludmilla Pitoëff bowing and shaking her head to one side with a strange little childlike curtsy, as if the stage were the deck of a ship already sailing away from the quayside.

On the evening of *Comme ci ou comme ça*, or the evening of *Hamlet*, or even less, of a forgotten play, sad and angry, who can say what has become of him in

our personal symbolism? It was an evening before the war, one of those evenings that will never happen again, and it's hard to know what such minutes could have meant to us, seventeen years old, that fragrant spring, those bewitching enchantments, those white and alternating voices. It was an evening before the war, when we still believed in so many things, in eternal youth and the honeyed taste of the lime trees over Paris. In just fifteen years' time, how would those who had known it all think of it?

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At that time, we were also discovering cinema. No doubt we had elders in this discovery, and the preceding years had seen artists and men of letters approach the new art with greedy faces. They were still doing so in 1926, and were only to cease, in truth, with the arrival of silent cinema. Today, there are none left to take a serious, deep interest in its pleasures. They may go to the cinema, but they no longer believe in it, and I'm not sure that film-makers believe in it any more. So we would discuss the image, the rhythm, and problems that have now been forgotten, such as subtitles. We would arrive, ignorant as we were, and I was in a particular situation: I had been to the cinema a lot as a child, at the time of *The Mysteries of New York* and the first Charlie Chaplin films, but hardly ever afterwards. I certainly didn't see ten films between 1918 and 1926. Of course, we were all still rather contemptuous of the stars who usually ruled the crowd: those were the days when women killed themselves for Rudolph Valentino, and all the Hollywood publicity probably never reached the collective madness that that name aroused. In Paris, I suddenly understood what the screen could offer with the German film *Variétés*. We discussed it at length in the courtyard of Louis-le-Grand; the following week I went to see Calvacanti's *En rade* at the Vieux-Colombier, and few works have made as much of an impression on me as that melancholy composition, those beautiful Mediterranean images, and that easy nostalgia. From then on, it was almost at every performance that I returned to Jean Tedesco's Vieux-Colombier, whose name did not evoke the theatre for me, as it did for the followers of Copeau, but simply the silent art of those fine years. German films, revivals of old films, absolute films, I

I hardly missed any. The theatre had a very good orchestra, and there was a lot of talk at the time about accompanying music, especially when Honegger composed the score for Abel Gance's gigantic *Napoléon*, whose three screens almost all of us went to see. We ventured to the Ursulines to see *Jazz*, and we ran to the Ciné Latin, on the slopes of Mont Sainte-Geneviève, where the works in the repertoire were already being shown. It was a one-eyed cinema, with benches, where I saw the first

I went to the "René Clair show" with *Entr'acte*, *le Fantôme du Moulin-Rouge* and *le Voyage imaginaire*. At one of the entrances, I rushed in. The gates were closed. A shadowy figure stepped forward, a candle in his hand: it was a monk. Stunned, I asked him if the cinema was about to open.

- It's now an Armenian monastery," the shadow replied with dignity.

The Ursulines, the Ciné-Latin, the Vieux-Colombier, these were the temples of cinema in those days. And I would come very close to admitting that no one has ever experienced cinema, no one has ever experienced those cinemas of heroic times, where the dizzying grey images rose like smoke, where everything was forgotten from the sounds of the earth. The great successes of the time were not so far away that you couldn't go and look for evidence of them in the local cinemas. I hadn't seen *La Rue sans joie* in 1922, but I watched Greta Garbo and the beautiful Asta Nielsen pass through the leprous stones of Vienna at the little cinema Cluny, with Fred Sémach. I hadn't seen *The Gold Rush* in 1925, but with Maurice Bardèche, we went to the Nation to watch the bread roll dance and *listen* with all our eyes to the emigrants' Christmas carol. And together again we discovered German expressionism, even in the twenty-cent cinema of the Ciné-Sabin, near the Bastille, with its benches, its trembling images, its smoke, and its popular audience who took all this macabre for a farce. *Caligari*, *Nosferatu*, and the Polynesian images that were fashionable at the time, and the patient works of realism from across the Rhine, are all inseparable for me from those magical years.

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As for my holidays, they were always the same, interspersing the grey skies, the mists and the Parisian theatres with the brightness of the sun and the warmth of the sun.

of the sea. For a year or two, we started wearing the little white beret of the American Navy on the beaches. No pyjamas or shorts yet. It was in 1926 that I met a young Catalan in Collioure, whom I would later tell my friends at Louis-le-Grand about great admiration. His name was Jaume Miravittles, everyone called him Jaumet, and he was twenty years old. He also had a great means of seduction: he had escaped from Spain after a failed attempt on his life, and he had been sentenced to death in absentia. Sentenced to death at twenty, wasn't that magnificent? We all thought so.

For a few days several young men and women formed a respectful and enthusiastic court around Jaumet. I can't think of Collioure any more, the round red town around the harbour, its pink church in the sea, its pebble beaches, without hearing the voice of this boy, who still spoke French with a delightful accent, to whom we were teaching Verlaine and Baudelaire. And that's how I got to know Spain, the country that would later play a certain role in all our lives and our friendship, through a rebel against it.

For a while I swore by Jaume I^{er} of Mallorca, portulans, explorers and adventures, the novels of *Tirant le Blanc* and the works of Ramon Llull. I bought *Publicitat* from the newsagents on the boulevards and bought myself a Catalan grammar book.

To tell the truth, what amazed me about him was the songs. We all had these comrades buzzing with verse or buzzing with song. Jaumet knew a prodigious number of them. He sang in turn, and just as well, in his beautiful natural voice, warm, a little veiled, the Jano d'Aimé from Périgord who went to the fountain, and Margarido from Provence, and the sparrow from Cerdagne who cries at midnight for his love, and the day of St John among the mountain paths.

*El dia de San Joan,
N'es diada senyalada,
Jo anava, camí avall,
Camí de l'enamorada,
O laïro*

On Midsummer's Day -
And it's a beautiful day -
I was walking down the
path,
The path of the beloved O
laïro!

*Quan en soc a mitg cami
En veïtg la porta tancada,
Amor meu, baixeu m'obrir,
Que tinc la barba gelada
O laïro*

When I'm halfway there I see
the door closed
My love, come down and open
the door, I've got a frosty beard
O laïro!

Other times, he would teach me the old Catalan songs of revolt, the ones that in 1936 the Maisons de la Culture would teach to lovers of revolutionary records, the admirable *Faucheurs*, and la *Sainte Épine* :

*Sont y serem gent catalana Tant
si es vol com si no es vol...*
We are and will remain the Catalan race
Whether you like it or not...

I even learnt *the Internationale* from Jaumet in Catalan:

*Es la lluta darrera,
Arropeu nos, germans
L'Intemationala sigui
La patria dels humans.*

All this formed a romanticism of revolt and conspiracy that every young man must have experienced one day. Forbidden songs blended easily with evocations of fountains, love, lost rings, girls on towers and stars in the sky. Dressed in blue canvas, this vigorous boy, with eyes so clear in his brown face, rowed through the centre of Collioure singing in his deep, sweet voice, and that was enough to justify his life and his dreams.

I was to meet him two years in a row in Collioure, where we went dancing in the square on the local festival day, or at the hermitage of Consolation on 8 September, or once again at his friends' house on a terrace overlooking the harbour at night. I was also to see him in Paris from time to time. I remember one day he took me to a young woman who lived in a painter's studio in Montmartre. We used to meet emigrants and conspirators there. She herself, Danish or Norwegian, spoke Catalan fluently. I was moving into Romanticism. Over the next few years, I lost sight of Jaumet. The Macia conspiracy broke out and, naturally, he was put in prison. Then came the Republic, he returned to Spain, and I never heard from him again, except...

from time to time, with a poem in a more or less surrealist review, sometimes with an appeal to oppressed peoples. During the Spanish Revolution of 1936, he became general secretary of the anti-fascist militia, delegate in Paris for Catalan propaganda, and later broke with the Communists. He even wrote to me once, during the Revolution, to assure me that he was still reading Maurras, the only Frenchman who understood Catalonia. I knew that he had returned to Paris, once again in exile, and that he was writing some very remarkable articles in *La Flèche*. I never saw him again, but I thought of him as I drove through his native Figueras on the eve of the 1939 war. In spite of everything that separates us, I know very well that we would only have to evoke our sea, our salty shores, the summer, the colour of fishing, the red rocks of our beaches, to bring us closer together.

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In this way, images of life, coloured by the romanticism of youth, but vigorous, could sometimes enter our circle, which was somewhat closed to books. We reworked them as we pleased, and each of us contributed our own, during those three years that we spent on the fringes of our contemporaries, no doubt, watching the shadows of the sweetness of life that was dying on the wall of our Platonic cave. We sometimes treated them with a smile, and I bless the heavens that I didn't live among serious young people. Even in the face of things we admired and were deeply enthusiastic about, we claimed the right to a little reserve of irony. Irony does not preclude sincerity, or even respect, but it was undoubtedly our way of proving that we were, in spite of everything, a little isolated from real existence.

Such were those three years. I wouldn't dare say they were exemplary, because each of us is a model that cannot be compared to others. Not all the young people between 1925 and 1928 led the same life. Not even all the students, not even all those preparing for the same School. They may have had other tastes, other passions, and also, through what we had in common, each of us was moving forward, sometimes with difficulty, in search of ourselves, in that long and narrow passage of adolescence. However, for all of us who lived through that time, there must have been some similarities, more or less clear. The backdrop was the same, giving way to the intellectual struggles of youth, in years of

relatively peaceful, full of curiosity and naivety. It was Paris, it was the beautiful grey and silent images on the screen. It was the theatre in its vigour and its renaissance, it was the books, now outdated but fresh and new. And we moved forward, in the midst of all this, with the youth of a body that is no longer, with the fragility and freshness of us too. Considering what we were, I understand that the most common and truest word for youth is fever. Yes, we experienced the fever of youth. The fever of the mind, through the most hazardous and the most solid constructions, the discoveries, the temptations. And Paris fever. And the fever of the heart too. And the fever of seeing and touching. And the three concupiscences, that of the mind, and that of the senses, and the strongest of all, that of life. How ready we were to listen to those who, in those years, advised us not to choose, not to limit ourselves, to let our desires and temptations run wild! The wisest hoped for moderation and a natural lull in the future: but in the meantime, they let the blood beat at their temples, they went forward with a marvellous appetite for all that was permitted and all that was forbidden, for the fruits of all the earthly paradises, miraculously suspended from every tree close to their hand.

II

THE GOOD LIFE

At this point in the story, perhaps it should be said that the universe, according Marxist laws, is undergoing some pretty big changes. We poor naïve souls had spent our early mornings contemplating Paris and life through the bars of a prison. We knew from hearsay that money was being thrown around, that people were having fun, that nightclub managers were getting dizzyingly rich, and not-so-distant elders would soon be telling us about those fabulous times. So fabulous that we're a little too inclined to believe that it was the same for everyone, which is not the case. The rest of us, for example, have well and truly ignored it, in most of its effects, and have only known its intellectual reflections. And perhaps it was bad luck (do we have to call it that?) that we emerged into the open air just as it was closing. Serious economists date the end of the era of prosperity to the American crash of 1929. M. Tardieu, who was President of the French Council at the time, probably didn't believe it, since in a famous speech around that time he painted a picture of France advancing along the happy roads of its destiny. Such were the roads that began with the crisis and led, less than ten years later, to war!

Gustav Stresemann died in the autumn of 1929, after another victory at a conference in The Hague and the evacuation of a new part of the Rhine.

Jacques Bainville wrote: "*Let us salute this as the finest piece of diplomatic work that Von has seen in Europe since the time when Bismarck led the humiliated Prussia of Olmütz to Sadowa and Sedan*". Moving on to the second phase of its action, Germany openly demanded a revision of the treaties. However, attempts were made to maintain the old dreams, Mr Briand became "the Pilgrim of Peace", highly intellectual *Plans* were produced, and a young review took this name, which tried to combine Italian fascism, the Soviets and the lessons of industrial America. The financial scandal of *the Gazette du Franc* shook the regime, the Communists gained ground, the traitor Marty was elected deputy for the Seine, M. Poincaré took over the presidency of the French government.

The Left Bloc and the National Bloc followed one another in a false euphoria and contempt for reality. Bloc des gauches, Bloc National, followed one another in a false euphoria and contempt for reality. We were rich, we spent, we voted for free education and social insurance, right-wing ministries pursued left-wing policies, but revolutionaries were arrested, hoping to defend themselves from the Revolution. The well-meaning bourgeoisie tried to believe, if not in its strength, at least in its luck.

In this year of 1929, the words "*pre-war*" already take on their full meaning, even though the previous years, for some of us, had been a fairly good prologue to it. And for us, in any case, there was nothing new, we continued to develop the existence that was already ours, we did not participate in the celebrations and follies of the post-war period, we were always, in any case, those of the pre-war period. The only changes were the personal changes in our freedom, the changes in our appearance.

My first impression of the École normale dates back to the 1927 competitive entrance exam. Admitted the first time, I went to the oral exam without much hope. The tests were held in the École's library and in the classrooms, and I was amazed, in my ignorance of the school, to see, in the middle of the afternoon, a few students in pyjamas and sandals mingling with the candidates and teachers, without anyone having anything to say about it, and leaning innocently over the examiners. Strangely enough, at Louis-le-Grand, we didn't worry at all about what our lives would be like if we passed. A few of us had been to the École ball and had gone to see old friends on rue d'Ulm, but most of us didn't think about it at all. As for me, this first notion of legal anarchy in which the illustrious university community lived left me dreaming. Then I failed the oral exam, and I forgot for a moment that the École could be a paradise of freedom in terms of clothes, intellectual and material freedom.

I found out the truth the following year. The written exam took place at Louis-le-Grand, in the Salle des Fêtes where the annual ball was usually held. This is also where the agrégation is taken. The week before, almost all of us would go home to our families for a few days, books closed, to indulge in a cure for forgetfulness. I still remember a day in June under the cherry trees, picking cherries with the girls. Then the doors to the rue Cujas were solemnly opened and we were locked in: six hours for the French, history and philosophy exams, four hours for the history and philosophy exams, four hours for the history and philosophy exams, four hours for the history and philosophy exams.

hours for the Latin version, the Greek version, the Latin theme, - the courtyard nearby for a stroll, - a little snack of sandwiches and cold coffee, - and, in the afternoon, on a warm day, the annihilation on the chairs of the Luxembourg. I don't mind thinking about it, didn't mind living it. In two years, I successively expressed my competent opinion on the question of the Orient in the nineteenth century, the social, economic and political movements of the Restoration, Molière's *Don Juan*, and two or three other points that I hardly remember. We took one test a day. The oral took place a month later, a month of half-work, half-freedom, while we waited for the results of the written test. Then it was back to the week-long merry-go-round, with one or two tests a day, the preparation of outlandish subjects, the unflappable presentation of wavering knowledge disguised as certainties. This time I passed with flying colours sse (13). {Twenty-seventh out of 28. In those years, 28 humanities candidates were admitted out of about 350 candidates, 20 science candidates, and there were always more girls}. I was nineteen. Some of my first friends from my youth would disappear, more or less s (14). {Maurice Bardèche, Thierry Maulnier, Jean Beaufret and a few others entered the school with me. Let us add, once again, a few names that the author omits, those of the writer Claude Jamet and Simon Neil in our class, and those of Jean Bérard, Maurice Gaît, Pierre Uri, Jacques Soustelle and René Brouillet in the following year's class}. Others, on the other hand, who may or may not have entered the School, would continue to share in the activities and pleasures of the pre-war youth group that we had formed when I was about seventeen.

The École normale on the rue d'Ulm has changed in appearance since then, and in a few years' time it is likely to be completely unrecognisable. A lot has been built and, unfortunately, a lot of trees have been felled. In 1928, it essentially comprised a quadrilateral of buildings around a tree-lined courtyard with a pond and lawns. Next to the gate separating it from the street, a low, single-storey house was used as an infirmary. It was here that Pasteur discovered the cure for rabies (15). {At the time, the infirmary was run by Mlle Tannery, from the family of Descartes' publisher, and known as the Virgin. She was charming and very popular at the School, and the rooms in the infirmary, which were more comfortable than the others, were gladly opened to the tired or the whimsical who wanted to spend some time there}.

On the south side was the headmaster's garden, to which the pupils had access and from which the windows on rue Claude-Bernard look out. On the other side of the school was the tennis court, a vague area for gymnastic apparatus, a room for dance lessons, which was later converted into a dance hall.

decorated with frescoes in the Montmartre style, and above all, overlooking the rue Rataud below, a wide ravine planted bushy trees that we used to call *the maquis*, and which has now disappeared in the silliest way (16). {The new buildings of the École normale (Lettres section) had not been built when this sentence was written. They now stand where the ravine used to be, overlooking rue Rataud}. Finally, on the north side, a sort of interior alleyway, lit prehistoric gas spouts, led to a small house for chemistry preparators and to a sort of ridiculous jungle where tadpoles were reared in the shade of tall trees: this was the garden for natural science experiments, which was called *Nature*. Today, the giant buildings of the École des sciences have been constructed on these rural sites, and have spread as far as the rue Lhomond, where an annex of the École polytechnique was located at the time. Neither the School of Physics and Chemistry, nor the Pedagogical Museum, nor the new houses on rue Rataud had yet been completed, and the district was full of greenery and gardens, charming relics of the time when little Hugo played at the Feuillantines.

I can well say that I spent some marvellous years there, very different from my years at Louis-le-Grand, three years of great holidays, in the most complete material and intellectual freedom. I don't know what the school was like for students before 1914, despite what Jules Romains said. I don't even know what it can be now. At the time, it was one of the most astonishing havens of poetic anarchy.

The French University, which is impervious to imagination, has had its hour of weakness, indulgence and genius. One day it was visited by grace, and it created the École normale. Without doubt, this tightrope walker invention was not perfect from the start. It took time, revolutions and wars (17). {It is frightening to think that in *Men of Good Will*, Jules Romains describes the Secretary General discreetly going into the rooms when a pupil is not up by eight o'clock}. The main thing was to achieve this fragile masterpiece of freedom, the model of which I don't think any country can offer. The main virtue of the École normale is that it doesn't exist, which, I'm sure you'll agree, is quite rare.

There are no rules. There are no obligations or sanctions. Or, to be more precise, it is compulsory to pass the end-of-year exams (18). {That is to say, the exams that all students take under the same conditions.

students at the Sorbonne: bachelor's degree, postgraduate diploma, agrégation. Before the

At the time of the 1902 school reform, the school had a kind of autonomy, private lessons and teachers. Subsequently, it became nothing more than a boarding school for scholarship holders, with no private lessons, at least in Arts, and no teachers other than those at the Sorbonne. If you failed your bachelor's degree, you were 'suspended' until you passed (I almost was, despite the three certificates I had when I entered, having failed my philology certificate twice and only saving myself by re-establishing the October examination session that year)}. But you have every right never to attend classes. If you were to show any ostentation, the headmaster would make timid observations, which could not be effectively sanctioned. The only compulsory course was military preparation: even so, anti-militarists easily got round this with two or three ineffective reprimands. As for sanctions, there was only one: expulsion. Understandably, this could only be imposed in fairly serious cases.

Although there are no regulations as , there were still habits. At half past seven, a bell rang to announce breakfast. Three quarters of the pupils did not attend. The café au lait was horrible, and we had only just abandoned the disgusting habit of serving it on plates. We generally preferred the local bistros. And we got up at eight, nine or eleven (19). {But if by chance we went down to the refectory a quarter of an hour after the bell, all we found were tureens of cold, stinking liquid. Today, I've been told, percolators have been installed which keep lunches going until ten o'clock}.

In addition, in 1928, pupils were supposed to have returned to school by ten o'clock in the evening. After this time, they had to sign in on a register and the door was kept open for them until one o'clock. It was a simple formality. After that, the night watchman went inside the school and no one could get in. But there were a few keys in circulation, and for those who didn't have one, the gas burner in rue Rataud was an easy way to get to the maquis, the tennis court and its bed (20). {I must confess that I only 'made' the gas burner once, in the company of Thierry Maulnier and José Lupin, who didn't belong to the École, but slept there that night}. Later, I saw the burlesque register disappear; the night watchman, between his rounds, came back to the front door and opened it to latecomers. And so the last shreds of discipline unravelled.

We slept in dormitories separated into boxes. The school was in 1928 painted in an old brownish paint, and appallingly dirty. I undertook to paint my room, which had probably never been done before, to replace the bed with a sofa, and to put in some basic furnishings.

white wooden shelves and tables. If you looked hard enough, you'd find some lovely chairs for country churches. A blue velvet curtain costing a few francs a metre, and cushions made by ripping open a few mattresses to remove the kelp, were enough to build an asylum that no doubt surprised, but was respected. The following year, the administration struck a blow and repainted the entire school in light grey. A new bursar had checked tablecloths placed in the refectory and replaced the kettledrums with glasses. It was luxury. It seems that we owed it to the monkeys at the Jardin des Plantes: as their budget was about to be increased, Mr Herriot, a former student of the rue d'Ulm, protested to the House Committee:

- And the "normaliens"?

We laughed, and the credit for the monkeys was passed on to the Normaliens. The director at the time had been a scientist for a year, Mr Vessiot, apparently a remarkable man, whom I myself had never met. The deputy director, Célestin Bouglé, was a radical with a nice beard, friendly, a sociologist, a contributor to *the Dépêche de Toulouse*, and convinced that Czechoslovakia was necessary to maintain the secular ideal in Europe. I have always found his ideas astonishing, but he set about, in an excellent way, to improve a comfort that Messrs Lavissee and Lanson had scandalously neglected. He was quite liberal, which is to say that he cared little for us, and he had absolutely no influence.

If I had made my room a place to live, the students would normally live in the small study rooms known as thurnes. In the first year, six of us work in a room on the ground floor. In the second year, there were three or four of us on the first floor; in the third year, we worked in the attic, on the floor emphatically called *the Palais*, where there were usually two or three of us. The fourth year students, i.e. those who do not have a bachelor's degree certificate on entry, those who are preparing an agrégation in modern languages and who are spending a year abroad, also live there (21). { Each year, students are called *conscripts*, *squares* and *cubes*. Former students are known as *archicubes*, and the school's official song formally states the following: *Our School is a greenhouse / Of which the cubes are the fruit, / The squares, their good friends, / Are the spring flower, / The conscripts are the manure / Whose soil must be fertilized* }.

The thurnes from first year are at left at their with the five or six individual desks and the lockers that surround them.

These are the ones you buy, for 400 or 500 francs, from your predecessors. After that, it was not unusual to settle in a little more comfortably, and most thurnes had their own sofa, their pictures on the wall, the teapot on the big round calorifier covered in black marble. This is how life is organised. Tennis and the library offer alternating pleasures. A *social documentation centre*, set up by Mr Bouglé, is ready for the most serious discussions, and offers a number of learned reviews. A circle on the ground floor is home to all the newspapers, including the ones I read for years, the ones I couldn't find anywhere, the ones read only by normalists and journalists: *la Volonté*, *le Petit Bleu*, *l'Homme libre*. It is decorated with old posters by Toulouse-Lautrec (*La Goulue au bal du Moulin-Rouge*), Steinlein and others. The food is not bad, and Friday is white wine day. There are no supervisors: the agrégés-répétiteurs are fellow students who have stayed at the École after their agrégation to prepare a thesis, and who are supposed to act as study advisers. They even supervise some practical work on explaining texts. They are called *caimans*. The first in the class, or *cacique*, acts as a representative to the administration, and has the right to work in the library after it closes at four o'clock. We had the best relations with the general secretary of the École, Roger Dion, and especially with his aide-de-camp, Jean Thomas, who was nonchalant, kind and cultured, and had been preparing a thesis on Diderot for years. The most important person at the École was undoubtedly the 'guardian of the vestibule'. I never knew his real name. He had been called Louvois for several generations. At the entrance to the school, in a hall supported by columns, there is a glass booth where students come to collect their letters: this is *the aquarium*. In *the aquarium* stood Louvois, whose job was to show visitors the way and, in reality, to keep an eye on the students and their relations. It's good to replace the absence of rules with a bit of spying. *The aquarium* is also one of the most important places in the school. Official notices are posted there, along with course times, the list of those who have passed and those who have passed the competitive examination - a list that the alumni ritually cover with jokes about proper names. The unofficial notices are usually posted at one of the entrances to the refectory, in a part of the corridor known as the *Forum*.

As you can see, the School's vocabulary is abundant. I've always found it rather comical when former students practise it with perseverance and, sometimes, teach it to their wives and children. I don't remember having used it too much, and today I need to make an effort to put together the snippets (22). {We used to say "le dîner", "le réfectoire", "l'économe": all three, in Normalien slang, are called "le pot", and "le pot" is still the 150 francs a month that each student receives as pocket money. Military preparation is called *bonvoust*}.

When the conscripts arrive, they are subjected to what are otherwise very mild forms of bullying, which consist of waking them up at around two in the morning and taking them to the attics and cellars, where there is a fire hose known as a *sea serpent*. Obscene songs from common student folklore are bellowed, and scholars have translated *the Louse and the Spider* into Latin. Scientists and literary figures are brought together for the occasion. Then it's off to bed. At the end of the initiation period, the most violent night-time rowdiness takes place, with torch-lit walks in the gardens and screams that keep the whole neighbourhood awake. One year, right-thinking journalists covered their faces in *the Écho de Paris* because the Normaliens had sung *the Internationale*. It's true that hardly a day went by, or even a meal, without *the Internationale* being sung again, along with *Sauvez la France in the name of the Sacred Heart*. No one attached the slightest importance to it. The last ruckus was called the *Night of the Great Mega*, and it preceded by a punch of "reconciliation" offered by the conscripts to the elders and archicubes, which was generally a night of great drunkenness.

These are the official distractions of the school. They are often crude, almost always simplistic, and there is no doubt that they give the most false impression of the school. Not that many comrades don't remember them or take part in them with pleasure, as they do in the *Annual Review*. But while we were there, there wasn't even a review, because we were so keen on anarchy. And it's precisely the charm of the School that you can refuse collective jokes, communal life and summary distractions.

This will never stop it from being a haven for those famous, slightly pedantic farces that have been given the name of *hoaxes*, and which have given literature a kind of buffoonish masterpiece, *Les Copains* by Jules Romains. The *Hoax* is, strictly speaking, and in its greatest achievements, a creative mystification, a farce that reaches the level of myth. A few months

Before we arrived, the students at the École had sent a note to the newspapers informing them that Lindbergh had just been made an honorary student. The crowd gathered on rue d'Ulm, along with the reporters and film operators. A car arrived, a tall blond boy waved and said a few words. It took a long time to realise that it was a joke.

We ourselves, who had written *Fulgur*, could not, of course, remain insensitive to such high examples. But it seemed to us that we were continuing at least as much the spirit of our group as that of the School.

Every year, foreign students enter the school. Some enter through competitive examinations, like the French, and I believe, for example, that M. Bergson was admitted in this capacity. Others, more simply, because their government gives them a maintenance grant. So we rubbed shoulders with a few Balkanists, especially Romanians. But there was also an Albanian, Peppo, whom we had known at Louis-le-Grand, and who was still as credulous and as cunning as when we had led him to believe that he was condemned to death in his country. He shared the thirst of Thierry Maulnier, who sent him to listen to Wagner's *Siegfried* with Giraudoux's *Siegfried* as the 'libretto of the play'. One day, when Benjamin Crémieux came to see us, Peppo stood for three hours in awe of his beautiful black beard: it's true that we had convinced him that Benjamin Crémieux was the greatest French epic poet, the author of *Le Vair Palefroi* and *Le Couronnement de Louis*. But Peppo reached the pinnacle of his Albanian career with the Poldèves affair. Alain Mellet, a contributor to *Action Française*, once sent a circular to a number of members of parliament pitying an oppressed people, the Poldèves, who didn't exist any more than Hégésippe Simon, the precursor of democracy. The circular was signed by Inexistantoff and Lamidaëff. In spite of this, several deputies assured their correspondent that they were ready to take the noble cause of the Poles to the League of Nations. There was a lot of laughter, but it seemed too good to stop there. Thierry Maulnier persuaded Peppo that *Action Française* was simply trying to discredit a people attached to democracy, and, for the sake of verisimilitude, assured us that he approved of this manoeuvre. We cut out everything about the Poles from the newspapers and gave the file to Peppo. How could he not know these people? Were they not neighbours of the

Albanians, their age-old friend? Our victim dared not deny it. He was due to give a lecture on the Balkans at Marc Sangnier's *Jeune République*. We urged him to ask the Poldavian question. He still hesitated. We went to Louis-le-Grand and solicited two students who wore their hair short and almost shaven. One of us had managed, I don't know how, to steal a foreigners' control sheet from the nearby police station, which would serve as an identity document for one of these people. We arranged to meet Peppo at a café in Montparnasse to *show him some Poldèves*. Thierry. Maulnier and I accompanied him. The two accomplices were there saluting in the German style, at right angles to each other. One of them was mute, not knowing French. The other spoke it with extreme difficulty. He stretched out his arm towards me and said gravely: "Generous France". Peppo looked at his neighbours from the border with all his eyes. After five minutes, the door opened and Georges Blond appeared, serious, with a briefcase under his arm. He introduced himself as Paul-Boncour's secretary, and said that his boss attached particular importance to Peppo's conference. The paper from the police station was waved. The Poldèves, their eyes glazed over, stupefied by persecution, replied heroically when the asked them what they wanted:

- Vodka.

Paul-Boncour, the vodka, the official papers... Peppo could no longer doubt. They even brought him the Polish anthem - which was a military march, the *Salute to the 85th*, I think. A hall was hired. All those of us who had exchanged greetings on 1st January with our teachers sent Peppo the cards they had received, embellished with flattering remarks: the rector, the director of the *École*, the entire Sorbonne, assured the Albanian of their sympathy and promised to come to his lecture. It took place amidst indescribable uproar, while the poor boy swore up and down that he had seen the Poldèves with his own eyes, and that there was nothing to be said against an eyewitness. This farce was the triumph of the 'lived document'.

Even more so than we thought. Because, a few months later, we discovered that Peppo had written to his consul asking for an increase in his grant. He was relying on his own merits, and as proof of his success at the University he was sending the visiting cards of Sorbonne professors that we had written. This is

And so the ingenious Balkan always got away with the tricks played on him, with profit if not honour.

But this was perhaps our only contribution to what is known as the *Normalien spirit* and group life. It is also an opportunity to learn about the "Normalien spirit" and group life.

Like Polytechnique, the École des Hautes Études used to boast about its *esprit de corps* and its cohesion. We have come to know its anarchy above all. The former headmaster who described it as a furnished hotel (we even attribute a harsher expression to him) was not wrong. To begin with, very few of our literary friends had any contact with scientists. I didn't even know the names of those in my year. The only meetings were on the tennis court, in the first year of military training, and in the Catholic students' group, which has been called *tala* (23) since time immemorial. {There is some debate as to the origin of this term, some seeing it as an abbreviation of the Voltairean *talapoint*, Buddhist priest, others as a subtle apocope for those who go to Mass}. Scientists have always been in the majority. As for the literati, it was with great difficulty that I got to know my promotion and the one immediately preceding us, and then some of the one following us. In reality, you only had regular contact with students from your lycée of origin. Groups and friendships were formed much more while preparing for the École than while living there.

Our comrade José Lupin did not pass the competitive examination. But that didn't mean he lost touch with the École. He stayed in hotels in the Latin Quarter, came to work in our thurnes and sometimes took part in our meals. We continued to go out together, and during those years Maurice Bardèche, my sister Suzanne, he and I even formed a regular society of four friends, which for me is the most important event of that period. We used to meet quite frequently in the evenings in the cafés of the Quartier (these are the only years when I frequented them a little assiduously). We had no home, apart from the school, and we lived in what José called "the eminent dignity of the temporary", which is what makes life so charming. We went to theatres all the time, and we'd discovered that the H bus, which runs from the École to the Odéon, the Vieux Colombier, the Français, the Théâtre de Paris, the Boulevards, the Théâtre des Arts and so on, is the very bus of Parisian shows. I sometimes look at our old reflection in the mirror of a grocery-confectioner on rue Gay-Lussac, before we get to boulevard Saint-Michel. We always stopped there when we went out in the evening: this reflection must have stayed there. At a

At 1am we'd come back, and on the platform we'd sometimes sing extremely silly songs in praise of a famous Gruyère cream, or improvise opera pastiches. We went to the cinemas too, and as José published reviews in a provincial newspaper when summer came we would go with him to do his

We had to "stock up on films" for the holidays. In the same week of July 1930, we saw six or seven newsreels a row showing the evacuation of Mainz and the departure of the French regiments. "*To the flag! then: to France!*" cried General Guillaumat. So said the commentator, and I can still hear that phrase.

In this way we wove a friendly, shared world of ideas, feelings, forecasts and memories above the city and our youth. I believe that this was a rare and wonderful thing, which the four of us will remember for the rest of our lives and which we must thank fate for granting us, whatever happens. We were free, beyond the shackles of work, as free as we will ever be again; we shared the same amusements, the same games, the same leisure, the same studies, and more or less the same money and homes. Normaliens are not generally poor. In addition to the slim state allowance, they give lessons, and in my life I have never found myself so rich. In slang, the students are called *tapirs*, a word whose origin is controversial, and one of the few that we have happily adopted, giving it a slightly broader meaning. The *tapirs* almost always belonged to the wealthy society of the XVI^e and XVII^e arrondissements, and the *tapir* spirit is complex. The typical *tapir* failed his bachot several times, had been thrown out of various establishments and had a grandmother who had made him work as a child. The young *tapiress* attends free schools where the only classes are once per week, and where the choir of mothers or the

In the background, "Mademoiselles" whispered the answers to the dear child. José, on the other hand, gave lessons in an honest and serious free institution. But Maurice, Suzanne and I were able to experience the unreal and magical world of the *tapirs*, their idleness and their expensive distractions. The post-war period was the real era of the *tapirs*, with its nightclubs, its luxury, its waste. There were still traces of it. I gave lessons to young Jews who laid out their bookbinders' notes on their desks to dazzle me, because they were getting *Nickel Pieds* or *Zig et Puce* bound for 300 francs a volume. I even made a film with one them on the lake.

d'Enghien. I gave modern literature lessons to a Swedish diplomat. Suzanne gave lessons to a little boy and a little girl, from a nice family, but through her she knew about other families, with bewildering educational principles, and those strange teaching houses run by illiterate women, even mulattoes, who, for exorbitant prices, pour illusory knowledge into light brains. We knew that a boarding house was fashionable one year, and that the year after it was no longer fashionable. The ladies in the salons say so with an acid voice, and are astonished when some unfortunate woman admits to having placed her daughter in one of these old-fashioned places:

— The Pension Espérance? Oh, how curious. We *used to* go a lot to the Pension Espérance. Do they still go there now? My children are at the Volubilis boarding school.

We, the pupils of the democratic lycées, immersed ourselves in this bizarre world with pleasure. We were also learning. Several of us had given lessons to an otherwise nice boy who had wandered through many institutions. He taught me how to make up belts with sixty-one pockets, sixty for the most likely French subjects, one for the table of contents, and how to write homework on little accordion papers that you could fold in the palm of your hand. This belt was worth 500 francs, almost openly, to the institution from which he had graduated. Elsewhere, he shared the money from his lessons with his tutor. I pretended not to hear these invitations. We were witnessing a sort of survival of the post-war world, and it seemed to us both comical and a little old-fashioned. Children were being prepared for a future life of great politeness, good education in general, empty brains and cups of tea. The girls in particular were outrageously submissive. The boys were preparing to happily squander the fortunes amassed by their parents, who were generally hard-working and skilful, leaving the accumulation of capital to be dispersed in the end. Passing in front of Louis-le-Grand, my sister once pointed out to the little girl accompanying her:

— This is where my brother studied.

— Ah!" said the other without hesitation or the slightest hint questioning. *He was kicked out.*

Because it's well understood that the only way to get out of a school is to be administratively expelled. This phrase has always struck me as symbolic of a world

whose representatives we later found in a few salons, newspapers and ministries. It was in those still peaceful years that we learned to recognise them.

Our society of four friends was perfectly happy with this, as it was with the other details of Paris in 1930. It was in the first month of that year that my sister, who had spent a year in England, came to Paris to study for a degree in English. It was in the spring of that year, one of the most beautiful of our lives, that women's dresses lengthened, that the flat girls of our adolescence suddenly began to show young, round breasts, one fine morning, all at once. When she arrived, my sister went to stay in an astonishing Puritan house in a district of the Centre near Saint-Lazare, where she stayed for a month. It was very uncomfortable and the atmosphere baroque: there were employees, Conservatoire candidates, chambermaids and students. Denunciation and arbitrariness reigned supreme. During the month we were there, we heard of a thief, a drug addict, a madwoman with voices, an abortion and several hysterics. My sister was astonished at first, but had a lot of fun while looking for a room elsewhere, which was difficult. The following year, she came back for a few more days, and through her we got an idea of these girls' homes which, under the guise of charity, are prodigious asylums for stupidity, even sadism, and where the directors are devoted to philanthropy and espionage. We used to go there for dinner with Maurice and his brother Henri, then a soldier in Orléans, and we'd run off in search of furnished rooms in the Latin Quarter, almost always run by marmot landladies, full of stuffed toys and dusty curtains. Once we'd found a room, usually at a very high price, my sister would leave her university or charitable asylums with a new supply of oddballs - and come to work at the École.

It wasn't difficult. There was still talk of a boy who had arrived one November day, a few years earlier, with the pupils. He had moved into a thurne, chosen a room and went to the library and refectory every day. It took weeks to realise that he wasn't a normal student. Legend had it that they realised it the day he went to the bursar to ask for his allowance. Without mentioning such complete facilities, there were always two or three comrades from outside who, when they were broke, came to sleep and eat at the school.

to be fed. However, they were usually fed in the thurne and didn't come to the refectory.

My sister, whose first bedroom was difficult to heat, got into the habit arriving every morning around nine o'clock. Sometimes she even make a dinner of a slice of cold beef with mayonnaise (the ritual Sunday evening meal), a bit of salad and a boiled egg brought in from the refectory. Along a corridor enclosed by two beautiful doors, which are the doors of the old chapel on the first floor, the second year students have their shelters. Two tiny rooms, about the size of a cupboard, have been given the name of *monothurns*, and students can work alone in them. They are highly sought after. Raoul Audibert had one, and I had the secondthurne 22 if I remember correctly. Nearby must have been *the Utopie thurne* where Péguy and one of the Tharauds lived. I gave mine, which we had lined with grey, to my sister. As for me, I went to work in the room next door, where only Thierry Maulnier and Maurice Bardèche stayed, decorated with old newspapers, political leaflets and caricatures of teachers, and in an utterly disgusting mess. At the entrance, on a desk, was an upside-down lampshade depicting a church trunk, and bearing the inscription: "Pour les pauvres de la thurne" ("For the poor of Thurne"). The truth is that it never held more than two pennies.

We weren't too surprised by Suzanne's odd presence in the early years of Mr Bouglé's proconsulship. In truth, she could iron her ball gowns, dine on a salad leaf when she was in too much of a hurry, play bridge with Thierry Maulnier, Maurice and me on endless Sunday afternoons, or translate Milton's *Samson Agônistês* or Fielding's *Amelia*, which were on her degree programme, using outdated, exquisite and faded eighteenth-century French translations.

On her twentieth birthday, Maurice gave her a doll in the style of 1930: she was named Amelia, and the christening took place in the little grey thurne, with José Lupin, and a lot of champagne was spilt. Amelia spread out her rose-coloured dress on an unbleached canvas divan. We made brandade de morue over a spirit lamp and played the phonograph for a while. Then, in the evening, the four of us went to see Ludmilla Pitoëff again.

in *Criminals*. Our distractions, as you can see, were clear, and we didn't have a complicated youth.

In the summer, we spent a lot of time in the gardens. Sometimes we would put off going on holiday (the school doesn't close until 1 August, except for the agrégation candidates, and the courses and other exams have long since finished) to enjoy this oasis of nonchalance in the middle of Paris. We stretched out on the grass, oblivious to the present and the future, sleeping in the open air, lightly dressed, creating a countryside, almost a beach, between the high walls. They have long ceased to be shocked by the sight of boys in pyjamas going for a drink on rue Gay-Lussac or rue Claude-Bernard. We drank port on the lawns with friends, and played Marlène Dietrich and Damia records once again. We talked about our past and present idiosyncrasies. Always old fans of adventure novels, we discovered Georges Sim's first stories, *the Bandits of Chicago*, in the big colourful covers. The following year, Georges Sim became Georges Simenon, revamping the detective story, taking his fat, placid Inspector Maigret through the mists of the North, and we never missed any of the volumes with photographic covers, which were one of the essential elements of that era. It was the heyday of the detective novel, which lasted for several years, and we pitted the merits of S. Van Dine against those of Simenon, and we all retained a soft spot for the charming, if un-mathematical, romance of *Arsène Lupin*, and we borrowed Régis Messac's enormous and learned thesis on *the Detective Novel* from the École's library, the bible of the subject. Later, Simenon became a psychological novelist, he was read by André Thérive, he took himself seriously, and we abandoned him. But then, in memory of *Fulgur*, I think I started and pushed ahead with Maurice Bardèche on an adventure novel, *Le Masque et le Couteau*, which was never finished.

We had other distractions that were just as amusing, but of a higher order. I remember one afternoon in the central courtyard, in the cool sunshine, when José Lupin and I were alternately reading aloud *God and the End of Satan*. We laughed ourselves hoarse, as in the good old days of Louis-le-Grand, and suddenly, every twenty lines, a few mysterious, flamboyant words burst out, in which the old Hugo locked up his own secrets, his intimacy with the stars, winged horses, chimeras, the whole aviary

and the rustle of their feathers would sometimes calm down and let them see God. Then we'd go back to laughing in the midst of vehement apostrophes and two-by-two antitheses standing at attention.

Friends from outside came to join us. From time to time, we had seen Georges Blond, José's childhood friend, in the uniform of a midshipman. On an exam day at the Sorbonne, I had met a young girl who was both laughing and grieving. Georges Blond was now working in Paris for the publisher Fayard. He had married the Sorbonne girl in April 1930, and it was then that our friendship began. We used to go to their little flat in Montmartre, where we drank Savoy wines, Ayze and Seyssel. They came to the School, to balls, to garden parties, and we even organised a big lunch in our third year, where we did the cooking ourselves, after borrowing the plates and cutlery from the refectory. And when we went to Montmartre, it wasn't unusual for us to bring extra cutlery and the school's large earthenware plates. Georges and Germaine Blond, in our society of homeless students, represented a kind of home, where youth retained its temporary grace, lightness and gaiety, and protected us from the shortcomings of our common enemy, the bourgeois spirit. Every year in winter, the École ball is held in the Sorbonne salons: we end it with a supper in our thurne, just as we also end the summer garden party in our thurne. It was our last lodgings, under the roofs, that I remember most of all: ever since then, I've had a large photograph of a Roman bas-relief, Vestal Guardian of my ever temporary homes, and a small picture of Ludmilla Pitoëff in *Sainte Jeanne*. Some dictionary was open on a desk, underneath the exam timetable on the wall with the list of films to be seen. Suzanne had sewn a grey cloth on the sofa and a grey cloth on the table. The coffee filter on the big calorifier, because we drank coffee every day in the fragile house built in the middle of official institutions. Books everywhere, dust even more, and the window open onto the wide gutters through which we could reach the roofs. In spring, a white tree in flower could be seen in the courtyard, and in summer, behind the lowered wooden curtain, the warmth in the shade was a little like that of the rooms in the South of France when I was a child. Could we believe, when we were gathered together in this sort of attic, that we weren't at , with our friends and family?

friends, far from any administration, any School, and listening on our first phonograph bought in monthly instalments, to the *Pavane* or *l'Après-midi d'un faune*?

It was a strange school, where you would certainly find some erudite fanatic bent over his books, but it was almost always at the top of the roofs, or with his feet dangling in the goldfish pond. Where some dull boy, who would later make an excellent sixth-form teacher, was interested in nothing apart from his comparative grammars, - but he carried them in the gutters, but he got up at noon. At half past four in the morning, those who had not yet gone to bed would take over the tennis courts from those who had just woken up. In the refectory, which was half empty every day, a few dishes were solemnly taken away for the illegal residents who were patiently waiting for their dinner in the thurns. Where, on clear nights, twenty-year-old boys would walk along the rooftops and watch the red mist of Paris glimmer gently in the distance.

It was an island under its wind-swept trees, a discreet and unknown island, with its bust of Pasteur above a circular stone bench, its little garden around the tadpole pond, its interior street adorned with Louis-Philippe gas spouts, and its total absence of laws. The island of Sancho, or rather the island that everyone has dreamed of, the island of *Trois ans de vacances*, - a year longer than Jules Verne's.

When we return to the central courtyard of the École, we always think with friendship of the guardians of the place. Better than the man in the vestibule in his aquarium, better than the curtain raised, as on a provincial mall, at the director's window, we felt spied on by the sixty busts lining the interior façade. It is undoubtedly a fine thing for future agrégés in literature to have Massillon and Lavoisier under their eyes for three years. But these good-looking celebrities with their blackened noses were not just put there, each between two windows, for the garden party visitors, the Inspector General's daughters, the Polytechniciens who secretly come on Sundays to swap their bicorne for a floppy hat and their sword for a girlfriend. The sixty busts are the guardians of the lie

and isolation. Even when the day comes and there's nothing left of the crumbling old walls, they can be auctioned off without revealing any their secrets.

Their secret is the demon who, on the lawns of June, sows boxes of records, teacups and young girls who come to drink port. It is the demon who removes all useful books from the library, leaving only vain and delicious ones, baroque marvels for the whimsical: treatises on the occult, ignored poets, eighteenth-century translations, Swedish heretics, genealogies of the kings of France with their bastards. In the evening, in the garden of the naturalists, he is the one who raises the tadpoles and brushes away the brambles. The bust of Pasteur, on festive afternoons, the study rooms frescoed by Mr André-François Poncet, the French ambassador, the old amphitheatre decorated with Apache frescoes and lanterns, the cellars where the sea serpent shelters, the attics, the roofs where you can see the sun setting at the very tip of the Eiffel Tower, made up for us a magical place subject to the empire of this unknown demon. But this unknown demon was our youth. And that's why today we make a sign of friendship to the sixty busts in the courtyard of honour, when, in front of the water fountain at seven o'clock in the evening, night begins to fall and the stone guardians decide to maintain their silent conjuration around the oasis, around the island.

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Explorers sometimes landed on this island.

We weren't the ones who decided to invite writers and artists to the School. I think we always did, more or less. From time to time, the *Centre de documentation sociale* would invite economists and French and foreign travellers to round a table and have serious political conversations. On the other hand, the *Tala* group delighted in hearing the ever so slightly shabby personalities of the Christian Democracy. But our comrades from the previous year had already broken the rules of the political and religious clans. They had invited Jules Supervielle, who had read some poems, and others. We followed in their footsteps. In a thurne on the ground floor, we bought petits fours and port wine and sent out invitations. That's how, in 1928 and 1929, we saw André Maurois, with whom we had a meeting.

and René Clair, who came to talk to us, a little before the complete demise of silent cinema (at the time he was being shown at the Vieux-Colombier in Paris, in that exquisite work *Les Deux Timides*), about the concerns he felt about the new invention, of which we were all opponents. He looked almost like a kid, hardly our eldest, despite being thirty years old, with a fine, wicked face and the air of being very bored. But he was already the young master of French cinema, one of the four or five good names on the universal screen. We admired him a lot, he intimidated us and I'm not sure he was very comfortable with us either. Critics sometimes came to talk too. Benjamin Crémieux, Alexandre Arnoux. I think that was very beneficial to them. And in memory of our old friendship with surrealism, we invited Tristan Tzara, a monocle Romanian, who read us vehement prose from *L'Homme approximatif*, and Jean Cassou, black and hairy, who projected obscure and equally approximate explanations like a cuttlefish. One day, we ventured to write to Colette, "*I like your invitation,*" she replied. *But I'm in bed (angina following the flu). Can I go and see you between 6 and 9 March? No, not on the 9th, I'm dining out. Well, you'll have to arrange it. Or telephone me...*" Jean Beaufret and I went to see her in the long, low-ceilinged flat she lived in on rue de Beaujolais. We saw her arrive one spring afternoon in 1929 with her bulldog Souci, whom we tried to get to eat banana sandwiches. She tasted with us, listened to the songs of the school and wandered around the garden, calling all the trees by their names, which we didn't know, like friends. In front of the little house of the preparators, on the edge of "Nature", she exclaimed that she would have liked to live there. Then she left with her dog, her thin smile, her frothy hair, her round, rough voice.

We had not, of course, forgotten our discoveries, our admirations and our passions at Louis-le-Grand. I don't remember how Georges and Ludmilla Pitoëff came to see us for the first time. I think our old friend from Louis-le-Grand, Jean Valdeyron, who spent his holidays in Capbreton like the Pitoëff children, brought them to us. We walked them through the school beautiful summer afternoon,

We took them up to the roofs, where they were very frightened, and had a snack in the garden. I see dear Georges again, as we shall never see him again, alas! with his head a little bent, the glasses he always wore in town, his charming smile, hesitating at the edge of the gutters, and so quickly a comrade to the boys around him. He talked to us about his plans, his future, his poor ten-year future, and his short past too. He did so with kindness, with irony, with that smiling finesse that all those who loved him remember today with such regret:

— Once I was playing *Hamlet*. An usherette, who heard what was being said on stage, asked: "Who is speaking now? She was told, "But it's Pitoëff. She looked very surprised and asked again: "So he's playing in this play? - Yes, he's playing Hamlet, the lead. She thought for a moment, then said: "He's right after all! It saves them an actor.

Today we are bringing together these brief remarks and others, his irony and his understanding. I remember that one day, as I was watching him play Charles VII in *Sainte Jeanne*, someone asked him if Bernard Shaw had not pushed the king's figure to the point of caricature.

— We think it's a caricature," he replied. They don't understand. He's a man full of flaws, a bit ridiculous, but very intelligent. In fact, you could say that he's the only one who understands Jeanne. He's the only one who resembles her. He's the same as her, only he *doesn't have grace*.

For this incomparable man, whose abrupt intuition seemed to be his primary gift, was perhaps even more a man who understood, who grasped with all his intelligence, and who, reliving a role better than anyone else, also knew how to explain it better than anyone else.

We saw a lot of both of them in those years. They had become friends with the school and attended the balls and garden parties. We danced with Ludmilla, remembering our first admirations of Louis-le-Grand. I remember one cold, clear night in the Place du Panthéon in 1931, when we had just returned from dinner at the École, and we formed a big circle around Georges and Ludmilla, asking them to kiss, under the worried eye of the police officers. On the other hand, they invited us to the hundredth, the two hundredth, of the *Criminals*, that Judeo-German play in vogue at the time, which they performed a lot, and to which we often went, because Ludmilla remained

and we could talk to her. How many times did we go into the Pitoëff dressing rooms, the big dressing room with the blue divan at the Théâtre des Arts, the little dressing room in the basement of the Avenue, the squalid dressing rooms at the Vieux-Colombier! They were always decorated one or two drawings by the children, on squared paper from a school notebook, and sometimes with a photo of Ludmilla at five, and Georges at eight. All the actors knew us, without knowing our names, we met Lenormand, the Duhamel children, and we were sometimes allowed, to our great joy, to go on stage when we needed a "crowd". Some of our comrades appeared in *Sainte Jeanne* sous la cagoule des inquisiteurs, we danced in the night cabaret of *Les Criminels*, and a few years later I was a silent actor or stagehand in *Six personnages en quête d'auteur*. But above all, we annexed these unreal realms of theatre with an ease we had never known elsewhere.

I'll never forget without immense gratitude that distant, provincial Théâtre des Arts where, when I was nineteen, I discovered both poetry and the art of directing, and the genius of the actor. Since then, how many times have I stood on the creaking floor, behind a blue velvet curtain, or behind the iron foot of a spotlight, listening to the same scene for the tenth time, capturing in the presence and confrontation of two extraordinary beings, that second of lightning, that fire that suddenly unites a pale man with a dark voice and a white, musical woman! Crouched on an unfinished staircase, with my comrades, I would get drunk on dust and fragments of admirable works. The theatre is a block, for the most part, and one does not know, except by reading, how to isolate from a play the climax, the minute of tension and ecstasy. Thanks to the ease with which these backstage scenes are always open to young people, I was able to choose, in my turn, and like the reader of novels or poems returns to a single sonnet, a single scene, to immobilise and sum up a tragedy in ten incomparable minutes. In those years, we saw the plays of the Russian theatre, and we will never forget Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, with the admirable Germanova, the great tragedienne of the Moscow Arts Theatre, who has since disappeared, - or that first performance of *The Living Corpse* presented by an old lady who was Tolstoy's eldest daughter, and played, alongside the Pitoëffs, by a child who was the granddaughter of the old dreamer.

At the same time, we took a personal liking to these two beings who so naturally brought dreams and grandeur with them, in the midst of material worries, pain, absolute devotion to the theatre and the difficulties of life. As frequent visitors, we loved Georges' profound kindness, extraordinary dignity and sense of humour, and Ludmilla's youthful unreality. How often we thought of each other, those of us who knew those years, in the lit dressing room, far from the noise of the stage and the street!

At the interval, in front of the make-up table, we look at this small, pale person with huge eyes and slightly protruding cheekbones, who speaks in a pure, thoughtful voice, like a wise child. What lies behind this unreal face is of incomparable value. The little person, on a day between days, is dressed in black, with a large collar, like one of the girls in uniform. She looks at me, says kind words, then laughs, tilting her head to one side and shaking her short black hair. Sometimes you feel she is so far away, from another race and another country, evoking in her pure voice, in the voice of a greedy child, a world that we will ignore for the rest of our lives. Sometimes, she becomes as close to us as a young girl from Valois, as Gérard de Nerval's Sylvie.

Everything serves the Pitoëff legend, their poets, their country and their children. They have seven, like the parents of Tom Thumb, two boys and five girls. In the school gardens, Ludmilla explained:

— There's one called Ludmilla, like me. Ludmilla means: sympathetic to people. There was a Princess Ludmilla who was once a martyr.

It's a very simple sentence, but I can't forget it. And we had fun remembering the names of the five little girls, like a litany: Nadia, Sveltana, Ludmilla, Varvara and Aniouta.

We saw a lot of Ludmilla in those years. Above all, we know that in 1929 and 1931, we heard her twice in that drama, more beautiful than all dramas, made up, end to end, of the simple authentic texts of the Rouen trial. We still remember a great film from the silent era: *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, by Cari Dreyer, with M^{me} Falconetti. But the real Joan was a child of nineteen, full of insolence, strong-willed, lively, only defeated at the end, and that's how Ludmilla showed her to us. Who has not seen her crying and stammering on the day of her abjuration in the cemetery of Saint-

Ouen, in repeating the forced formulas, missed the most moving and perhaps the most beautiful thing in the world. We will have known what genius is.

A little later, in the prison, the bells rang and she clasped her hands together like a child. And the admirable words speak of fairy circles, miraculous trees and familiar saints. Who better to comment on the purest words in history than those fragile hands and stubborn, childlike forehead? I still have the letter she wrote me one summer day in 1931, in which she told me about a trip to Domrémy:

"... *I prowled in the Chenu wood.* "There is a wood of oaks called Chenu Wood, which you can see from the door of my father's house, and it is not half a league away..." *I went into the church, which has been very well restored, but the stoup is a contemporary of hers, and the statue of Saint Catherine in front of which she used to pray is still there. The statue is very pretty and very small.* "My apparitions came to me in great multitude and very small". *The church is immediately next to the house. I went into the garden, and turned my back to the gate so that I was looking at the house and had the church on my right. The bells had just rung some time, the bells are old and cracked. I can't describe or explain my confusion.* "And there came this voice at about noon, in summer time, in my father's garden. I heard the voice on the right side, towards the church..." *Between all these blessed places, in the middle of a field, on the banks of the Meuse, I feel captive in a miraculous net, and I wouldn't want to escape from it for anything in the world, because so many secrets are opening up to the eyes of my heart.*" In this way, we were able to approach the dreams we had had in the theatre, when we were still locked up in the high schools of our adolescence.

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For a while, cinema continued to be as important to us as it had been in the past, and we would go to local cinemas and repertory cinemas, like Les Agriculteurs, to see films from the past that we hadn't seen. The crowds were beginning to get excited about the most famous star of the screen, the Swede Greta Garbo. America was just finishing sending us its films about Prohibition, when gangs of bandits formed to sell drugs and other goods.

beer, very surprising images. We used to go and see avant-garde films at the private, almost secret, screenings organised by the A.E.A.R. (*Association des Écrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires*), and we wept with pain because for years we couldn't find a seat for *Battleship Potemkin*. But the invention of talking pictures left us bewildered. Were we going to turn our beloved art of grey, silent images, where even the most intransigent of us were bothered by the subtitles, and our beautiful visual music, into the poor canned theatre that the first French talking pictures predicted? José Lupin and I came away from *Les Trois Masques* feeling sorry for ourselves. Fortunately, soon afterwards we went to see *Hallelujah*, the great frenetic poem of black life, the film richest in real sound inventions that the screen had yet brought us, the one that revealed to us the value of silence between noises. Shortly afterwards, we were reunited with René Clair. It was he, in fact, who was cinema almost entirely in those years, who incorporated himself into our way of understanding the world, who collaborated in our strolls through Paris, raising above us the imaginary world of its little people, its ballets of grocers and *cremières*, its staircases where children play, all its grey and gentle, fine transposition of the spectacles of the single city: How many times have we seen *Sous les toits de Paris*, *the Million* and that bitter, enchanted show, with its Luna-Park where mechanical birds sing, its poetry of gilded paper and romances, that is *À nous la liberté*? I couldn't say, but for us it was the symbol of a happy time, when the dangers were Americanism and overproduction, not strikes and misery, and when, in the end, two vagabonds were also singing their way to the happy roads of destiny. And so the screen gave us news of the universe. We learned about Paris from René Clair, just as we had learned about it from Baudelaire and Balzac.

As is natural, we sometimes chose lesser works. One evening, in the early days of talkies, the four of us went by chance to see a filmed operetta, *Le Chemin du Paradis*, in which three penniless but carefree boys were pleasantly gyrating around a young girl in a baroque frenzy of gestures, with two or three charming inventions. In 1931, this film and these songs became our totems, our passwords. I've seen it four or five times, we travelled to Versailles to see it again, we saw it in German. A few months ago, we went to see it again at the Ursulines, old-fashioned but charming.

We were still amazed at the women's fashions, the acting, and the fact that it was a historical document, and a little surprised, in spite of everything, to find out from him in 1939 about our youth and its era, which was already so long ago and so curious.

On the other hand, we were still learning about Paris, its mysteries and its beauties. Attentive to what René Clair's films were teaching us, we looked around us at the working-class neighbourhoods and the simple, curious little people. The School is located on the edge one of the most beautiful

"We used to go and buy a packet of chips for twenty cents from the shopkeeper in rue Mouffetard. Sometimes we'd go and buy a packet of chips for twenty sous from the shopkeeper in the rue Mouffetard, follow the river of victuals and vegetables, full of quarrels and colour, and then prowl the deserted streets between the high walls of convents and the staircase entrances to the rue Lhomond. On the other side of the ravine, rue Rataud still had the same aspect, not even provincial, but village-like, with its tall trees leaning against the weathered wall, and the little streetlight from our climbs. We extended our explorations further, returning victorious and amazed, as if from Venice, Amsterdam, the Chinese bridges over the Canal Saint-Martin, the gardens around Père-Lachaise, the bus that took us through Charonne and Belleville to the military training grounds in Romainville. We went to the popular swimming pools, to the Butte-aux-Cailles, near the Porte d'Italie, where certain days were reserved for couples, and where chaste and athletic boys could be seen waiting at the door for a casual companion, just as they sometimes waited at the door of women's restaurants. It's worth noting for the historian that back then, people still swam less than they do today, and the *crawl* was almost unknown. But our homeland was still the Latin Quarter, our garden the Luxembourg, our cafés the narrow halls of the Boulevard Saint-Michel, and we used to go to the little three-franc cinemas on the Avenue des Gobelins to see the old Buster Keatons and Harold Lloyds that we were so fond of. Paris stretched out around us, especially nocturnal Paris, which we had only glimpsed at Louis-le-Grand, and which offered us its deserted esplanades, its streets flashing with red and green lights, its Montmartre crowd, and under the high pillars of the aerial metros, on foggy evenings, its faded women and its tramps. We went to the fair to see the flea tamers in the Place Blanche (people fleas, gentlemen, not dog fleas, not cat fleas), to admire the flea village, the fleas shooters of canon, the fleas jugglers, the fleas

dancers. We came back from Chez Dullin or from that astonishing Balzacian restaurant called Le Bon Bock, where you eat at a fixed time at a table d'hôte, like at the Pension Vauquer, gigantic meals almost at your discretion. From Saint-Séverin to Saint-Pierre de Montmartre and Saint-Julien le Pauvre, we also sought out the old parish churches of Paris, their gardens and their shadows. Finally, those were the last years when you could walk around the Jewish quarter, rue Brise-Miche, rue du Roi de Sicile, rue de Venise, the dirtiest and narrowest streets in Paris, now destroyed. The leprous, Balzacian beauty of these old black houses, these hideous recesses, reminded us of medieval Paris, and then suddenly we realised that the ghettos of Central Europe had poured in their fur-hatted Jews, their filth, their dialects, their shops, their kosher butchers, their forty-cent restaurants, for a quick cleansing before the shopping ghettos of the Faubourg Montmartre, the luxurious ghettos of the Avenue du Bois and Passy. The spell of Paris deepened for us, something that those who experienced it at the age of eighteen will never escape.

Why are certain places and crossroads now imbued with an incommunicable magic? It's because we recognised them, at that time, by mysterious signs, as part of our autonomous world. One evening, with Raoul Audibert, our eldest pupil at Louis-le-Grand, who had entered the École before us, we wandered through the streets of Montrouge and Montparnasse, stopping off at those bistros where, around 1930, a high-pitched phonograph was still blaring, and taking the rue de la Gaîté, red and blue, streaming with lights, as lively as a street in Marseille. It was the time when (at the same time as we were getting fond of Marlène Dietrich from *L'Ange bleu*) we discovered Damia on the phonograph, with her beautiful, popular, black voice and her songs about sailors and girls. We went to see her at Bobino, to a packed house, a beautiful woman in her dark dress, with her big lioness head, we asked her for *Rue de la Joie*, and *Les Goélands*, we applauded with the guys in their caps, through the grey smoke of the cigarettes. Then we set off again through the streets where our footsteps sounded, careful to let the smells and sounds of the night come to us, and, on the Boulevard Saint-Michel, we came across the old-fashioned train from Arpajon, which then brought to Les Halles, dragged slowly by its smoking locomotive, the vegetables from the

gardeners. The Arpajon train, inseparable from the Latin Quarter at midnight in those days, no longer runs today.

During the day, our Quartier pleasures were at Picard's, where we never stopped leafing through books, or at a "pathéphone" that has now disappeared. There we could hear new records, but mostly old ones. And so, through a sort of clattering of plates and squeaking of pulleys, catching only one word in three, we were able to get an idea of Sarah Bernhardt in the declaration of *Phèdre*, as described by Marcel Proust. When the long, bizarre melody was over, the record continued to sputter for a moment, then the divine Sarah, resuming her natural voice, concluded: "Et voilà. It's not rocket science.

We didn't always dine at the École, and this picture of the Latin Quarter around 1930 would not be complete if we didn't mention the Russian restaurants. Raoul Audibert was fond of Bartek, others of Miron, Coq d'Or, Vieille-Russie, and even the distant Dominique on rue Bréa. We were regulars at K'nam on rue Royer-Collard, where I don't return from time to time without giving a souvenir to our old table de quatre, where we were introduced to blinis, borscht and goulash, and which for me is a place of enchantment. For a very modest price, while the so-called French restaurants lived in filth and the smell of grease, the students had the illusion of luxury, flowers on the small tables, polite waiters, an orchestra whose singers never changed, pictures on the walls, and the pleasure of exoticism (24). {It is distressing see the hideous apparatus of so-called charity at the Cité Universitaire or in women's restaurants, when you see what simple shopkeepers who do not value their patent of philanthropy do}. The food was decent and the atmosphere, above all, friendly, young and natural. We played the records ourselves on the phonograph in the little corridor, where there was no noise from the orchestra and where, at midday, the bell of a nearby convent rang. We sometimes flowers from a very charming old white lady who walked sloughis during the day and shyly sold a few roses and carnations in the Russian restaurants where she was discreetly given dinner. We bought our newspapers from an old man who was shaven in summer and bearded in winter to keep warm. And so, as fashion for literary escapism was not yet complete, we indulged in the ironic luxury of these cheap trips.

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We also sometimes worked. The School Library was part of the fantasy that reigned in the house. The books had been rearranged, I believe, by Lucien Herr, whom left-wing intellectuals have made out to be a great man, but who was, in reality, according to Andler's portrait of him, a kind of obtuse but influential failure. He had carefully banned unorthodox modern authors from his shelves, and Barrès was represented only by selected pieces *in Italian*. As for Pascal, he was classed as a novelist. Many useful books were missing, if they were not unduly withheld by former students. Nevertheless, the library remained a remarkable working tool, and offered incomparable food for thought. On rickety ladders, I walked for miles along the shelves, looking for mysterious books, reading Escobar or the Patrology, deciphering Lycophron, *the Dionysiacs* of Nonnos, the little Alexandrian poets. For Greek and Latin, the library is well-stocked. History books are plentiful enough for the layman, if literary history and pure literature leave something to be desired. But I considered these high rooms, which literally bend under the weight of the volumes, as I would have considered the series of boxes on the quays. I rummaged through them at random, copied the genealogy of the kings of France on beautiful armorial volumes, read Swedenborg, Restif de la Bretonne, Macrobius and the compilers of low Latinity. The École's library was the ideal place for des Esseintes.

I certainly learned more there than at the Sorbonne, where I was a very unfaithful pupil. I was bored by the lectures, and for a year I only followed those of M. Mazon, who was an admirable professor of Greek, and with whom we explained Aeschylus. In four years, I only had to give three or four lectures, which I think seemed rather fanciful. The most charming year of all is that of the diploma (25). {When you have a degree and you want to take the agrégation, you have to write a short dissertation of between a hundred and two hundred pages on a subject of choice. In one year, the work is not overwhelming.} José Lupin studied at the salon of Fanny de Beauharnais, who was a charming madwoman with whom Restif and Mercier frequented, and drew all his erudition from the École's library, where in three days I copied for him the essentials of his essay (26). {This was also the year in which

In a lycée, you have to do a teaching placement, which consists of listening to a class for three weeks and teaching it for a fortnight. I did an internship at Janson and I had a lot of fun with this one contact with university life}. Thierry Maulnier gave only a few days' thought before handing him over to his work on Racine's prefaces and his dramatic art: I remember, in the theatre lined with old newspapers, seeing him write, in a single day, fifty-eight pages of small, tight handwriting, which received a dazzling mark of 18 out of 20. Maurice was then taking courses in the history of art, and for M. Focillon he wrote a very learned work on the backgrounds in Flemish painting of the first half of the fifteenth century, which enabled him to go to Ghent to see the beautiful flowerbeds and fairy-tale towns of the altarpiece of the Lamb. For my share, I had proposed to

Mr Fortunat Strowski, who was nonchalant, indulgent and flowery, and at whose home

a study of the streets of Paris by Balzac. I would walk through the neighbourhoods close to ours, which had hardly changed in the last hundred years, and I would find the house of the beggar in Saint-Sulpice, or the house of the usurer in the *Petits-Bourgeois*, rue Lhomond. The past thus contributed to my taste for the sacred city.

One day I picked up a slim volume from the École's library, containing everything the ancient rhetors had left us on Virgil, a few *Lives*, the longest of which is ten pages long. We were at the height of the fashion for fictionalised lives, and I wondered whether it wouldn't be possible to write, on the basis of such brief data, a biography in which nothing, and especially not one dialogue, would be imaginary. There was also talk of celebrating the second millennium of the Latin poet in 1930. I began this biography, in which I made a point of using neither local colour nor the colour of time, and of presenting my character as if he had lived in our time, - though without inventing anything. I tried to send the first chapters to Jacques Bainville and Henri Massis's *Revue universelle*, where they appeared in April 1930. It was also the time when I read the theatre of Seneca, glowing with passion and jewels, and when I sent the N.R.F. a study on him, which appeared a little later, when the Pitoëffs played *Médée*. To complete the picture of these somewhat 'fringe' activities, I have to say that the first slightly lucrative work I did was the translation of a four-hundred-page Latin cookery volume, *the Philosopher's Stone*, by Jean Isaac, a Renaissance alchemist. A curious person had asked me for it, and if I didn't learn how to make gold, I knew that through the

glorious body, at the end of time, will burn the soul and the quintessence which is the soul of things, and many other marvels, lost in a rather tiresome repetition. We translated this in Thurne, or on the beach, and this philosopher's stone even paid for our first holiday that year in the Basque country. But we also sometimes read the authors on the syllabus, and it was at that time that I got to know Joinville and Montaigne in some depth. Montaigne's whispered chatter, his warm and friendly advice, his love of young bodies, his egotistical wisdom, his profound frivolity, we loved them very much during those years, when he taught us that "it is an absolute perfection, and as divine as it gets, to know how to enjoy one's being loyally".

One spring day in 1930, we learned that some of the students who edited the royalist journal *L'Étudiant français* had suddenly left *l'Action française*. Jacques Talagrand went to suggest that we produce the next issue, within forty-eight hours, so that there would be no interruption, and it was written entirely in our thurne by Maurice Bardèche, José Lupin, him and me. It was on this occasion, moreover, that Jacques Talagrand took the pseudonym Thierry Maulnier. We worked together for a while on *the Étudiant français*, and Henri Massis, whom I had visited two or three times, sent me to Pierre Varillon, who was running the literary page of the newly-created *Action française*. The A.F. was still housed on rue de Rome and I used to visit Pierre Varillon sometimes in a sort of attic perched at the top of the house, sometimes in his office as director of the *Cité des Livres* publishing house. That's how I started working for *Action Française*, whose literary critic was the charming young Jacques de Montbrial. The old newspaper, accused of being the newspaper of dowagers, one day published, among other things, a literary page whose contributors, Jacques de Montbrial, Pierre Varillon, Thierry Maulnier and myself, were not a hundred years old between them. In 1931, Jacques de Montbrial fell ill, gave up his job and died a few months later at the age of twenty-five. I was asked to replace him. I don't think there is a single major newspaper, apart from *Action Française*, that has given a twenty-two-year-old boy such an important literary column.

However, we were not yet involved in the life of the paper and we sent our articles by post. Charles Maurras welcomed us as he welcomed all young people, with that smile and confidence that I have only seen in him. One day, in April 1930, we were invited to the Manoir d'Anjou,

Thierry Maulnier, Maurice and I arranged to represent the Ecole Normale to the Count of Paris. In the suburbs of Brussels, we went to the beautiful bourgeois house that shelters the royal family. The Count of Paris was twenty-two years old at the time, extraordinarily attractive, and struck us by his prodigious *listening skills*. What did we, students with no connections, have to say to him? Not much. He listened to us as if every word was a revelation. Deep down, we were intimidated, and we spoke volubly to disguise our emotion, and we accumulated blunders and errors of protocol, and we let the chops and peas cool on our plate while the valets, and the general, and the prince, waited respectfully for us to finish. He looked up at us with his beautiful pale eyes, his Valois face painted by Clouet (27) {There is a Vendôme in Chantilly that looks exactly like him}, his fine Asiatic hands, and he nodded at our every word as if to convince us of our own genius. We returned absolutely won over.

At that time, as always, the School was seen as revolutionary. To tell the truth, half a dozen comrades made more noise than harm, and the average was an honest radical or socialist mediocrity. They didn't neglect the future either, which made a change from Louis-le-Grand. It was in those years that Briandism flourished. Any student of the Ecole Normale Supérieure could spend his holidays in Geneva free of charge, under the pretext of "information", or go to Davos in the winter, in the hope of attracting him to orthodox doctrines and support for the regime. The more bucolic went to the abbey of Pontigny (28) {There was also a rest house in Normandy, called "le Vieux-Pressoir", put at the disposal of the School's students by Mr Lazard}, which was run by Paul Desjardins, and where we talked "about subjects", which always seemed to me an astonishing way to spend one's holidays. We decided to give some publicity to our visit to the Prince. We wrote indignant

letter, signed Weil, to Mr de la Fouchardière, at *L'Œuvre*, to tell him of the importance of the project.

the monarchist movement at the École normale supérieure, the journey of obedience to the pretender, the bullying suffered by true republicans, and asking him to protest against this. He did so ironically, making fun of everyone, not wishing to attack freedom of opinion. But finally, he spoke about it. M. Bouglé was not very happy. The following year, 1931, Briand

failed to win the Élysée and died a few months later. We had seen him so much caricatured by Sennep, we had talked so much about his politics that we suddenly watched this bent old man flee, with his hushed and slippery manner, astonished as if we had seen disappear a sort of companion of our youth. None of us had been briandists, but it's hard to imagine today what briandism was like, the Europe of Bénès, Titulesco, the masons and the bankers, and we suddenly wondered what would come in the place of illusions.

It was in this way that we began to get to know the world outside the School, and to try to look beyond our immediate studies and pleasures . (29)

{Through someone who had connections there, one day I sent an article to *L'Intransigeant* in which I recounted the visit the Pitoëffs had made to the École. The article appeared during the 1929 holidays, and I sent in two or three more after that. Fernand Divoire, who was then editor-in-chief of *L'Intransigeant*, asked me if I wanted to join the paper completely. I mentioned my studies, the five-week teaching placement I was due to complete shortly, and even my military training. He offered me to come every morning learn the trade of journalism, and I accepted, assuming that it was better to do it at a time when I had no need of it and when I could experiment in complete freedom. It lasted a month, and now seems quite absurd. To begin with, I was sent to interview the President of the Society for the Protection of Animals, and they seemed scandalised because I had written - which was the truth - that this excellent had a painting above her mantelpiece depicting a hound hunt. I visited the Houseware Exhibition and wrote little papers about the *Galette des Rois* and the destruction of the Jewish quarter. All this seemed to me singularly empty, and I was very bored. I never saw a printing press or a machine, I learnt nothing, apart from the mysterious instructions which, it seems, turn the most innocuous article into a pamphlet absolutely contrary to the laws of advertising, - and after January 1930, as the time had come for my internship, the experiment was not continued. Such were my beginnings in 'great journalism'. It only goes to show the freedom we enjoyed at the school}.

We met Henri Massis at the *Revue universelle*, which was then housed near his own flat on boulevard Saint-Germain. He was so quick and indulgent to receive the pages on Virgil's youth that an unknown student from the Ecole Normale Supérieure sent him in early 1930. Later on, I think he liked coming back to this School where he had had friends before the war, such as Henri Franck, and where he liked being among us. We had looked with some fear on the serious author of *Défense de l'Occident*, whom we used to talk about so seriously in the courtyard of Louis-le-Grand. But it was this slim and upright man, with this lively and

Spanish, those big, passionate brown eyes, wide lock of black hair, that extraordinary kindness of welcome, that extraordinary mobility of gaze, hands and mind, that taste for youth. There was nothing dogmatic about Henri Massis when he came to École to lie on the sofa of a thurne, when he helped us make tea, when he walked with us in the Luxembourg, or when he took us to his house to listen to records by music-hall stars! I remember the day after École ball, which his son Jean had attended when he came to meet us at about one o'clock in the afternoon, just as Thierry Maulnier, Maurice, Suzanne and I were putting away the dishes and bottles from our student dinner. His very serious, very episcopal, very well-coiffed opponents would no doubt have been surprised to see the writer of *Jugements*, in the small room on the third floor where there is a gas stove and a water point, wiping the teacups while humming the tunes from *Congrès s'amuse* :

Could it be a dream, a beautiful dream?...

They would have been surprised, but not us.

— Are you sure it's the same Henri Massis?" a friend asked me worriedly.

But yes, he was the same, and that's what touched us most of all: a growing affection, a real freedom of pace, a passion for ideas that still resembled the passions of the students we still were. He could talk to us about Barrès and Gide, he could also walk with us along the rooftops, happily, sit with us on the terrace of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. And that's what we were grateful for.

We continued to discover the letters of that time, we made progress in reading Claudel and Péguy, and he talked to us about them, and came to show us and read us their letters, and one day he lent us, to have it copied, his typed copy of *Partage de Midi*, Claudel's most radiant and least known work, and we recited Mesa's prayer to each other:

*Hello, sisters! None of you brilliant girls,
Does not support the spirit. But alone at the centre of everything, the Earth
His man has sprouted. And you, like a million white sheep,
You turn your head towards her, who is like the shepherd and the Messiah of the worlds...*

And we began to read foreign poets and novelists, and we loved Rilke, and we discovered the books of Rosamond Lehmann, (the fashion was for English novelists, for *Poussière*, for *La Nymphe au cœur fidèle*) and we always went to hear Giraudoux's theatre, *Amphitryon* and *Judith*. But because we were eclectic, we also enjoyed a few more affordable comedies. The important thing was for them to be able to enter into our particular language, to allow us to pronounce: "She said we'd have port" and "She said we'd have port".

"C'est coquet" with the voice of Michel Simon in *Jean de la lune*, - : Or "He's so pretty, that little boy" and "Morne soirée, Antoine" in the Moldo-Vallach accent of Marguerite Moreno in *Le Sexe faible*. For we were not far from thinking that literature is only valuable for providing passwords. Such were those years.

Letters, on the other hand, had hardly changed. Edmond Jaloux declared that the novels had an "adolescent excess" and an "escapist excess". Jean Desbordes, a disciple of Jean Cocteau, published *J'adore*, and Jean Cocteau himself completed *Les Enfants terribles*. André Gide, the true master of all this paganism culminating in the cult of drugs, was already looking forward to communism as the ultimate means of destruction. We read all this with pleasure, out of respect for anarchy. A luxurious magazine, *Commerce*, published scholarly and pure texts. Publishers were still launching collections on the most varied subjects, giving their authors French homework and commissioning every biography imaginable. But our loves were elsewhere.

Around that time, we were also beginning to discover painting. A layman may be excused for not having thought of it sooner. But we were not made for hazardous discoveries, for geniuses blossoming in the shadow of the great dealers, and we knew nothing about it, and we had to gradually acquire a little of that taste for the plastic world for which French studies are so poorly prepared. I don't know whether the great exhibitions - we were to see even more beautiful ones a little later - had been as well attended in previous years as they had been in those years. We were first introduced to the Impressionists at little cost, and paintings were brought back from America and private collections that we would probably never see again in our lives. It was the time of the Renoir Exhibition, of beautiful children with cheeks as fresh as a bunch of flowers, of fat, purple and naked women, of the

ample statues modelled under the direction of the painter with the dead hands of one of the most prodigiously sensual gazes ever cast upon the universe. It was the time of Manet. It was the time of Toulouse-Lautrec, of his green and purple gumdrops, of a whole ugly, sad and dirty era, brought back to life by an ugly drawing gnome. This was the time when all of Picasso was suddenly brought together for us, from the beautiful, sad grey adolescents, the beautiful, human horses of youth, to the Harlequin coats, so fresh, of the first Cubism, to the farces for gulping Americans, to the paintings made of bits of pasted newspaper and daubs. We advanced timidly through these dissimilar planets, ready to move on to higher eras, to more distant masters, but familiarised by these inventors who were closer to us with colours and lines. We were learning our trade far from the schools, and even further from the astonishing haggling which, in those years, treated painters like stock market securities, making them suffer rises and falls, even imposing financial language on them and allowing booms on the École de Paris to be followed by crashes on the orthodox cubists. Painting came to us decanted from all contact with the century, already ready for the museums, far from the noise. It was even the mute world par excellence, with its beautiful strangers in furs, its silent balls, its ghostly parties, its landscapes where the wind falls silent in the trees, its moving stains and its closed-mouthed songs.

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We called the generation that preceded us, since there was a generation, the generation of the Decorative Arts Exhibition.

— A strange way of counting the ages," Albert Thibaudet declared ironically. So you, the generation from the year when there was a Negro's head on the postage stamps, will be the year of the Colonial Exhibition.

It was, in fact, since the beginning of the summer, the rich Exhibition organised by Marshal Lyautey. We've never had much love for these vast fairs, but this one was well designed, pleasant to look at, with beautiful images at the end of the avenues of trees. Suzanne and I went there one evening with Georges and Ludmilla Pitoëff, at whose house we had dined. I remember that they were to stage a play by

Lenormand, inspired by the legend of Medea, which was later performed elsewhere. Ludmilla told me that she had just reread Euripides' *Medea*, and I asked her if she knew Seneca's *Medea* and Apollonius of Rhodes' marvellous, human and tender portrait of the young Medea. We were strolling, under the lights of this happy era, through these testimonies of French splendour and happiness, and, with the hindsight of a few years, this Exhibition may seem the last manifestation, already a little late, of the era of prosperity. In the beautiful night of Vincennes, the fountains of water coloured with fire and the cardboard architecture took on their rightful fairytale aspect, abandoning all facile tricks. They were the very backdrops of adventure, and a whole literature of escapism ended there, within the reach of the petit bourgeois, between the bear and the seal of the Zoo and the great red mass of the temple of Angkor. But this night was just as suited to irony and tenderness as reading *Hamlet*. But this night was just as much about irony and tenderness as reading a Jules Verne novel, and he was all right, with the companions of our theatrical dreams.

A little earlier, at his home, at the long bare wooden table where the seven children sat, as in a Perrault fairy tale, Georges Pitoëff had asked me if I could give him a translation of *Hamlet*, to replace the one by Schwob and Morand that had just been taken over by the Théâtre-Français. At the same time, in his soft, cracked voice, with his smile, his passion, his eyes turned towards the inner spectacles of his own enchantment, he explained to me this extraordinary character to whom he had given more than life. And I seemed to be talking about *Hamlet* with *Hamlet* himself.

— Everything revolves around the monologue, because the monologue poses the great human question, that of why we exist: to be or not to be. Everyone knows that. But it is less well known that at the end of the play, one minute before the duel, *Hamlet* has resolved the dilemma. He is going to fight; he has already said: "I accept my fate". And now he says: *Let be*. Which means, "Let things be." But the French translation leaves out the essential meaning (in Russian, we could translate both the hidden meaning and the apparent meaning). For the essence is the answer to the monologue: *To be or not to be?* Answer: "I accept, *let be*."

— In short: let what *is be*?

— Just about.

A few days later, Ludmilla Pitoëff came to the École to pick up *Médée* and the *Argonautiques*. Our last year at the École was over, and many of our classmates were about to leave. For my part, I was expecting to fail the agrégation, for which I had done little preparation, and I had decided to stay in Paris for the following year. But in spite of everything, the future was a bit dubious, and our company of four friends was already in danger of breaking up. The beautiful year that had just ended! This is what Ludmilla Pitoëff's visit to our school one summer afternoon meant to us, somewhat melancholically. I have two photographs of her that day, one on the grey sofa in our thurne, sitting beneath her own image as Saint Joan, the other on a bench in the garden, books beside her, like a young girl returning from the prize-giving.

III

THE END OF THE POST-WAR PERIOD

The post-war period was slowly dying. The consequences of the American crash of 1929 had not been felt immediately in France, and the Tardieu ministry had been able to appear crowned with the sweetest promises. However, industry was beginning to feel the aftershocks of the crisis, and everywhere the world was becoming silent, hushed and devious. Communism was slowly taking root, but people pretended not to believe it. A conspiracy of Freemasons, clerics and revolutionaries overthrew the Spanish monarchy in 1931, and Pierre Gaxotte could exclaim in *Je suis partout*: "This time, it's on our doorstep. No less profoundly, Germany was growing stronger, and every season a new scarecrow was raised on the other side of the Rhine.

Yet Mr Brüning came to Paris and attended mass at Notre-Dame-des-Victoires. Ladies and intellectuals were enthusiastic about a German, Frédéric Sieburg, who published *Dieu est-il français?* We were very afraid of Steel Helmets, very afraid of Mr Treviranus. Who remembers that today? As for the "agitator", whose name was Hitler,

M. Blum, the leader of the Socialist Party, used to say, after each of his successes, that he was definitively removed "from the very hope of power". This is one of his most famous prophecies. All hope was pinned on the astonishing champion of democracy and liberalism, the old Marshal Hindenburg, the bulwark against Hitler's nationalism. Pacifism was still in full swing. German war books such as *Nothing New in the West and Class 22* were popular, as were the films based on them, the most famous of which was Pabst's *Four of the Infantry*, full of grey, despairing images of the inevitability of war. In short, we fell asleep. Sleep was the essential feature of the three or four years between the evacuation of Mainz and the official seizure of power by National Socialism.

Fate, however, knocked at the door from time to time with a conscience worthy of a better fate. Mr Briand had disappeared, defeated at the Élysée by a brave republican, Paul Doumer. But a year later

After coming to power, the thirteenth President of the Republic was assassinated by an unbalanced and suspicious Russian, Gorguloff, without the reasons for his act or his accomplices ever being fully explored. But the elections of 1932, although they did not give Communism the place it might have been expected to have, ousted M. Tardieu, leaving the way clear for ministries of radicals and businessmen, and, increasingly, for sleep. Apart from *Action Française*, the national newspapers were dull. A megalomaniac perfumer, François Coty, had launched *l'Ami du Peuple* at two sous (instead of five), a powerful means of action. He ruined his effort in incoherence, after falling out with everyone. The Socialists were still opposed to military appropriations, they had voted in the Chamber, with several men of the Left, against fortifications in the East and the Maginot Line, and they still wanted to believe in the League of Nations, the doves of Lake Geneva, the cooing of the cello, and close their eyes, close their eyes. Maginot died in January 1932, in a strange way. The defendants in the Oustric case were acquitted. People were dancing to new tunes, living through the period between the mewing of the Hawaiian guitar and the mewing of West Indian dances, jazz was becoming more brutal, richer in timbre, more anarchic, and was giving way to jazz-hot. The first Russian billiards tables were appearing on the beaches and in the bars. In Saint-Tropez, people were being introduced to the childish amusements of the Florida bathers by swinging a magic spinning top called a *yo-yo* at the end of a cord. Eroticism was discussed and Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* became a hit. France needed songs and toys, France needed dreams, France was sometimes startled by a nightmare, but it quickly went back to sleep. It was sleep time.

And for us, mindful of everything that threatened us, and which we had been taught not to neglect, we also had the important task of continuing our youth and finishing our lives as students.

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If we had had the literary quarrels of pure poetry and the defence of the West to distract us at Louis-le-Grand, if we had launched among us the farces of *Fulgur*, *Hamlet*, even the conference on

the Poldèves, it was from our thurne that a new quarrel was to start, that of the end of the post-war period. At that time, in June 1931, we were staying on the top floor of the École. One day, a student from three or four classes Normaliens, who was still sitting the philosophy baccalauréat, came to visit us. We chatted amiably with him, for he was a charming, well-mannered boy, and he expressed his courteous desolation by telling us that certain nightclubs had been closed, that the effects of the Wall Street crash were being felt, that people no longer knew how to have fun, that the crisis was coming, that some of his classmates were looking for work, that they were selling their beautiful cars and that film extras were no longer enough to pay for cocktails. We were politely listening to these stories from another world, like those of an explorer, because we had never known "the time of prosperity", when this boy who didn't read, who didn't think much, suddenly had a profound word to say:

- In short," he says, "it's *the end of the post-war era*.

I don't know whether he had invented it or heard it, but we thought the expression was beautiful. A few days later, I wrote about it in my first 'literary feuilleton' in *Action Française*, devoted to a novel by Drieu la Rochelle, *Le Feu follet*. At the time, Georges Blond had already asked me to write a few articles for Arthème Fayard's weeklies *Candide* and *Je suis partout*. I also met a former student of the Ecole Normale Supérieure, Pierre Gaxotte, who looked about eighteen but must have been thirty-five, ironic, mischievous and smiling. It was Pierre Gaxotte who, in the course of this serial, discovered the expression of my former pupil and asked me to do a literary survey for the holidays on this theme. In July, I wrote to a number of authors, many of them less famous, and the survey began to appear in *Candide* at the end of the summer. It was eclectic, with Paul Valéry playing his part along with Clément Vautel, and a few young writers who hadn't written much of anything yet, which was quite a cheek. As far as I was concerned, I had a lot of fun.

It was truly the end of an era. Dance teachers, threatened with bankruptcy, could only find some use for themselves by teaching the waltz. Johann Strauss was back in fashion. Women fetched delicious little hats from their grandmother's dresser. Paul Éluard's and André Breton's collection of negro fetishes sold at auction and fetched a reported two hundred thousand francs.

which are liquidated so cheaply! Bernard Grasset wanted to 'break the back of the novel', America had fallen out of fashion since Georges Duhamel's *Scènes de la vie future*, all the post-war writers were starting to collaborate for the Comédie-Française, Mr Gide was being happily buried in the corner of all the magazines, and a mischievous Jewish writer, Emmanuel Berl, was writing funny books about bourgeois thought, bourgeois morals and the ridiculousness of our times.

I didn't meet Paul Valéry very often after that. He received me one day at his home, he had a cold and was wearing a dressing gown, he spoke slang, he told me that laziness is the honour of mankind, he admitted that he had read very few contemporary authors, and regretted the ease, the carelessness, of a bygone era. As he talked, I looked at his thin, Cartesian, wrinkled face, and I discovered in his conversation a light-hearted, gossipy and joking aspect, which, it seems, his friends knew well. I also came across some ideas that were dear to him, expressed in lively, unpretentious phrases.

— What's terrible is the power of man over matter. It made our heads spin. Reinforced cement allows you to do anything you want, terraces suspended over the void, and so on. It's the end of the resistance of stone. We don't use stone any more. No more stone! Our era has witnessed the end of the ancient agreement between form and matter. Architecture is nothing more than a decoration, no longer a balance between the artist's desire for a particular form and the material that resists it.

And he added:

— But why shouldn't our entire civilisation disappear? If we continue the post-war trend, we're heading straight for it. Certain arts have disappeared over the ages: illumination, for example. Why not painting and architecture? There's no shortage of artists. There's never a shortage of artists! But we do need people who need artists.

As he rolled his cigarettes, I listened to him speak to me at random, sometimes stammering, a few apt and picturesque phrases, and I watched, as if I had read him, as "Valéry" was born in its raw state. It was a curious sight:

— How do you define modern? Modern is about surprise. It's all about the initial shock. Just walk around Paris at night. The advertising, the lights that go out and come back on, it's all based on the same idea.

on the pleasure of discontinuity and surprise. Advertising is impressionistic. And what could be more contrary to the laws of the mind? Only those who move slowly are noble: look at the Arabs.

He also told me two apologues. Here is the first:

— The last craftsmen who knew how to cut stone accurately are dead. They were employed to build the railway bridges under which an oblique arch passes. Now, of course, we make reinforced cement decks. But when these bridges were made of cut stone, the stones to be cut very precisely, because the vault was at an angle. The whole thing had to give the impression of a malleable material that had been twisted. So each stone had to be cut at a different angle. There was a whole mathematics involved in these simple bridges, which seemed very ordinary. Today, the last of the craftsmen are dead, and an entire craft in which the spirit was involved no longer exists.

And here's the second:

— I always say to the young people who visit me: you can have ten thousand birds in the sky every day, and if you don't have a gun you won't catch any. But if just one goes by, you have a gun and you just shoot, that's enough.

But these were just generalities. Others were more blunt. Henri Massis spoke of the influence of Gide, and the fervour with which he was discovered after the war as a new author, and rightly declared that "escapist literature" was now closed. Albert Thibaudet quipped about generations and exhibitions. Jules Supervielle spoke of a kind of surrealist classicism. One day I went to lunch at Marcel Arland's, who lived near Mantes in a delightful eighteenth-century property surrounded by greenery, and we talked very freely, as we strolled through the fields, about the most illustrious writers of the so-called closed period. It wasn't all very nice, but we still happened to be interested in literature. The expression "the end of the post-war period" seemed ingenious and became almost popular. Joseph Delteil, whose *Jeanne d'Arc* had caused a minor scandal in the heyday of 1926 or 1927, was not at all happy that his funeral was taking place, and he let it be known in *Nouvelles littéraires*. "*We were twenty years old at a blessed time, when false gods were crumbling to dust everywhere... Such was the post-war era: verdant, free and joyous... I don't know if a better opportunity will ever present itself for man to make a new skin.*" Others took the

defence of Montherlant and Paul Morand. They were told that they were not attacking any talent, but that they wanted to move on to games other than escapism, anxiety and, above all, their exploitation. *Fine gravediggers*," replied Delteil, *"I demand the names of the corpses!* All this was accompanied, on the part of the defenders of the incriminated period, by bitter-sweet thoughts about the young people who were taking the liberty of judging their elders without having proven themselves. With bad faith, they attributed to the post-war period all the writers who had published books there, even if they had emerged in 1900, such as Claudel, Gide, Maurras others.

As for Mr Guehenno, he simply saw it as a "reactionary" conspiracy against the people. It was fun. Most newspapers, even non-literary ones, took up the question. In short, there was some noise, which seems surprising to us today. It's true that the literary post-war period died around this time. It is also true that, with its errors, its catchphrases and its false novelties (Jean Paulhan rightly pointed out to the investigator that the entire post-war period was already present in the pre-war writers, Max Jacob and Apollinaire), the post-war period was a lively, brilliant, graceful and crazy time for art, and today we can only regret it. But this quarrel was also, I believe, its last manifestation, because it doesn't seem to me that literature was ever given the slightest importance afterwards.

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We could play literary games, in any case, we were always disrespectful of opinions, and all that didn't seem much more serious to us than *Fulgur*. Fortunately, I never knew too many people around me to take literature tragically, and we would have found that distasteful. In reality, we were still students.

Normaliens de fait ou d'occasion, we would have regretted abandoning the admirable freedom of the École too quickly. But in those years, Parisian students could take shelter in places other than the lycées, the Facultés and the cafés of the Quartier Latin, and we must complete the picture of that era with that of the Cité Universitaire, which at the time turned down thousands of applications, and whose popularity later waned a little.

I know it well enough, I think, having lived there myself for a year and having worked there for another year, for a friend (30). {In January 1931, José Lupin stayed at the Cité Universitaire, where I often went to see him. Having failed the agrégation for the first time in July 1931, I lived in the Cité myself from October 1931 to July 1932. José Lupin was doing his military service at Saint-Cloud, and we saw him almost as often. Thierry Maulnier was a second lieutenant in the provinces. Maurice Bardèche was finishing his fourth year at the École, and naturally I continued to spend my days in our thurne, as if nothing had changed, except that I slept at the Cité and sometimes ate there. Raoul Audibert was staying at la Cité at the same time as me}. Quite well, but probably not quite in the way we know other places from our youth, and it seems to me that I'm not the only one to suffer from this essential lack of knowledge. Whether we like it or not, and despite the efforts of the official authorities, it is part of the city itself, its life and its being. Sometimes I imagine that the Boulevard Saint-Michel, which seems to be no more than the Latin Quarter itself and which is far from being a hundred years old, was, for a few years, just as poorly integrated into the existence of young people, perhaps deserted, perhaps cold. I'm not sure that the Cité is still completely integrated into the life of a modern student.

It's charming though, with its houses as fragile as Exhibition pavilions. It has that slightly old-fashioned charm of temporary buildings, and the wind that blows through the trees in Parc Montsouris seems to shake the cardboard walls and poorly sealed windows. I'm talking, of course, of the French Cité . . . the honour of its founder, In the words of Mr Deutsch de la Meurthe, it takes the form of an Alsatian village from a comic opera (nothing in common with the real Alsatian villages), arranged around a central lawn and a building in the shape of a church with a steeple, which is nothing more than a poor library. The other 'cities' are castles in fake Louis XIII style, in fake Renaissance style, a fake Greek temple for the Greeks, a vaguely Chinese pavilion for the Orient, - and two modern creations, just two, the Dutch pavilion, huge and grey, and Le Corbusier's Swiss pavilion. All this, along the Boulevard Jourdan, makes for a slightly baroque, slightly comic sequence. But Parc Montsouris is nearby, with its fake buildings too, its fake Moorish style, its fake caves and lake, almost fake swans and fake trees. You'd think you were walking through a world invented by René Clair, the Luna-Park of *À nous la Liberté*, where the birds sing in French, the paper flowers shake in the wind and the trees are fake.

speak. It was a poet's idea to set young people up in falsity from the start, in the world of postcards and romances.

And yet, while in 1931 the French pavilions were rejecting around eight hundred applications a year for lack of space, when the crisis hit, a room in the Quartier Latin, which was astronomically expensive at the time, became affordable. Almost always without much in the way of comfort, but do young people want comfort? Let's lose that illusion. The Cité was far away; on the other hand, and no matter how little, it raised its prices. Soon nothing was easier than finding a place there.

In practical terms, what are its faults? The rooms in the Cité are comfortable, although they are not very beautiful and the mediocrity of the materials used, due to a lack of money, gives them a faded appearance. I'm talking about the French Cité here, because most of the foreign pavilions (especially Switzerland) are truly to be emulated. Almost nowhere is there anything to complain about in terms of comfort, which, for such a low price, provides students with heating, bathrooms and solitude. Unfortunately, the distance from the study centre puts a considerable strain on the budget (31). {A bus every quarter of an hour is useless and, on top of that, it stops at eight o'clock in the evening. So it's always empty. The Porte d'Orléans, where communications are more convenient, is ten minutes away. We should not be surprised if students tend to seek accommodation in the Latin Quarter}.

There is a restaurant in the Cité, common to all nations. For a long time, it was housed in a wooden shed. Today it is sumptuously housed in the vaulted rooms of the Maison Internationale, where you always serve yourself on a tray, which eliminates service charges. But is it possible to have lunch at the Cité when you've just finished a course at midday and have another one at two o'clock? Certainly not. And the food is mediocre. A meal costs six to eight francs, and there's no shortage of food in the Quartier Latin at that price; that's what the students who went on strike one year said. So we should not be surprised if the majority of those who stay there are content to sleep there, leave it in the morning, find it again at night, and, after a year, abandon it without much more love than the love one might have for a hotel room. So we should not be surprised if the city remains unknown to its inhabitants, and if, to discover its charm, some attention and some merit are needed.

The great mistake of those who imagined it on the obvious model of the American Universities is to have not understood that a city

University life cannot be imagined without the proximity of work. The liveliness, the feverish joy that has filled the Latin Quarter for centuries, does not come from the greater or lesser comfort of the classrooms, restaurants and bedrooms. It comes from the constant presence of students. They can go down to the straw of the rue du Fouarre to listen to Abélard or Albert le Grand, they can leave the slopes of the rue Tournefort and Rastignac's garret in the pension Vauquer, they only have to walk a few steps to find their teachers, their friends, their work and their pleasures. The Cité Universitaire, half an hour from the Latin Quarter, separates rest and work, rest and pleasure, in the most unfortunate way. I'm not just saying that you don't enjoy the same freedom there as in a private room, although that counts too, for boys of eighteen or twenty. The fact that you have to go home at one o'clock in the morning has not prevented anyone from climbing over the railings, which an ironic and benevolent administration has set at a height of ninety centimetres. The bottom line is that you can't live in the Cité and you can't work there unless you love your cell.

I don't think that this divorce was in the mind of the Minister of Public Education, Mr Honnorat, who is a little forgotten today, and who was much joked about in his day because he didn't have a bachelor's degree, but who had two semi-celestial inventions: the Cité Universitaire and summer time. However, certain obstacles are stronger than a minister; he can undoubtedly stop the sun, but he won't change anything at the University.

And yet, who could fail to see how much the Cité Universitaire could transform the lives of students, a life that is sad enough when compared to that of foreign students, and which can only be saved by the strength of youth? For my part, I think back fondly to the time I spent between these ivy-covered walls, in this fable-like setting. You don't have to live in certain places all day to love them and remember them, I would even say you don't have to know them. I sometimes wonder whether the charm of the city is not due in part to its abandonment, and whether, just as Barrès, Proust and Henri de Régnier sang of dead cities, just as we love Bruges, Venice or Toledo because there is something pure and isolated about them, there might not one day be a poet who would sing of this distant, slightly enigmatic land, this island of youth where youth itself shelters only with mistrust.

Deprived of any profound significance because of the absence of the Schools, the Cité Universitaire as conceived and as built will only reveal its charm to those who do not ask more of it than it can give. Its location on the edge of Paris, on the very edge of the bare countryside, separated from the suburbs and Gentilly by a wide strip of isolated land, will serve it well. Perhaps for the picturesque, we will miss the area we used to call "Morocco", and all the hot mess of shacks and old wagons that stood against the false church of the Cité française. Perhaps we should miss the shed of the temporary restaurant and the tramps of the Accommodation Centre. But only for the picturesque. Because I don't think that cleaning up this ring of Paris has undermined the Cité's privilege of being first and foremost a construction of dreams, cardboard, leaves and shadows.

So to anyone who arrives, I say: "Don't think you're going to find those international friendships here that you naively dreamt of in your home province. You'll make friends with people who have the same tastes as you, the same political opinions, the same way of talking about women, and probably the same job. Just like anywhere else. Don't think you'll save much either, and if you lived in a bad room in the Quartier, you wouldn't spend any more. But here, you'll be better off. You'll be warm. You'll be able to wash, which in France, believe me, is still a luxury. You'll have the Parc Montsouris, one of the wonders of the city, right next door. And wait until summer, when you can tell me all about the Cité.

Wait until summer... If I try to remember the Cité, all I can do is evoke summer and, as I hardly lived there during the day, summer nights. Then those boys and girls, brought together by chance, would really and solely become witnesses of their own age, of those wonderful days of youth when nothing happens, and of which we will always have an indescribable memory. The city then becomes what it really is, discovering its essence, and I believe that its essence is to be a ship. Standing on the sea, as unusual, as improbable, as false as a ship when, with all its lights on, it is alone on the plain without a harvest, in the very centre of the night. A ship, with its strangers brought together for a brief crossing, its quarrels, its loves and dislikes, a world in miniature, but ephemeral, and which the new season or the port of call will disperse.

Decorated by the night and the moon, the central bell tower of the Cité française becomes the bell tower of a church, where an uncertain hour rings out. Until ten o'clock, you can hear a phonograph playing on the central lawn, around which, from two or three bodies lying on the grass, a silence rises that is friendlier than conversation. Along Boulevard Jourdan, you can walk under the trees. Parc Montsouris doesn't close until eleven o'clock in the evening. Then a caretaker passes by, whom I've never seen, but whose invisible bell I've heard, and who seems to push a sort of transparent, fairy-like herd towards the gates at closing time, rather than children and men. Wouldn't you stay there all night, all your life, at this end of Paris, on the edge of the city, where you can hear the bell resounding in the distance and lighting up the sky with a red glow? So when the ship passes close to a coastline, it sometimes reveals in the night a lighted port, a city buried in shadow.

So we will visit it with more friendship, as soon as we have understood its profound mission . In the rooms built by Le Corbusier, an entire wall is glazed, and night, or day, enters the room familiarly. It's a symbol that I find quite beautiful, and one whose spirit I'd like to be sure to find at least in the other university pavilions. You have to be on a level with the night, on a level with the very space of the day, and know how to establish between the air and yourself, between the light and yourself, that communion that city dwellers no longer want to experience, and which they have so carefully forbidden to those of their children who live in books. The Cité Universitaire breaks with the old edict and opens the doors and windows of prisons.

Later, when the inhabitants of the Cité meet other young people, I think it will probably be impossible for them to evoke the shared memories that so conveniently bring together former pupils of the same lycées or schools. Perhaps they will be lucky enough to have known the same temporary restaurant, in the same place, to have met, pink and golden like a young Rubens, this Hélène Fourment who guards the door and is famous among all the students. But I think that's all. For immediately, they will each return to their own domain. One will enjoy the summer nights, listening to American records on the lawn. The other, work, a third, clandestine visits. One will have attended all the balls of all the foreign foundations, and the second will never have appeared. And one will say that

the other that he found charming friends there. They will all be right, because the Cité was created to safeguard what is threatened everywhere and to teach young people about individualism. It's an almost miraculous originality.

It's as if they wanted to set up some sort of prodigious market on the very edge of Paris. Multicoloured tents and shops are erected in the light wind and sunshine. A crowd of people no older than thirty crowded around these tents and shops. But what is on display? What are they selling at this market? I think they are exhibiting and selling one and the same thing. Disorder and illusion seem to be part of our pleasure. Because what we come to admire at the top of the old Montsouris hill, where the Paris meridian used to pass when the clocks marked noon at exactly noon, what we come to admire are the light buildings left behind, as souvenirs and witnesses, by the very fair of youth.

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We would sometimes visit, because we've always had a certain sense of community, if I think about it, but of a small, purely friendly community. And my last few months at school, my year at the Cité, in those late post-war days, combined the pleasures of being a student with the first pleasures of newspapers and the joy of writing.

There was a time, in the blessed pre-war period, when students who loved literature were happy to found a magazine. The young people's journals, which sometimes died after the first issue, we know that Barrès called them *orphéons*, and was interested in them with amused curiosity. Roger Vailland had collaborated on *Le Grand Jeu*, and, luxurious as it was, *Bifur* was no less than a first-class *orphéon*. Around 1930, some of our friends at the École even wanted to found a publication of this kind, but they were scientists who assured us that M. Herriot and M. Painlevé would collaborate on the first issue. Disgusted by these official celebrities, we scowled at the absurd project, and the magazine never appeared. It is true that towards the end of the year, like hermit crabs, we discovered an ancient shell and made it our home.

I don't think posterity will have a particularly vivid memory of *the Revue française*. But we never think of it without pleasure, because we had a lot of fun with it. This publication must have been in existence for a little over a quarter of a century, and before 1914 had led the quiet and gentle life of an emulator of the *Annales*. Well-meaning, bourgeois, provincial, it was made for another time, and for a clientele that was dying out without being replaced. It belonged to Antoine Redier, who had published books of memories of the war, and who, supported by a small publishing house run by his son Alexis, was trying to retain the Catholic public, mainly in the northern provinces. Pious ladies wrote harmless little tales and gave moral advice. When there wasn't enough copy to fill its large weekly issues with blue covers and woodcuts, which were always quite copious, they would rush to the right authors: we had a good laugh one day when we came across an issue from 1922 devoted to infinity, with texts by Pascal, Lamartine and Anatole France. It's clear that big subjects didn't scare us. In short, there was no less revolutionary magazine, further removed from the ideas and tastes of young people. It was there, however, that we would take our first real steps into journalism, that we would learn to love the printing presses, the physical work of writing, the composition of an issue, and many other pleasant games.

At the end of 1930, Henri Massis brought together a few young people he knew to ask them to write critical notes for *the Revue universelle*. Thierry Maulnier and I came, as we had already started writing for *Action Française*. When we left the meeting, we went to the Café de Flore to finish our discussions by drinking a few half-caffs with a boy we didn't know, who was short, wiggly, and who wore, on top of a long face, an enormous spiky hair the colour of punch that he waved like a torch. At the time he signed himself Jean Maxence (32) {Later, after a trial for no good reason, he signed himself Jean-Pierre Maxence}, and his real name was Pierre Godmé. Henri Massis used to visit him, around 1925, at the seminary where he was studying, then he spent some time as a licentiate at the Sorbonne, ran a small publishing house, *Éditions Saint-Michel*, on rue Servandoni, and founded a youth magazine, *Les Cahiers*, which bore the name of the year in which it appeared (1928, then 1929, 1930, and even, for a few issues, 1931).

Finally, he had recently become editor-in-chief of that good old *Revue française* which, in the eyes of the most intrepid subscribers, we had to do something quite frightening when you think about it. He asked us to go and see him, and in the last few weeks of 1930, Thierry Maulnier, Maurice Bardèche and I began to contribute to it, while José Lupin and Raoul Audibert (33) {Raoul Audibert was actually the first of us to have frequented the house. In April 1930, the Rediers founded a short-lived magazine called *Contacts*, which disappeared prematurely. Raoul Audibert wrote for it and also published a collection of three short stories, *Montagnes*, that year, before writing a charming book: *Midi, rue Soufflot*} and Georges Blond.

It seems to me that we've entered into this somewhat as conquerors, jostling frightened old ladies, and indulging in the most reckless fantasies contrary to the very spirit of journalism. Every week, we expressed our ideas about the universe with disarming candour and certainty. I think my first article was a *funeral oration for M. Gide*, which Jean-Pierre Maxence republished in his *Cahiers*, where M. Gide read it (34). {He expressed his bad temper about it in his *Diary*}. From then on, everything was covered: literary and political articles, images of the provinces and vague musings. Maurice Bardèche had undertaken a patient and beautiful description of Paris, its districts, its faces. Thierry Maulnier kept a political bulletin there, where today we might look for evidence of his young maturity. The collection of *the Revue française*, today, seems to me something strange. For the old collaboration had not disappeared. They continued to moralise families as they had always done, and the well-meaning contributors tried to keep their place. But alongside them, young students were having fun writing whatever came into their heads and, when they had nothing to say, coldly publishing their schoolwork: Maurice gave learned remarks on Ghiberti and the Van Eycks, and I put together the material for a Sorbonne lecture on Joinville. Little by little, distractions began to appear in the former (35). {At the start of the 1931 academic year, I took up drama criticism, and Maurice film criticism. Book criticism was taken over by a friend of Maxence's, François Retailliau, who signed Augustin Fransque}. I must add that the results of this intensive rejuvenation were not long in coming: by the end of autumn 1931, the magazine was appearing only every fortnight s (36) {The cover of

This new series was from then on unchanging, sober and linear, instead of the touching little antlers that were the rule. It was designed by a charming anarchist, Pierre Pinsart} and in June 1932, it became a monthly - for a few months only, before disappearing altogether.

It would not be difficult, if one wished, to paint a fairly caricatural picture of *the Revue française*. It would be necessary to depict this cashier, as they don't make them any more, more avaricious of the common money than of his own, and from whom his due was snatched with infinite pain. And also depict those solicitors who, in the morning, waited two or three hours for someone to pay what they were owed, until, fed up, the pink and blond Alexis Redier, who was not much older than our age, finally said to the cashier:

— You will give the gentleman twenty francs.

From time to time, one of the directors would leave for the North, on mysterious trips to Catholic industrialists, to try and bail out his leaky ship. Sometimes he would return satisfied and start paying the editorial staff. It also happened that a creditor with an illustrious name, red with anger, hat on his head, cane raised, would enter the offices of the magazine, screaming his head off. He would come out after an hour, calm, happy, laughing, usually having left a new grant. Through this powdery landscape, we passed, a little incomprehensible, and enjoying ourselves. Even stranger figures entered our lives, whom we only understood afterwards: long white faces with moustaches, half anarchist, half policeman; a well-fed, well-spoken Creole who disappeared one day for his native islands after organising a huge banquet in honour of François Mauriac, for which the admirers paid, but the restaurant owner never received a penny; here and there, good people blinking like bats caught in broad daylight, bumping into the bars, no longer quite understanding how one could walk on this shifting ground, and timidly bringing pious, pink manuscripts wrapped in the flowers of a good conscience; and holy men, patriotic and pious, shrewd and patient, whose secret adventures were told under wraps, and about whom my good master, André Bellessort, was to say to me one day:

— Before the war, he had already stolen a million. It was a strange world, and we didn't understand it.

And in there, Maxence, his hair bristling, sowing around him the ashes of a hundred cigarettes a day, bubbling over ideas, invectives

dreams, mistakes, magnificent projects, convinced that we were all geniuses, proclaiming it anyway, running from one to the other, rebuilding the universe until four in the morning.

Those who do not like him do not understand what influence the Maxence of 1931 was able to exert. It came not from his articles or the books he had already published, but from a truly extraordinary vitality, a great zeal for organising a 'team', and an even greater kindness towards the members of that team. I must admit that he wasn't always very choosy when it came to choosing his team. Later, above all, he gave his protection, his friendship, his prodigious animation, to a few boys without personality or talent who complacently joined his shadow. An unrepentant night owl, he dragged them into all the bistros of Montparnasse, praised their works, their articles, their ideas, set up phantom juries which awarded illusory prizes every month, juries of pale courtiers promoted to great critics for the occasion, he ran through parties, newspapers, which were far from being worthy of him, but where he found that warm atmosphere of brasserie, agitation and camaraderie that he needed. I'll always think it's a shame. In the days when we were producing *the Revue française*, Maxence used to involve us in his tumultuous life, and let us enjoy everything that belonged to him, with an enthusiasm that never wavered.

Throughout our reign, *the Revue* was published by the same printer, whose workshops were first in the rue Madame, then in the XVth arrondissement, in one of those working-class districts with tall new houses that those who do not know them find devoid of character. It was a vast hangar with a gallery overlooking the machines. It was there that we learned the physical pleasures of printing, the smell of lead and ink, and the pleasure of touching the large sheets of paper, always slightly embossed, of the first proofs. We drew up the mock-up at Redier, rue de Sèvres, on this old issue that we used blue pencil to clean up. When an article was too short, or needed to be illuminated, we placed a few passe-partout drawings, chosen haphazardly, because we didn't really care about illustrations. There were soldiers in helmets, flowers and animals. One day, Robert Vallery-Radot, who had given us the last part of his book on Lamennais, came to us with a half ironic, half timid request:

— I understand very well," he said, "your principle of illustrations. The only problem is that you've put a little rabbit in the middle of the story of Lamennais's death. I don't think that's quite right.

The rabbit, with one ear raised and the other lowered, had a mocking eye and a casual attitude. Since then, we've only ever called these figures "rabbits".

François Retailliau owned a car, and he was even the only boy in our immediate circle to enjoy such a luxury. On Tuesdays, we got into the habit of leaving with him, Maxence, Maurice, Thierry Maulnier and me, and going to lunch in the countryside, in the Chevreuse valley or the Marne valley, in small restaurants where we were usually alone on chilly winter days. The first year passed very pleasantly. Maxence was still running *the Éditions Saint-Michel* for some time, *the Revue française* paid its contributors fairly regularly, we were rich, and we enjoyed the first and simplest appearances of luxury.

At that time, Henri Massis had given a lecture in which he reminisced about Anatole France, Barrès and Péguy. Maxence asked him to write the text for *the Revue*. The memoirist was won over, and little by little the lecture became a book. Every week, Henri Massis, like the legendary soap opera writers, would give us, always at the last minute, two or three great pages on his youth and the other pre-war period. At around ten o'clock in the evening, Maxence and I would go to his house to tear out the last few pages he often read to us, to ask our opinion, and out of Barrésian concern for the sentence. It was these pages that became his best book, *Évocations*. He would also come to the printing works to correct the proofs, which we would take together to a small café in a quiet, provincial square nearby. We were hardly disturbed except by a good chap who put a token in the music box, and we talked about Péguy, Henri Franck, Bergson, M^{me} de Noailles and Barrès. When I wrote about his book in *Action Française*, Henri Massis wrote to me from the bottom of his heart: "*This book, written for you people, only you know how to talk about it in the way I secretly wanted people to talk about it... And I have only one thing to say to you: I like you. So life goes on: this morning it brought me your testimony... and a grandson whom I'm going to kiss. In twenty years' time, you might tell him about his grandfather.* Such was her affection.

We would take our friends to the École's parties, drink champagne in thurne, and, on beautiful Parisian nights, we would tirelessly take each other through the streets, each to our homes, and we remember sometimes chatting like this with Maxence, a bit as a game and a dare, until the early hours of the cold morning. For the first time those years, I also went to *the Action française* printing works, which is still on rue Montmartre, in a beautiful house with a Renaissance staircase. In those days, Charles Maurras arrived a little earlier than he does today, around eleven o'clock in the evening. We would wait for him on the narrow ground floor, filled with the noise of the machines (where I later spent so many hours), chatting with the page editor, M. Blin, who was observing Maurras with an attentive and severe eye in a famous photograph. I met Lucien Rebatet, who was in charge of the literary page, and François Vinneuil, the best film critic in the whole of the French press. At eleven o'clock, there would a big commotion, and a few young people would come in, heavy canes in their hands: they were the pedlars on duty. Then Maurras would arrive, his small, battered black felt hat on his head, newspapers in his pockets. He would raise his face in that gesture familiar to all who saw him, he would make a friendly pout, and smiling, he would hold out his hand. We followed him into the incredible storeroom on the first floor, lined with the *Action française* collections, which he shares with Maurice Pujo. Next door, a small room with a bunker, where the guard service spends the night. On the walls are anti-republican graffiti and drawings. And through the smoke of the cigarettes, you can hear the heavy rumbling of the machines, and you are always late, and the articles are never ready on time, and the illustrious hieroglyphs of Maurras pose problems for the only typographer capable of reading them that are as arduous as those of the epigraphy of the Middle Ages.

Today I combine these memories with those I took with me from the other printing works of the time, where our work so easily took on the appearance of student games sometimes, always fun. At the same time, I continued to go backstage with the Pitoëffs who, while I was living in the Cité, were at the Avenue, on the Champs-Élysées, performing *Œdipe*, *Médée* and *La Belle au Bois*. We still went there by tram, on an interminable journey. I used to love those dusty irrespirable places, theatres, engine rooms, where you couldn't sit down or even stand up, where there was never any room but lots of draughts, and where you felt so deliciously ill. I haven't changed my taste since those years.

We continued to live in the eminent dignity of the provisional, and Maxence even added new provinces to the bohemia for us. When *the Revue française* began to falter seriously, when contributors began to be paid more and more late, Maxence lived in a studio on the Boulevard Saint-Marcel. He got married in the autumn of 1931. We used to organise picnic lunches at his place, where we did all the cooking ourselves, and every month we would find the vegetables from the previous month sprouting into impressive forests in the pantry. Not everything was rosy in the bohemian world: we could see it in the lives of some of the *Revue's* contributors, who took on a sort of hunted look, became embittered, and were no doubt ready to compromise and indulge in all manner of mediocrity. It wears a man down to expect 15 francs every morning. We can only have indulgence for those who have lost so many of their gifts, so much of their heart and mind. But we found out later that they really had lost a lot. At that time, we were enjoying the embarrassments of *the Revue*, and we could not yet see the signs of wear and tear on the faces we knew. The second year of our *orphéon* was not as free as the first, it was less free, but we were still among ourselves, we were not personally affected by the financial misfortunes of *the Revue*, we continued to go from time to time to the countryside, with François Retailliau, and Maxence's brother, who signed Robert Francis vehemently polemical articles, and a strange novel, full of sweetness. We would later find the essence of it in *La Grange aux Trois Belles* and the books that followed it. As restless, lively and dynamic as Maxence was, Robert Francis was secretive, smiling, stubborn and gentle at the same time, with a childlike face beneath his grey hair.

La Revue française had published some superb pages by Georges Bernanos, later collected in *La Grande peur des bien-pensants*. We met the author of this torrential, chimerical book three or four times, and talked to this man with a big lion's face under his long hair. One day I dined with him at Robert Vallery-Radot's house. He had not yet fallen out with *l'Action française*, which he abandoned in a senseless manner, and he had not yet begun his long and talkative detestation of Maurras, which has become his essential illness. He promised us his lasting friendship "which I never take back when I have given it", he used to say. One day in 1931, he wrote to me from Hyères: "*I have just*

to finish reading today's Action française and I hasten to drink to your health... You are an amazing guy who walks on his own two feet, a rare phenomenon these days". This is the only letter I have from Georges Bernanos, who was later to sink into an obscure and sooty universe, where this Christian anarchist would get lost.

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So we discovered a world that was certainly less free than the world of Louis-le-Grand and the École, and less pure too. Ambition had its place there, as did poverty. We didn't understand everything, because we entered it as amateurs, with no real need for it, amused only by its picturesqueness, and tasting at first, as in the past, the camaraderie. Maxence had us sign a rather grandiloquent anti-Briandist manifesto, we were beginning to take an interest in the new Germany, we announced the imminent arrival of Hitler, and Thierry Maulnier prefaced in the most remarkable way the book by a young Nazi, who committed suicide for the honour of his party, with the most accurate reflections on what differentiates our nationalism from German nationalism. For a collection of *Revue* texts, I was preparing an edition of the *Procès de Jeanne d'Arc*, and Maurice was copying Arnauld d'Andilly's graceful translations of the *Desert Fathers* by Saint Jerome and his disciples. But above all we added images to the other images with which youth had endowed us, and this was done with complete freedom, with a luck that we can only congratulate ourselves on. We read Claudel, whose *Soulier de satin* appeared in 1930, we moored the greatest names and the greatest works to our comical boat, and we continued, with Massis or Supervielle, the games of the court of Louis-le-Grand or the roofs of the École.

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Jules Supervielle had just published the wonderful tales of *L'Enfant de la Haute Mer* when we met him: "*It seems to me,*" he wrote to me in his first letter, "*that without ever having seen you, I would recognise you if I met you.*" We saw him several times in those days, and I'll always remember one of the first, in a restaurant

Montparnasse where we had invited him. From the outset, we recognised the poet of *Gravitations* and *Débarcadères* in his long, swaying body, his planetary, granitic face, his distant gaze, the way he waved his beautiful, large hands in front of him like the Hindu fakir preparing to climb the rope that stood unsupported in the air. He knew nothing about the young people around him, but he talked to them, and we asked him to tell us poems that he recited in a slow, surprised voice, with an incoercible feeling of amazement at each word that he seemed to discover as we did. That evening he told us his delightful *Prophecy* of the End of the World:

*Instead of the forest,
bird will sing...*

First of all, like all those who came into contact with him, I found him to be "the thief of children", since he had six, just one less than my friends Georges and Ludmilla. Above all, I will never forget, in that vast flat on the Boulevard Lannes overlooking the Bois, the extraordinary impression one could have of those astonishingly beautiful creatures surrounding him, Spanish women with dull complexions, who one would have liked to be anonymous, adorned only with a discreet label, "the poet's wife", "the poet's daughters". Jules Supervielle was kind enough to read me his poems, his fairy tale of *Belle au Bois*, which the Pitoëffs were to perform in the spring of 1932, and which we asked him to write for *the Revue française*, which published it in the summer. One day he took me to Vaugirard to see a friend of Rainer Maria Rilke's, who barely knew French, and who nevertheless read us admirable translations of poems, mysterious, clumsy and magical, which she declaimed, dressed in red, beneath a copy of *L'Enterrement du comte d'Orgaz*.

At the end of those months, we were to see him again, in other landscapes, more suited to his nature. My sister, Maurice and I had spent a few days' holiday in Saint-Tropez, which was all the rage at the time, but where we led a quiet life, going to bed well before midnight and just enjoying the hustle and bustle of the port and the beautiful hours on the gulf. We had abandoned the hard collars of our adolescence for wide ties and spread collars. We no longer wore walking sticks in the Latin Quarter. On holiday, we wore sailors' suits, thick blue or breezy canvas; the year before, we'd adopted pyjamas for women, and we were curious about the first *shorts*. In Sainte-Maxime and Juan-les-Pins that year, people gambled in casinos and nightclubs.

cockroach racing boxes. It was a rather special holiday, in fact, the last of our student life. We didn't quite know what the future might hold, but we'd scraped together enough money for a few days in a modest hotel with excellent food, for walks through the grey and beautiful streets, for races along the coast. We even went as far as Nice, to stroll around the admirable old city, under the extensive linens, with our friend Raoul Audibert, to taste Bouttau's Provençal cuisine, - as far as Monaco and Monte-Carlo, to discover the architecture of the Second Empire, the old ladies who were obsessed with martingales and, in turn, the roulette wheel and that slot machine in the bar where the washed-up people melancholically go to lose their last twenty-cent coins. At the time, Colette had a perfume shop on the harbour. She had published a little book that I had mentioned. *Théocrite et les gros mots*", she wrote to me. *Basically, I'm very happy. Come and see me again in the little shop at the end of the day. I thank you with more pleasure than I care to show, and I shake your hand in friendship.* We went to say hello. I was correcting the proofs a pseudo-novel, an album of images from my Mediterranean country. It was during this trip that I spent two days in Port-Cros, where Jules Supervielle rented the François I^{er} fort at the entrance to the island. We walked barefoot so as not to slip on the pine needles, through the fragrant paths, we climbed to the top of the island, at "In the morning, in the garden surrounded by thick walls, open to the violet sea, between the cacti, Jules Supervielle wore a huge planter's hat. In the morning, in the walled garden overlooking the violet sea, between the cacti, Jules Supervielle wore a huge planter's hat under a fig tree. He read us the unpublished verses of *Les Amis inconnus*:

And what are you doing, O troubled memory?...

I can still hear his deep, patient voice in the marvellous setting. This image by the sea is one of the most graceful that remains with me, with the beautiful, fragrant forest, the fortifications on the red rocks, the child thief and the lovely young girls, and the island deprived of song (there are no birds at Port-Cros, only beehives), but full of the familiar bees and the words of the poet.

It joined the last images of my student life, my last days at the School or in the City, everything that had taken on an even more striking charm in the fine days of July.

It was at the end of those months, in fact, that we had perfected, and in a supreme way, it seemed to us, the use of the School. My sister had made the acquaintance, in the world of *tapirs*, of a young girl who was 'Mademoiselle' to two families, if I remember correctly. Marguerite Neel struck us as graceful, with golden skin and a nonchalant character. We told her she would become a 'lady' one day. In the meantime, when July arrived and her lessons were over, she thought she had to go back to her family, thinking without pleasure of copying forms at fifty francs a thousand for the Préfecture de Police or the Palais de Justice, I don't remember. We recoiled. And the school? She came every day, even twice a day, to our thurne, during those last days of summer that we still wanted to spend in Paris. We brought her meals from the refectory. We called her our daughter. Two or three times we went to the naturalists' garden, where I don't think I'd ever spent more than an hour in all my years at school. There was a broken bench and an old chair. We would bring in the phonograph we had bought, our first luxury, the refectory dinners, and set up slightly melancholy picnics. It was the end: already the charming jungle was disappearing, already it was being crushed between the high walls of the new École des Sciences. We climbed up to the terraces of the new buildings, pointing out the whole of Paris to our friend in the reddening night, the gardens, the churches; we looked at our old school, its courtyard guarded by busts. Then we'd come back, the four friends who'd become five, we'd put on our favourite records and stay up late under the cool trees. Fifteen days, three weeks - I don't think any of these parties, paradoxical in a state school, lasted any longer. That's long enough to see the very symbol of our youth.

The last few days I spent at the School were filled with a wonderful melancholy. The thurne was gradually covered in dust, a symbol of the hours that were ready to disappear forever. We had more or less abandoned it on those hot July days in 1932 to work in the garden or courtyard. The laziest of us, myself included, could not, out of human respect, resist dragging the Greek and Latin authors the agrégation under the charcoal and acacia trees. In the evenings, we also took the phonograph there, and for a few more times, we let *the Pavane* and *the Boléro*, already a little worn, already a little creaky, play, or the easier tunes, richer perhaps in memories, that were so popular at the time.

had been those of old films. The most obtuse of our comrades, like all of us, felt the price of these unique moments that all students had undoubtedly experienced at the end of their true youth. We were twenty-two, twenty-three years old: the following months would take us away to some garrison town, then life would begin, a career, a flat, money to earn, perhaps marriage, maturity for sure. One more moment of freedom, in the oasis of the École, in the middle overheated Paris, under the trees hit by the scorching summer. One more moment of happiness.

We savoured those mortal minutes, enchanted that they were mortal, drunk with our close memories, drunk with friendship, camaraderie, the most profound discoveries, the marvellous frivolity of our lives.

A little more time, and we would have to abandon these treasures, close these pages. A little time, under a clear sky, before the ironic gaze of sixty busts. A little time to run to the local cinemas to see the films of seven years, the gardens, the cafés, Paris at night under the lanterns of 14 July, a little time to say goodbye to our adolescence.

IV

MISSED REVOLUTIONS

The year 1933 is perhaps not the clearest in the sequence of our youthful years. On the contrary, it is blurred, pale and dulled by turns, with that ghostly, cawing aspect of Edgar Poe's raven sitting on the bust of Pallas that capital hours easily take on in our memory. This was indeed the momentous year of all, the one we had been waiting for without knowing it, as we glanced around us while pursuing our lively, gentle and wise personal adventure. It came at last, dark and streaked with brief glimmers, suddenly noisy, then muffled and muffled, and we could barely shake it off from our forecasts and our expectations, it was still confused with them, and yet it was the mysterious year of realisation and threat.

Our groups of friends were separated when she ascended into the new heavens, scattered all over France by military service or the beginnings of life. In Lyon, in a boarding house where I often ate my meals, I saw the first Jewish emigrants from Germany arrive. Not too terrified, in fact, and always in contact with wealthy relatives in Frankfurt or Berlin: people who foresaw the future and took precautions against hard knocks, but whose exile - which at the time was without suffering and without any real persecution - was already being orchestrated into enormous lamentations by the entire press on both continents. I knew one of them, no doubt a half-Jew, who regretted not being able to join the German army, as his whole family had done, and who asked candidly if he could not find equivalent advantages in the French army. Another, the son of a banker, spoke to me about the Nazis with a rather indifferent objectivity. It was he who wrote down for me in a notebook the words to their song, the *Horst Wessel Lied*, which I heard an emigrant Jew humming for the first time.

I also met them sometimes at the Villeurbanne swimming pool, where I went in the summer. Lyon stretched out around me, and I was slowly getting to know the most astonishing city in France, misty and grey between the two rivers. I wandered through the winding streets of the Croix-Rousse, where the city had so recently died out.

the noise of the trades. Friends came to see me there, we experimented with gastronomy in the very capital of good eating, and I still have a marvellous memory of a little bistro behind the Cercle Militaire, where the owner boldly charged according to the customer's head, but where the cooking was skilful and profound. The great masses of mist - on the Place Bellecour, the benches of whores together through the streets, the relief of the hundred thousand windows of the Croix-Rousse above the city - remain images that I have not forgotten, and on which other images of the world are superimposed, in the fashion of the old cinema.

But we mostly met in Paris, from various parts of France, we spent our evenings on the trains, and, with a provincial bulimia, we accumulated evenings at the theatre and matinees at the cinema to satiety. It was the year of *Intermezzo* and its ghosts, the ironic eulogy of the life of a civil servant, the masterpiece of poetry, the provincial symphony. When we went out, we repeated Giraudoux's lines under the burning sky: "What a beautiful night for little girls who want to learn to count to a million! And we would gather together, wandering through the streets, more homeless than ever, waiting in the little cafés of the Latin Quarter, we would gather together our youth, our friendships, our pleasures, we would extend over the course of this empty and scattered year the months of our near past. We came back to the Pitoëffs', we looked for our images of working-class Paris in René Clair's *Quatorze Juillet*, we went to see Viennese films, old-fashioned films. It was the great fashion for the "1900set, and probably the first time history that an era, albeit a recent one, was cherished not for its beauty but for its touching ridiculousness. Paul Morand had published a book on the first year of the century, people loved picture books, and the screen showed nothing but old waltzes and wide ribbon dresses. And we, searching the grey Parisian streets for the memory of years gone by, came across an older world, even more out of place, which seemed to push the time of the Charleston far beyond the time of the first tangos.

And yet it was a new year that was beginning, a year that would never cease to amaze people. We were listening to French television, which had almost waited until that year to spread everywhere and become a well-organised scourge. In previous years, which we have so quickly forgotten, it was grating and capricious, it excited the verve of caricaturists, it brought together souls of good will around random stations,

lost in search of a concert in the midst of frightening babble. But by 1932, the invention had reached a sufficient degree of power and ease. Everything was ready for us to hear, in the evening, when we turned on the German radio, that extraordinary National Socialist election campaign, a river of bells, drums and violins, all the demons of music unleashed.

Did we ever stop thinking about Germany? Is there a Frenchman alive to whom Germany has ceased to seem, even for a single year, like an ever-present companion? Before the Great War, and after it, is there a country that has been so much a part, not of our intellectual life, our curiosity, our reasoning, but of our very physical existence? Which has ensured that destiny, misfortune and happiness have at some point had a German face? We have always had this enormous planet above us, it has influenced our lives better than any star, and we have always known that without its inflexible course, the world would have been different. But suddenly, after the reveries of Geneva, the idylls by the lakes, the illusions, suddenly it settled in the very centre of the sky with a fiery radiance, and you'd have to be blind not to see it. That's what we used to tell ourselves as we followed the initiation ceremonies of the new cult on the French television stations, listening to the bells ringing out minute by minute to cut short the speeches and make the crowds bow their heads.

Had we been unaware of this, the emigrants would have warned us. Chased out in a jumble, whether Jews or Socialists, they began to build a vast Wailing Wall in France, before which they called the world to witness. They arrived with their amulets, the clenched fist salute (united like the five fingers of a hand), the three-pointed star of the Amsterdam-Pleyel group, which is just a brand of German car, the triple cry for bread, peace and freedom, the desire to unite all revolutionary parties in a red front, even those that have become bourgeois. And they also brought with them a monster, a phantom, the shadow of international fascism: they vehemently opposed the Red International to a White International, which was the source of all evil; they denounced in the slightest doctrine of authority an enormous, totalitarian heresy, ready to take over the universe. Until then, fascism had been Italy, hated but alone. In 1933, the "accursed doctrine" took hold of the old land of the Revolution, the birthplace of the

Marxism. Portugal, Poland and Lithuania were now living under dictatorships. Impatient young parties were already stirring in the liberal nations. The émigrés wept, raised their fists, said to France: "Beware" and did their best to help create the terror they denounced. Across Europe, we could already see the beginning of a war of religion, which would last more than five years, and we watched the first flames rise from afar.

The world of paper and clouds that our elders had believed in was ruined once and for all. It would have been another dream, no doubt, to applaud loudly the stubborn intrusion of reality into appearances: there was nothing pleasant about it, of course, but it was reality, and that was that. It appeared, like the great elongated globe of the sun bursting out of the sea, sudden and furious. And all was forgotten in the mists of dawn, and before the dawning star, it had to be admitted that many peoples, many men across the planet, recognised it as luminous and burning, and no longer wanted to hear about what had gone before.

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Faced with the arrival on the scene of German National Socialism, the bourgeois France of that year had other things to worry about. In the middle of the summer of 1933, it was not Hitler they talking about, but a little poisoner who had killed her father, almost killed her mother, and who had lived in the Quartier Latin among shady students whom she provided with money and pox. The drama of Violette Nozières captured the attention of an entire press devoted to infamy, and fascinated people in a way that no successful crime of recent years had done: Not since Landru, who killed his wives, had Mestorino or Barataud (these buried stars are hard to find) seduced the crowds as much as this pale, defeated little heroine, with the dubious, dirty details of her appalling life, the grey atmosphere of debauchery where cocktails, drugs and café-crème alternated, money and misery, in a setting of workers' dwellings, albeit with a few savings, an atrocious world without God. Before it was even forgotten, this tragedy was followed by several others: a young couple, drawn into a square game, killed themselves in disgust in the morning; a town councillor and music-hall manager, Oscar Dufrenne, was murdered by a companion

of pleasure, and the entire police force searched, or pretended to search, for months for a so-called little sailor. Soon the Republic's biggest financial scandal since Panama would erupt, and a disgraced dead man would blacken the snow of Chamonix with his blood. In the space of three months, the era took on a strange colour, and the indulgent painter of post-war follies, Paul Morand, showed the face of American negroes bent over our moribund society, and, recalling the horrific deaths of some of these victims, wrote in October 1933, in an article that caused quite a stir: "*We want clean corpses*". Six months later, the failed revolution of 6 February 1934 left Paul Morand with twenty-two people killed at La Concorde and a dozen brave revolutionary dead.

Perhaps it was the first time that we had the impression of being directly affected by external events, of suffering their direct consequences, and of plucking them out of their printed paper world. The political leaders who had disappeared or were to disappear had hitherto appeared to us - with the exception of Briand - in a kind of historical retreat. Clemenceau died as a Balzacian hero would have died, buried upright with a bouquet and an old book, in the Vendée countryside. Poincaré disappeared without ever having touched us. But here were men of lesser stature, whose actions and gestures were capable of changing our own actions and gestures, whom we hated or accepted as the provisional masters of our destinies, and with whom we seemed to have an almost familiar relationship, even if we had only seen them to whistle at them at the cinema. And we didn't read about street events in the newspapers, we encountered them, we walked on the broken tree grills of the Boulevard Saint-Germain, we ran into a demonstration, we watched the police charge. All this was now woven into the very fabric of our lives, the lives of restless young Parisians in the run-up to the war. And Europe itself was not forgotten.

We were young, though, no doubt, and we were even less likely to forget our past pleasures, our friendships and even our habits of life. We were no longer students, but we wanted to prolong our student existence as much as possible, and move the École thurne to Vaugirard, where chance and the availability of rent, which was difficult at the time, had fixed us. We arrived one fine day, with no furniture, no chairs, just a few suitcases and bedsprings in a three-room flat.

of a new house, under the suspicious eye of the concierge (37). {At the end of rue Lecourbe, I lived with my sister. Maurice Bardèche became my brother-in-law. Our friend from the last days of the École also stayed for a while in our camp, and friends from the past and from the present often shared our table. It was still a bit like student life, and Maurice was staying in Paris to start a thesis on the formation of the art of the novel in Balzac's novels}. When we disembarked as emigrants, we had no money, and the greatest uncertainty about our future, only a few charming probabilities, a few collaborations that could become indecisive, but insouciance with us, youth and hope. For the first few months, when our articles or lessons gave us the money we needed, we threw the notes on a sofa in a big heap (money in hundred-franc notes has a big effect), stirred them up and solemnly stirred them as if in a kettle, crumpling them up well, then divided them up according to the laws of the community.

I was to learn to love this popular, airy district, with its plain houses, but animated by a familiar life, and open, for those who knew how to look, to the most charming picturesque. We were looking for the old village of Vaugirard, which is not so difficult to recognise, through these wide streets between tall buildings. Almost always, nothing remains of its houses: but the very shape of a square, the illogical curve of a street, suddenly reveal the old country village. Modern times have thrown their weight behind it. It's a suburb, full of small factories, where, in the summer of 1936, the red flags will bloom, and where people will beg everywhere for the strikers. The Cambronne market, one of the liveliest in Paris, was contrasted with the shops in the new square, recently built on the site of the old gasworks: at Christmas, fishmongers and grocers dressed up in carnival costumes, Louis-Philippe hats and striped knitting dresses, and joyfully engaged in a war of rival markets. Every evening, under the big electric globes, the huge crowds fill the crossroads with shouts and haggling, imposing a magnificent life on these banal streets. The Russians have also chosen the 15th arrondissement as their place of exile. You meet popes with long beards and large pectoral crosses. You know that Old Believers, separated Christians among separated Christians, meet in a cellar. In the shops where ready-made meals are sold in the evening, there are hardly any Russians. We spent three years in this charming, provincial suburb, getting to know the old little baker, who

was delicious, the dyer, our cleaning lady's concierge who used to douse her cats in methylene blue, our cleaning lady herself, romantic, whimsical, devoted and baroque, the Italian ham merchant, the little square by the Convention metro station, with seven wooden benches under the poor trees, where on summer evenings, loads of lovers and old people would meet. We were telephoned three times a week to find out if we were a food colouring company, and without scruples, we would kindly offer macaroni incarnadine and kohlrabi dipped in walnut stain. We were approaching a free life in Paris through its most pleasant aspects, through its ingenious and clever little people, through the four-season merchants, the provincial craftsmen, the 'colour' merchants where you can find every conceivable and unconceivable thing, and the provincial life of the slightly outlying districts.

We left it to return to the old neighbourhoods our work and pleasure, the Latin Quarter, the Champs-Élysées, the theatres, and also the new publication that had replaced for us (with a few differences) *the Revue française* of our adolescence. Since the success of *Candide*, weeklies had always attracted publishers. *Gringoire* had shown that there was room for two on the market. Soon *Marianne*, illustrated with pleasing photographs and driven by Emmanuel Berl's brilliant and subtle wit, was trying to win over left-wing readers. A sort of "right-wing" *Marianne*, also illustrated, came to mind. The Plon bookshop prepared the plans, and Henri Massis spoke to me about it in Lyon in the spring of 1933. It was given the "name of the year", like the old *Cahiers* de J.P. Maxence.

Mil neuf cent trente-trois was a very elegantly presented weekly, and undoubtedly the most pleasant to look at in those years- (38). {In addition to my duties as editorial secretary, I was drama critic. Film criticism was shared between Paul Brach, editor of Proust's correspondence, and Maurice Bardèche. Thierry Maulnier was a regular contributor to the *Jeunesses* section of *Le Monde*, where Claude Popelin probably wrote the first French article on José-Antonio Primo de Rivera and the *Spanish Falange*}. The *offset* reproduction process, which is not often used in France, is very delicate and gentle. I remember a delightful page on the circus, illustrated with drawings by Dufy, of beautiful horses in charming circles, in rather surprising farandoles in an organ with a large print run. As for the texts, they were always free of vulgarity, but they appealed a little too often for my liking to well-meaning celebrities.

and second-rate glories. The clientele to whom *Mil neuf trente-trois* was addressed would have been frightened by too much boldness, no doubt, and had to be provided with sound ideas and pleasant reading. But it was never forgotten that there was something else out there: Montherlant, Paul Morand, René Clair and Claudel were published; Albert Thibaudet was the literary critic, and it was in this journal that the first article on Patrice de la Tour du Pin and the first political pages by André Suarès appeared. The undeniable qualities of the journal did not, however, allow it to last very long. Personally, I think it was too restrained to reach a wide readership. And it was far too expensive to set up for a limited readership. At the end of 1934, the paper changed hands and, after six months, the owner closed down.

We had spent some very enjoyable years there. A little different, of course, from what we had already known from newspapers and magazines, and also different from what we would come to know. But I think back with friendship to those late afternoons in winter, in the large room a little way down the rue Garancière, - later at the top of a building in Montmartre, where we would happily correct the French mistakes of our eminent colleagues over tea. Maurice Bourdel, director of publishing, used to come and see us, sometimes with amusement. I would see Gabriel Marcel again, who wrote the music column (his illegible handwriting was the despair of the typographers), and who had once been my 'morals' teacher in the eighth grade when I was thirteen. For a while, not very long, the indecisive posts of editorial secretary or editor-in-chief (there were never any official titles for this newspaper), were held by the nonchalant and charming Michel Dard, who soon returned to the East, Romania and Poland. Jacques-Napoléon Faure-Biguet, abandoning his novels and essays on Gobineau, began writing tender detective stories under the name Jacques Decrest. I loved talking to him when we came back from the print shop, because he had been twenty in 1914, and before the war he had known Paris, and the Variétés, and Sarah, and the young Cocteau, and, at the time of the *Miracle of Saint Sebastian*, he used to go to the Bois in the morning for a walk with d'Annunzio. A childhood friend of Montherlant, he once showed me some 'Neronian' novels, full of massacres and bulls, that they had both written in collaboration, at the age of twelve, at a college in Paris.

Neuilly. They were little notebooks with drawings, which will no doubt be fun to reproduce one day. I myself only saw Montherlant once, for a few minutes, at the printing works where he had come to correct the admirable *Lettre d'un père à son fils* (*Letter from a father to his son*), which he reprinted in *Service inutile*.

That's also where I met Albert Thibaudet. He'd arrive from Geneva or Tournus, with newspapers and books in his pockets, his moustache in muss, his accent more Burgundian than natural. I liked him. When you read his books, his collections of articles, you quickly notice his faults: the endless digressions, the chatter, a sometimes superficial subtlety, a kind of pedantry. But these are Montaigne's faults, and we can find in him the cavalier frivolity of his master. Alongside these faults, there remains the flavour, the wealth of knowledge, the inexhaustible curiosity, the marvellous intellectual excitement. It is a truism to say that Thibaudet spoke of books as he did of wines, but it is an accurate one. He would stroll through the different crus, without wanting to prefer Burgundy to Bordeaux, and both have their qualities. With each swig, he recalled a famous year, a plant from before America and phylloxera. I sometimes had lunch with Henri Massis and him, and I listened to him without speaking, inexhaustible, amusing, shrewd, very stubborn at heart. He loved to be invited, and was very fond of giving out the addresses of little Beaujolais bistros. I'm not sure that he always put as much real knowledge into his art as a gourmet as he did into his art as a reader, but that was his coquetry. Today, those who knew him can no longer pass the cafés of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, where he was an eclectic regular, without seeing his big peasant head, his malignant eye, and that little black spot on his cheek from which he would die one day. I can still hear him, at Lipp's, at Flore's, at Les Deux-Magots, judging beer and Mauriac's novels, I can hear his voice rolling the rs. When the socialist newspaper, with an astonishing idea, wanted to launch an aperitif called *Popu*, Georges Blond and I accompanied him to several bistros where he obstinately demanded this unobtainable beverage. He was from another time, I think, when friendship for books was accompanied more than later by friendship for editions, the incidental circumstances of life, and memoirs. But he was curious about politics, he used to read Maurras's morning article aloud to us, he claimed to be a radical from Saône-et-Loire,

and he extolled provincial virtues with delicious vehemence. No one has replaced him.

The mess, no doubt, was less in *Mil neuf cent trente-trois* than it had been in *the Revue française*. Fortunately, all that remained was enough to add pleasure to the work. Our first printing works was in the rue de l'Abbé-de-l'Épée, a vast, draughty, glass-walled building; the second was in a cellar. We reread the proofs a considerable number of times, because Henri Massis could hardly resist the temptation to correct his collaborators' commas. We always argued a lot about this, and I argued for the right of academics to make mistakes in French. Naturally, after successive revisions, *Mil neuf cent trente-trois* was still littered with huge typographical errors and incomprehensible "mastics". We spent long days, and sometimes even evenings, working on it. The model was prepared together on rue Garancière, and carefully drawn by Zig Brunner. Henri Massis was prodigiously active, drawing us along in what seemed to us to be a very amusing game. Then he would take us, alternately, to magnificent restaurants or tasty little bistros. He would show us the Auteuil dairy and his summer dinners in the shade of his little-frequented garden. Always attentive to the delicacies and ingenuities of friendship, he would come to see us in Vaugirard, and I would sometimes bring the entire editorial staff of *Nineteen Thirty-Three* to our folding emigrant table for dinner, without warning. Sometimes he came alone, he liked the affection of youth, he found himself as young as we were, and we went for walks in Luxembourg or Versailles. No one ever had such *kindness* for us, in the old sense of the word, such elder-brother affection.

When *Mil neuf cent trente-trois* was moved to Montmartre, it was this district that we annexed to our Paris. Henri Massis is a citizen of Montmartre, where he was born, and which he knew before the war, in the days of the painters, the château des brouillards and the rue Ravignan. He would tell us about those fabulous times, leading us through the streets that have changed so much, towards what remains permanent in the forgotten village. We would look out over the city together at that delightful hour of the evening when the lights come on, and it's impossible not to think of the sum of sin and effort that this vast sea of water represents.

I also worked, if it is work to have never conceived of work without pleasure. I was writing little stories about working-class Paris, a bit on the side of René's films Clair (39) {*L'Enfant de la nuit* sur Vaugirard (1934) and *Le Marchand d'oiseaux* sur la Cité universitaire (1936)} which I had loved so much, and which had taught me many things. *The Revue française* had gone bankrupt, and Henri Massis had had my books reprinted by the Plon bookshop. One fine day in 1934, during the holidays, Maurice had the idea of writing a few tricks about pre-war cinema, and of going to Orly to talk to the old Georges Méliès, inventor of so many exquisite fairy-tales before 1900. The following year, we talked about celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the birth of cinema. We proposed a *History of Cinema* to the publisher Robert Denoël. We'd seen enough films in our youth to get involved. The result was a very big book, which America had to translate for its *Museum of Modern Art*. At La Nationale, it's quite difficult to find screen magazines and newspapers, which in the early days were not always deposited. But when my sister was very ill in the Neuilly clinic where she was in June 1935, we used to read the odd volumes, the collections of old, defunct publications that can still be found in dentists' and doctors' surgeries: there was part of Jean Tedesco's post-war magazine, *Cinéa-Ciné pour tous*, now impossible to find, and full of valuable information. So chance served us well. We also frequented film clubs. They don't exist any more, or they've changed a lot. For most of the post-war period, they were often of communist propaganda, which evoked a not very the "In the name of art, they showed banned Russian films. In 1934, there were several charming and naïve cinemas where the "classics" of the screen were projected over and over again, in other words, always the same works: *Potemkin*, *the Phantom Cart*, René Clair and a few Méliès. But the essential thing was not the show, it was the public debate. The fashion had been launched by the Club du Faubourg, discussions in which everyone gave their passionate opinion on love, phylloxera, sex education and political murders. At the screen clubs, Greta Garbo's lovers and her opponents, the old friends of silent cinema, clashed. To tell the truth, it was always the same figures who made a name for themselves in the small circle: the noble bearded Jew, the unknown poet, the surly lady and

these true film buffs, who have seen *Potemkin* a hundred times (*Potemkin* is only ever shown in front of a packed house where half the audience has to remain standing), and who know every detail. When the film was over, the lights were switched on and the director of debates began to speak. Then, from their seats, shyly at first, then confidently, the spectators would give their opinions. It was great fun. We went to see *Potemkin* with the secretary of our editorial office, Natacha Huttner, a young Russian woman with long eyes, full of activity, anger and love of poets and the Samovar: later I enjoyed translating Pushkin's verses, *the Demons*, *Ruslan and Ludmilla* with her, which she explained to me word for word. In 1939, there was still a film club, but the public debates had disappeared, making the Rialto in the Faubourg Montmartre, or the little F.I.F. hall at the top of the Marignan, touching branches of meetings for theosophists. It's hard to believe that the images of a time so close at hand have suddenly taken on a kind of historical colour.

Through Georges Méliès, we reached the pre-war period. Maurice had seen him several times at Orly, where, whatever people said, he led a very gloomy life. He had also seen the illusionist Caroly, who urged us to write, after the history of cinema, a history of prestidigitation. Caroly had trunks full of sets for those delightful films from 1900, where trickery and enchantment reigned supreme. Méliès evoked memories. He had been the creator of all forms of cinematographic art, and he wrote us touching letters complaining that people were trying to restrict him to trickery alone, and that the word "fairy" was being used to describe his films.

"He wanted by all means to be given the credit for vaudeville and worldly drama. *I've had the opportunity many times,*" he wrote to us, *"to see what it costs to be a precursor! I came too early, that's all, and at the time when I started out, how could I have dared to spend too much money, when no one, not even Lumière, believed in the longevity of the new invention...? Ah, of course our successors are not naive!... What consoles me is that, since there is such a thing as a trickster, and I am considered to be just , in New York collection rk (40) {The collection of Méliès negatives was bought in 1935 by the Motions Pictures historical museum in Los Angeles, he wrote to us} there are a number of my processes, no doubt too complicated in their execution, and of which no one has taken any notice.*

to this day. I am delighted to see that only the easiest have been imitated and used to satiety. But this pleasure is for me alone. I am content with it.

After the war, he ran a theatre in Montreuil, where our friend from the last days of the École had known him. In 1928, he was selling toys at the Gare Montparnasse. He was discovered, celebrated, decorated a little and there was a big session at the Salle Pleyel where he performed conjuring tricks in front of a singular crowd: fat gentlemen, Jews and Aryans, in suits and top hats, huge caricatures of capitalism, watched smiling indulgently as this little bearded old man performed his tricks. They had the money, the power, they were the cinema, and there was a certain contempt in the way they looked at this poor man who had found a way not to get rich by making films. But to all those who truly loved this art, Georges Méliès brought back the days of fairground poetry, bohemia and the enchanting enchantments of childhood. He died at the beginning of 1938, still poor, still happy and proud of his past, and happy as a child when he realised that he had not been completely forgotten. The 'informed circles' of the film industry put a notice in the newspapers to say that he was not unhappy at all and that he had been given enough money as it was.

I have several letters, too, from René Clair, at that time, always a little melancholy and delightful: *"A film is made in a few months by bringing together a few ideas, the contribution of a few collaborators, a little chemistry, a little mechanics. Suddenly, it comes to life in front of the public, and a few months later, it starts to die. When we see him again, several years after he was born, we search in vain for what was alive in him, for the points of contact that were established between his reality of a season and the audience that was his contemporary. All that remains on the screen are vague silhouettes, out of a vague museum of shadows, which gradually fade away like the ghosts of legend at the crowing of the cock. A little later, now a Londoner, he evoked the working-class Paris of his films: "On my way back to the fogs that are my new homeland, I sometimes stop between two stations, - just long enough to sigh as I look down on Boulevard Barbès and the beautiful, shiny cafés".* He remained the poet of our youth.

In this way, new people entered our lives, and we did not welcome them in the same way as we had welcomed the visitors to the School a few years earlier. As the events of the nation and the world took on greater density, it seems that at that time there was a kind of defensive reaction to give us more distant shelters. There was no longer any talk of escape, or of the anxieties of contemporary youth, but literature had not abandoned its fashions for that reason. *Le Grand Meaulnes*, which we had read at Louis-le-Grand, flourished again in nonchalant, poetic tales. It was a time of enchantment. Maxence's brother, Robert Francis, made young girls dream with *La Grange aux Trois Belles*, *Les Mariés de Paris* and *Le Gardien d'épaves*, reflecting a world that was meticulous and confused, but brilliant with tenderness. And Monique Saint-Helier, from her sick bed, also reconstructed a seductive and bizarre world, where the reader lost his or her footing at every moment, through a forest of images and dreams. And literary juries were crowning these kinds of books. Perhaps there was an instinctive retreat from the threats of the universe in this fashion that pushed the reader, through the flaws of these novels, towards what they contained as unreal. Similarly, in the cinema, the greatest pleasures were provided by cartoons, by Walt Disney's funny and tender poetry, his naïve coloured images, his deformed animals, his contempt for logic and reality. A new kind of comedy was born with the films of the Marx brothers and Fields, a comedy of nonsense and the absurd, now aged by the abuse of imbecilic dialogue, but which was the start of a delicious adventure, which unfortunately came to nothing. On the other hand, while hit songs had remained commonplace since the armistice, people began to hum little ironic compositions, deliberately parodic, a little absurd, a little grating, which Mireille and Jean Nohain made fashionable, which Pills and Tabet, Gilles and Julien launched, and whose genre, on the eve of 1939 war, was still being cultivated by Charles Trenet. It was the time of *Couchés dans le foin* and *Vieux Château*, with their rhythmic acrobatics and easy picturesqueness. A kind of tender surrealism had thus penetrated everyday life. In the mass-circulation newspapers, people were no longer drawn to the hard, precise caricaturists of yesteryear, but to the fantasies of humour and dreams. We discovered Jean Effel, his characters with big heads, his daisies planted in a corner, his spiders, and the dreamy logic of his legends. "I'm going to make you a

A course on realist writers, said the professor of fairies at home: Andersen, Perrault". And the mushroom priest taught that the poisonous would go to hell and the edible to heaven. On the day of creation, God had models of the world to be born brought to him, and in front of music books, dogs, cats and birds each learned their cry; and the Creator tasted the sea like soup. Soon Jean Effel would be designing window displays for Christmas. We knew him; he was the brother of one of our classmates from Louis-le-Grand, and above all he had met our friend from the École, Marguerite Neel, at some funny ball. He would come to see us, full of a naive and cunning charm, like his drawings, he would go to Soviet Russia and come back a little bewildered and amazed by the metro. We sometimes went to dinner at his home, in his studio in Auteuil, sailing above the rooftops, above the Seine. He married our friend in July 1934, and he continues to sow his ingenious and poetic little drawings with daisies, the best illustration of those three or four years before the war, which were Jean Effel's 'century'.

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However, there were more serious worries on the minds of our contemporaries. Huge events - revolution, war, money, death - were suddenly creeping into our pleasures and our personal lives at an ever-increasing pace. The last months of 1933 had brought a strange twilight of assassinations over France. A sign in the night, towards Christmas, the Lagny rail disaster left two hundred dead, an enormous figure never before reached. And in a few lines in the newspapers, we learnt that some kind of fraud had been perpetrated on the Bayonne municipal credit bank. A few days later, this almost innocuous piece of information gave rise to the most serious affair of the regime. We had seen others. We had read in the newspapers that members of parliament from both the right and the left had "touched", and we had laughed with some contempt at the Oustric affair, the Hanau affair, and the *Gazette du Franc* that such high authorities naively sponsored. Such scandals are commonplace in a parliamentary system. But we had not yet experienced a drama vast enough, rich enough, mysterious enough to shake an entire country. The little case of the Bayonne swindle, relegated to the back pages of the gazettes, had suddenly spread.

A Jewish swindler from Odessa, Alexandre Stavisky, appeared to be at the centre of a fearsome combination that included some of the biggest names. He was about to be arrested, fled to Savoie and was found dead in a villa in Chamonix in the early days of 1934. Was it suicide? They said. Murder? More likely. From then on, it was impossible to stop the affair. The compromises, hand on heart, swore they had nothing to do with it. It was discovered that the swindler had benefited from inexplicable indulgences, mysterious legal remissions, that the whole of Paris had received him. And yet, all of a sudden, nobody had ever heard of him; he was a miserable man with no connections. So many lies, so much pitiful hypocrisy revolted the city. From the beginning of January, the fever mounted, the tree grills on Boulevard Saint-Germain were torn down, the members of parliament and the mobile guards were reviled. Thus preparations were made for a riot - or a revolution.

There had been demonstrations almost every day in January 1934. On 27 January, following one of them, the Chautemps cabinet, which had obtained its ritual majority in the Chamber, resigned. Men with a reputation for energy - Daladier, President of the Council, Frot, Minister of the Interior - were brought into power, but the unrest continued. However, with the help of habit, no one thought that 6 February would be more serious than other days. The big veterans' demonstration that had been planned would be something more than a platonic stroll with pretty signs,

"So that France may live in honour and cleanliness"? Were those who were alarmed not cowards? At nine o'clock that evening, there was a premiere at Jouvet's, on avenue Montaigne, at the Comédie des Champs-Élysées, a stone's throw from the Rond-Point. I was there, as it was my job at the time. Thirty people in the auditorium, to see again Sutton Vane's charming comedy, *Au grand large*, evocative of the fashions of ten years ago, with its dead cruisers, its barman, its supreme judge in a colonial helmet... We were astonished, we were ready to laugh at the fearful, we who didn't know that at half past seven the crowd had already been shot at, that were already dead people, more serious than those in *Le Grand Large*. At half past eleven, as we left the theatre, we were suddenly struck by a strange sight: on the horizon, something luminous seemed to be dancing above our heads. We stared blankly at the black, swinging light: it was a bus at the Rond-Point that had been run over. And then, as we moved forward, a huge crowd of cars suddenly rushed towards us.

loaded with bunches of men and women rolled to the sound of their horns, and old ladies began to run with their legs around their necks. We realised that this was not a demonstration, but a riot.

It had been a long time since Paris had experienced a night like this. Thousands of people didn't go to bed that night, they wandered in the cold wind, everyone was talking to each other, the workers, the bourgeois, and some men were saying:

- We'll be back tomorrow with grenades.

And there were no more opinions, and the communists agreed with the nationalists, and in the morning *L'Humanité* had published an appeal asking its troops to join the veterans. An immense hope was born in the blood, the hope of the National Revolution, the Revolution old Clemenceau had said was impossible.

"It was a night of tragedy. It took shape throughout this tragic night, when the most diverse rumours were circulating, the resignation of the President of the Republic, the announcement of hundreds of deaths, exhilaration, anger and anxiety. At the Weber, the wounded lay in state, and M^{gr} de Luppé, in his episcopal vestments, came to bless them. The divine couple, Courage and Fear, as Drieu la Rochelle wrote, who felt that exhilarating night so well, had reformed and were roaming the streets.

Today, we can think that 6 February was a very bad plot. These motley troops, thrown out unarmed, listened only to their instincts and not to precise orders. In the centre, where there might have been some direction, there was nothing. We may learn later of the negotiations, the meetings, to a few chiefs had agreed in the days preceding, or on that very day. But the crowd ignored them, and what followed showed clearly that everything was in vain and ill-prepared. On the morning of the 7th, Paris was as gloomy as we had ever seen it, the newsagents were under siege (many newspapers had not had time to adopt an official version of the events, and were giving their front page to the majority in the Chamber), and we gradually learned of the resignation of the ministry, and, contradictorily, of the searches or investigations of the nationalist leaders. In the afternoon, as I was alone at *nineteen thirty-four*, Paul Bourget phoned to ask me if it was true that Maurras had been arrested: it was the only time I ever heard him, and his voice was breathless and trembling with tears. But they were already announcing the arrival of the peacemaker, M. Doumergue, former President of the Republic, whose

smile was as famous as Mistinguett's. The regime was using one of its old favourite tricks.

It was all over. On the 9th, the communists were still trying to save at least the Social Revolution. Jacques Doriot, head of the "Communist Rayon of Saint-Denis", threw some tough, fearless boys at the Gare du Nord, who fell to police bullets. But the underworld was already invading Paris, the 12th would be its day, and all was forgotten about social and national unanimity.

A few days later, on opening the newspapers, we discovered that on the eve of giving evidence in the Stavisky case, a magistrate, Mr Prince, had been found dead on a railway track near Dijon, at a place called Combeaux-Fées. Here again, we need only look back to the very moment to recall the unanimous feeling of the French people: Mr Prince had been murdered. But this assassination implicated too many people, too many lords of the regime. After a few days, no one understood anything, the suicide theory seemed the strongest, the experts argued, the police reports stirred strange muds, and the death of the unfortunate magistrate was to join in the shadows the other mysterious deaths of the Third Republic, from Syveton to Almereyda to Maginot. From these enormous quarrels, France emerged irritated, sombre and ready, it seemed, for any adventure - including the most beautiful. Henri Béraud published an admirable article in *Gringoire* on 'le Fusilleur' Daladier, and the German newspapers announced: "The dawn of fascism is breaking over France.

As far as we are concerned, we have no reason to deny 6 February. Every year we carry violets to the Place de la Concorde, in front of this fountain that has become a cenotaph (an increasingly empty cenotaph), in memory of twenty-two dead. Every year the crowd gets smaller, because French patriots are forgetful by nature. Only revolutionaries understood the meaning of myths and ceremonies. But if the 6th was an evil plot, it was an instinctive and magnificent revolt, a night of sacrifice, which remains in our memory with its smell, its cold wind, its pale common figures, its human groups at the edge of the pavements, its invincible hope of a National Revolution, the very birth of our country's social nationalism. What does it matter if, later on, everything was exploited, by the right and the left, from this burning fire, from these pure deaths. What was cannot be prevented from having been.

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In those years, we were also discovering foreign countries. France has always been attracted to foreign countries, but in the early post-war years, even fanatics from Russia or the United States didn't involve the country of their heart in their daily lives, as we had to do between 1934 and 1939. At the same time, as we began to be able to travel, we enjoyed visiting nearby nations. It wasn't the great post-war change of scenery, the big show, but something much more natural. The French at that time were discovering that it was no more difficult to spend their holidays in Spain than it was to spend them in the Midi, and that it was sometimes less expensive. In the modest hotels, you would meet civil servants and small shopkeepers, amazed or in a bad mood, generally incomprehensible and basically in a hurry to get back home. But we met them, and I'm not sure we met any more English people. As for the young men, if they could scrape together some money, it was not unusual to find them in the Balearics or Naples for eight days of freedom and almost luxury. Some of them were already starting to put on their backpacks and travel around Luxembourg, Corsica and Provence. On foot or by bicycle, as the bicycle was back in favour after an eclipse. And that's not to mention the international exchanges that were still fashionable, an old relic of briandism, and the naive friendships forged "under the banner" of sport and peace.

It was particularly fashionable at the time to go to the Balearic Islands. Anti-fascists, who feared the dictatorship in France, gladly prepared an asylum there: two years later, anti-fascism reigned in France, and Mallorca was under dictatorship. Ingenious developers *gave* plots of land to journalists and men of letters who wanted to build a house in these paradisiacal places. I remember going with Henri Massis to look at the plans and specifications proposed by these poetic organisations for fun: we had a lot of fun.

But it wasn't because of fashion that we spent our first holidays abroad in Spain. Spain had always been the country of our hearts, and six generations of men, after all, only separate me from my Spanish ancestors. My sister, Maurice and I

made our first trip to this magnificent land, in the summer of 1934. We saw Burgos, Segovia with its sixty churches on its rocky peak, an extraordinary treasure that is too little known, and Valladolid, and Madrid, and Toledo, and Zaragoza, and Barcelona. We stopped at Guadalajara and Sigüenza, which is just a village, but which boasts one of the most beautiful cathedrals in Spain, set amidst narrow cobbled streets and arcaded squares. We were bored with painting, looking through the Prado at the most beautiful ensemble in the world. It wasn't so much the Italians that attracted us as the Spanish painters, the caricatured and silky Goyas (like Proust painting the Guermantes), El Greco's Saint-Maurice, and the primitives, the Master of the Sisle who collapses beside the bed where an emaciated old woman who is the Virgin is dying, the neighbours of the village, the ferocious and meticulous little Berruguete with his *autodafés*, and then there are the Flemish, the most beautiful Van der Weyden with his heart-rending and pure *Pietà*, and that Bruegel of the Flowers who is not a painter of genius, but who is delightful, and who has a naked Adam and Eve dancing in the middle of a miniature jungle, as high as a ladybird. And then we wandered through the red streets of Toledo, the beautiful Burgos at eight o'clock in the evening, when the Espolon is full of promenaders. "One evening, in Burgos, on the Espolon..." we repeated to ourselves, with some desire for a Barrésian parody... We drank orangeades, we ate *forget-me-nots*, at eleven o'clock in the evening, in Madrid on the Castellana and the Paseo de Rosales. We began to collect these passing figures that you meet for a moment on any journey, and that you never forget again, and which become part of your personal folklore, and we will know for the rest of our lives that we spoke in Sigüenza with a French beggar, a former sailor, who told us a very confused story of landing, but who was in reality the descendant of those escaped convicts, those privateers, of whom *Quixote's* inns are full.

We couldn't get enough of the evening arrivals in these Spanish cities (red Segovia emerging from its ravine, Toledo beyond the plain between its Arab bridges) when all the girls are out. We saw Toledo, never to be seen again, Zocodover with its hundred balconies, yellow and green, buzzing with joy, with its cafés, its hotels, its begging children, Zocodover now destroyed, with the Arc de la Sangre still intact, and the Alcazar high above the rooftops. After our rides on the overheated, slow, dirty and dusty trains like no other in the world,

we finally landed in Mallorca, and spent ten days in Pollensa, in a small hotel run by Harpagon himself. The weather was warm, a little grey. The marvellous bay closed in on us. It was a unique few days of rest. We never left the garden, where we played bridge until midnight with Marcel Barzin, a professor at the University of Brussels, and his wife. We'd talk to them about the cities we'd passed through, and we'd come back to Toledo, to that mysterious scaffolding of red stones and dreams that makes it such a unique city, to those bare walls where you always expect to see the criss-crossed straw roof of some Moroccan souk. On the heights overlooking the city, the Cigarrales where the wealthy citizens have their villas, we looked down on it. All around us, parched stones, unfinished roads, uncultivated dunes - this is the harshest of landscapes. But here is the unimaginable city, designed rather than built on a cloudless sky, the city of incorruptible death. And since irony must never be allowed to lose its rights, it was here that we composed the Barrès pastiche we had been looking for since the start of our journey:

"From the top of the Cigarrales, let your eye grasp Toledo and its destiny. Let your heart be moved by the many reasons that rise from each stone of this incomparable fortress. Later, in the eternal dialogue that pits the Christian against the More, as it does in your mind, you will be able to strike a magnificent chord, like the one that has been established once and for all between the Castilian desert and the dry sky."

And we argued about which was more beautiful, Toledo, Arab and crushed under its glory, Segovia, Romanesque and almost unknown, gentle and lively, unforgettable forever for those who breathed its fresh air, wandered through its quiet streets, greeted its round golden apses, pushed open the door of its churches at the end of a field.

The following year, at Easter, we were still looking for traces of Spain in the northern countries. We wandered through lightless Bruges, in the smell of dead canals, on the hard cobblestones, watching tall buildings, bell towers and palaces rise up in the misty night. Gleaming in the shadows, like a baroque jewel, was the Chapel of the Precious Blood, where the blood of Jesus is kept. On the most beautiful square in Flanders, the purest belfry dominated the sleeping houses, the green waters and, in the distance, the plain beyond the thick, round gates. We wandered in unforgettable peace along the Quai Vert or the Quai du Rosaire. Not a city

dead, as the poets have said, but quiet, peaceful, wonderfully quiet. There is no sadness along the shady quays, where the great green masses of trees are reflected in the water. Even less so in the enclosure of the Béguinage, around the little green and white houses. But an indescribable peace. The same peace we found at the Musée Communal, at the Hôpital Saint-Jean, when Memling and his companions offered us their long golden virgins, Barbe and her eleven daughters, their burgomasters and the very crowd in the shrine of Saint Ursula. Stone, tree and water, together married, make up this pale red city, withdrawn from the world to live a life that is not sickly but almost entirely spiritual. And always human, like that of Memling's ladies, modestly carried up to heaven with their rosaries, their knowledge of headdresses and jams, and their calm, irreducible faith.

The charm of Ghent is not the same as that of Bruges, but the beauty of the old city is just as great. We wandered through the working-class districts, poor and dirty, rich with such a severe beauty, and along the Quai aux Herbes, where the noblest and most beautiful merchants' houses in the world line up. Before us was a lively and charming town, a province from another century, miraculously fixed, miraculously preserved, but still populated by the courteous and solid characters so dear to Van Eyck and Roger de la Pasture. Were we not going to see, from the window of this jagged house, our Hôtel Saint-Georges, which has been a hotel since the fifteenth century, a round virgin, a wise burgomaster, or see, in these cobbled streets, an old woman running under a bundle of sticks, a little dog, as in the painting by the greatest of the Flemings, whom we admired in Brussels and Antwerp, Brueghel the Elder? At the clatter of horses' hooves, we would close our eyes and open them again on old Ghent, *Gent de oude*, where life has not changed, where the same businesses are sheltered in the same shops, and where, around the *Steen* of the Counts of Flanders, the figures of the painters of yesteryear are settled for eternity, placid, with their girls with big ankles.

We stayed in Amsterdam for several days. I shall never forget this city of spices and water. We walked along the canals that lead to the port, past the noble facades with their scrolled pediments and pale, soft colours. In the reserved quarter, along the *Oude Zijs*, we discovered the naïve Dutch prostitutes, who lodge on the ground floor , a little below, a or two women.

the first a notary, the second a warehouse. Probably no other city, with the possible exception of Hamburg, offers such a Baudelairian image of prostitution. From the cafés, where the rolling cry of a melancholy piano and the noise made by the sailors can be heard, pale women in mauve bathrobes, powdered in white, with dark circles around their eyes, or pallid knitting gossips, sometimes emerge. Nothing in common with the powerful vulgarity of Marseille, trade in filth and sunshine. And we also found Baudelaire in the port, with the thick liners going to the Indies, whose names gave us the very smell and hope of great voyages. How could we lose interest in this unique city, where ancient nobility and the future blend so well, an immense port on the very edge of the unknown, full of perfumes and graces, an ever-living Venice, ever-dominant on the seas of trade?

Then we set off for the towns of the Zuiderzee by boat, along the monotonous canals. We discovered the wooden houses and dairies of Brœk in Vaterland, the bell tower of Monnikendam, the grey expanses of the South Sea with its strange name. It was cold, and we walked wrapped in blankets through the clean streets that were washed every morning, and where, as in the rest of Holland, huge herds of cyclists roamed. It was in Volendam that we saw the most delightful fishing village, built from the very materials of the toy box, and a whole people as strange and as unknown as the people of Lilliput. We know that tourism alone, of course, requires them to keep their costumes on. But they are charming, with their winged bonnets, their pointed headdresses, their braies tied with silver rixdales, and these children dressed exactly like their parents, reduction of men and women not children. Then there was the light of Holland, the very light of its painters, its soft, slightly green light, with a transparency equal to that of the most beautiful Vermeers. For it was Vermeer, these creamy, clean walls, this liquid thickness of the air, and these fresh waters at the foot of the houses, and all these little people of shelves, and these women laughing at their work, and these windows open onto a mirror, and in the mirror the street itself is reflected, delimited by the panes of glass, green and blue, shared by shadow and sun, and adorned with a milkmaid and a child.

In this way, painters helped us to love the lands we were travelling through, and we still remember the most beautiful Rembrandt, *the Jewish Bride*, and *Saul* in despair, and *the Ronde*, of course, - and Vermeer, with

his *Port of Delft* or his streets, - and the little Jean Steens, - and Van Asloot at the Prado or in Brussels, with his official paintings which delighted us, pilgrimages or battles, where a million characters picnic across gigantic canvases of a naive comicality.

But in the spring of 1936, we also revisited the Morocco of our childhood. It seems that the disorientations of childhood are vivid enough to leave a strong mark on our memories. In Rabat, it was my sister and I who led our companions down the rue Sidi-Fata to the little white house we had left when we were four or five on a summer's day in 1914. It was now just a hotel, and even a little one-eyed. When we visited it, we used to cringe because the courtyard had been made smaller and the large rooms downstairs had been split in two. But we recognised the staircase with its high steps, the curved corridor at the entrance, the palm tree planted by my mother, we knew where the bedrooms were, the stable, the old kitchen. I've always believed that the people we've known never disappear from our lives, but that they have their cycle, that they come back after a few years, sometimes to disappear again. A little girl we played with as children, I found again eleven years later in Lyon, she disappeared again, and I'm sure that in eleven years we'll see her again. In Morocco, we roamed the cities with friends from further away than ourselves, lost for twenty years, and their daughter Colette. And so childhood took its place again on this journey, a pilgrimage even more than a pleasure. The beautiful cities, red Marrakech with its snake charmers and storytellers in Djemaa el Fna square, green Meknes, grey Fez, white Rabat, offered us not only images but also memories. A quarter of a century earlier, we had played at the Oudaïa, in front of the rough, white sea; we had crossed the Bou-Regreg towards Salé, and run through the cemetery every day. The carpet merchant in the Rue des Consuls, Abd-ul-Hamid ben Dinia, remembered our first names. We didn't need to tell him again, we drank the mint tea of friendship with him. The coloured wool, the cinnamon, the oil, the wonderful scents of the peppery streets, the little stalls, the grey donkeys running around with their baskets - this was not exoticism for us, it was childhood, it was almost a rediscovered homeland. Near Meknes, in the Zerhoun, we had a grand dinner at the home of a mountain caïd, a sumptuous *diffa* with *mechoui*, *pastilla*, *tadjin*, horrible sweet and greasy dishes, and we didn't have to discover, but to rediscover the taste of the best pastry in the world,

gazelle horns and almond-flavoured *cadi* turbans. But of Kasba-Tadla, we will always remember with laughter the dusty inn and the miserly meal pompously presented to us by "the widow Jagot", declaiming her menu over the registers in which she had written our names alongside those of the Arab pedlars who made up her regular clientele. The harsh Moroccan landscapes, which resemble those of Castile, are already dry and peeling in April. But they are a bit like my own landscapes, where suddenly, after a hundred kilometres of wide, magnificent, straight and deserted roads, roads where you fall asleep at the wheel of a car, you come across a small Berber village of dry earth, crushed into a hill. And on the stony slopes of El-Herri, graves marked with white mark the dead of 13 November 1914; and at the foot of the brown kasbah of Moha-ou- Hammou, the chief of the Zaïans, in this desert landscape, under the suffocating fog, at midday, we laid a few flowers on the grave of my father and his companions.

This beautiful Morocco appeared to us then as the land of the very youth of the nation, with its fresh new towns, Rabat marvellous and graceful in its leaves, and the old noble towns, and the perfumes, and the gardens, and the flowery architecture, and the Koutoubia against the deep sky of Marrakech dominating the souks, and Fez from the heights of the Merinids, and above the wooded paths leading to Volubilis, the holy city in the shape of a starfish, Moulay-Idriss, forbidden to Christians, where my father and mother, lost on horseback, had spent a night twenty-five years ago. With each step we rediscovered our oldest memories, which went back beyond ourselves.

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We returned to Paris, to the city of those days, with its newspapers, its pleasures, its bourgeois and vain agitation. The State had thought up the idea of creating a national lottery, which was criticised by the moralists, but which greatly excited the French people: from 1934 onwards, the newspapers published the winner's photograph and stupid interviews in which he always declared that he did not want to change his way of life. They were also full of the misadventures of the first winner, a hairdresser from Tarascon called Bonhoure, who had been dazzled by five million dollars falling from the sky. Despite all the festivities and noise, fate continued to knock on the door. In October

In 1934, at the same time as Mr Poincaré died, Croatian terrorists assassinated the visiting Serbian king and Minister Barthou in Marseilles. One fine morning in July 1934, while reading the newspapers, we were shocked to learn of the "execution" of the Austrian Chancellor. Mussolini had sent Italian troops to the Brenner Pass. Another summer, when the King of War, Albert 1^{er}, had already died in an accident, Leopold of Belgium lost the charming Queen Astrid, whose popularity in France was touching and immense. In 1936, her photograph could be found on the walls of the most fiercely Communist unemployed in Paris. We were not emerging from the murderous, sooty years, illuminated at an angle by the multiplied torches of the Nazi congresses.

The French nationals, in between reading the evening papers, hoped to find some remedy and, above all, some healer. It was the time of the Leagues, the Leagues that the anti-fascists presented as scarecrows. There were several of them, apart from *Action Française*, which had its own particular physiognomy: the old Jeunesses Patriotes dike, which had had several admirable students or veterans killed on 6 February; Solidarité Française, revealed that same evening, which brought together a few fighters of good faith, but unfortunately also a few dubious elements; and Francisme, whose leader sent messages to Hitler. A lot of good people in there, by the way. But the most important league, formed around a core of veterans, the Association des Croix de Feu, was the one that gave the French bourgeoisie the greatest hopes. Around its leader, Colonel de La Rocque, an astonishing mystique developed. The National Volunteers were a group of determined young people, attentive to social truths and ready to create a French fascism. But the upper middle classes saw it as a pretext for charity sales, mundane chatter about interesting cases, cups of tea and help for the poor, who were full of good intentions. This movement became even more pronounced when the dissolved Ligue des Croix de Feu gave way to the Parti Social Français. Some disappointed National Volunteers left the party, whose leader advised them to remain on "pious alert" and seemed afraid of action. Many also got lost in clumsy conspiracies under the pretext of pure action. The great hope that the party had aroused was dissolving, just as Boulangism had dissolved into good feelings.

and the Ligue des Patriotes in France, and Gil Robles' Action Populaire in Spain.

Then the nation returned to its pleasures, to the year-end magazines and illustrated newspapers. The confessions of music-hall stars were published, and the word *sex appeal* was thrown around. All the capital of luxury and lust that the post-war era had amassed for a privileged few was squandered on mass-market publications, and the masses had their share of the vices and joys reserved for the rich. This was the time when immoralism was popularised.

So why should we be surprised if, distracted by a regime that was squandering the best of the nation, many people became even more curious about the often threatening, but great-spirited experiments being carried out abroad? Without Violette Nozières, without Stavisky, without *sex appeal*, without the evening papers, we might not have looked beyond our borders as we did during those years.

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And first of all, the country that held the greatest place in the history of the French at that time (apart from Germany, which never left the horizon) was undoubtedly Italy. In the courtyard of Louis-le-Grand, we talked about fascism with friendship. Later, we read in the newspapers that Franco-Italian relations were sometimes good, sometimes bad, that the makers of posters for *Bel Paese* cheese were adding Nice and Corsica to their map of Italy, and then we thought no more about it. The old land of painters and lovers of souls, the nation where the new spirit was forged for the first time (the twentieth century will be the century of fascism, said Mussolini) could never become a stranger to us. We had friends who had made their first trips there. And then, one fine day, we heard that everything was going better, that Mr Laval had been very well received in Rome, that agreements had been signed in Stresa. I'm not sure we paid much attention to this policy at the time, but we were sensitive to friendship and pleasure. To round things off, in 1935 we were presented with an incomparable gift, the Italian Exhibition at the Petit Palais.

I don't think we'll ever see anything like it again. We had seen, we would see other exhibitions. We had just discovered Dumesnil

de La Tour and his red and cubic paintings, his maternities lit by a sidelight, his apparitions with faces standing in the shadows, which were the revelation of the Exhibition known as "French Reality". We would soon see the Flemish again, from Brussels, with a marvellous Van Eyck virgin, buried in the collections of M. de Rothschild. These marvellous and dangerous collections of masterpieces were becoming fashionable, and for ten francs they offered art lovers once needed: wealth, idleness, twenty years of travel and a good memory to be able to compare them. But - not even at the admirable Exposition d'art français of 1937 - will we ever see this extraordinary flamboyance, the most irredeemably beautiful paintings, insolent with youth and glory, the most recognised masterpieces, before which we must bow. Not all of Italian painting, no doubt, but a certainty of choice, a continuity of wonder: the most beautiful Botticelli from the Uffizi, the little Simone Martini, and Antonello of Messina, and that unforgettable dark blue Vinci from the Russian Hermitage, and the meticulous, pretty, melancholy and blue Guardi, with a yellow wall like a Vermeer wall, and all the fêtes galantes, and, in no particular order, jumbled together, the boldest Mantegna, the darkest and most dramatic Caravaggio, and the milky, lunar flesh of Tintoretto's *Susanna*, with its bright, dark leaves, its flowers in pure masses, its deer, its pools where swans float and magic deer drink. Later, no doubt, we would see the frescoes, the fourteenth century, the fifteenth, and here there was almost no Angelico, nor of course Gozzoli, Lorenzetti, and few Siennese, and Raphael already boring. But that didn't matter: in this 1900-style Petit Palais, which had suddenly become Italian with its rotundas and curved corridors opening onto galleries and gardens, there was, above all, the sheer joy of painting, the exuberance of life, the song of the illuminated world. How many times did we return, in that summer of 1935, to those dazzling, unforgettable walls!

It was said that Mussolini had not wanted to insure the paintings he sent to France. What millions would have restored a damaged Vinci to him? Alas, we were soon disillusioned, and had to recognise that although painters make excellent ambassadors, they end up being beaten by professional politicians. There is no

It wouldn't be many months before our friendship with Italy suddenly took a more dramatic turn.

The affair seemed so simple at first that no one believed it: Italy wanted to conquer Ethiopia, probably establishing a simple protectorate there at first. England refused, invoked Geneva and set the S.D.N. on the path war. Many French people were stunned. Even those who would have had nothing but indifference for Rome found it scandalous that the two greatest colonial nations in the world, France and England, should unite to prevent Italy from rounding off its African domain. The atmosphere became heated. Geneva decided to impose economic sanctions on the "aggressor". The Socialist press pushed for even tougher measures, and 140 members of parliament signed a petition that would lead to war. Charles Maurras published their names and demanded that, if war broke out, those who could be mobilised should take justice into their own hands for the murderers of peace, using any weapon they could get their hands on, even a kitchen knife. The courts sentenced him to a year's imprisonment. Previously, writers and journalists had been divided. A manifesto signed first by fifty-four names, then by several thousand, had appeared in favour of Italy. We were the first to sign it. When the manifesto became known, the Romans massed in front of the French embassy, singing *the Marseillaise* outside the stubbornly closed windows. The Italians were not hostile to us, they believed in France. A strong anti-British movement was beginning. Henri Béraud published a resounding article in *Gringoire*: "*Faut-il réduire l'Angleterre en esclavage?*" There were demonstrations in cinemas shouting: "Down with sanctions! There were shouts of "Long live Italy" outside Dante Alighieri's house on the feast day of Joan of Arc in 1936. We had a cautious minister, one of the few French foreign ministers, Pierre Laval. He wanted friendship with Italy and peace with England. He treaded carefully, but managed to safeguard the essentials. Unfortunately, his economic policy was also cautious, which is to say democratically mistaken: he cut wages by 10% and reduced the cost of living. In fact, life was never cheaper or more affordable than it was in 1935. Naturally, the Communists called him a starver of the people, and almost the whole of the Popular Front was based on the 10 per cent cut. When he fell, all Italian politics came to an end.

It was on this occasion that the mainstream press showed, for the first time on such a scale, its gigantic ugliness. It's hard to believe that there was a time in France when *Paris-Soir* didn't exist. But it did. I don't know when the paper was founded, or even when it developed. In 1935, it had already stifled *L'Intransigeant*, which had fallen into disrepute after a financial manoeuvre had led to the expulsion of its director Léon Bailby by the Jewish billionaire Louis- Louis Dreyfus.

And so this prodigious newspaper grew, year on year more enormous, year on year pushing back the boundaries of human vanity. Its owners were major sugar and textile manufacturers. It was known that they had initially wanted to manufacture their sugar cans themselves, and to do so they had bought a paper mill, and to use their paper, a newspaper, and to manufacture their paper, forests in Norway. They ruled through money, stupidity and power. They launched new newspapers, crushed the illustrated ones with *Match*, and the women's magazines with *Marie-Claire*.

Sometimes, in the latter two publications in particular, they hired clever journalists, full ingenious ideas, and *Marie-Claire* gave a fair idea of the French woman in the cities around the immediate pre-war period. But *Paris-Soir* remained unchanged. As Catholics, its owners sent their reporters on crime stories. Being rich, they didn't shy away from faked photos or gratuitous cinema images boldly presented as documentaries. They travelled to the provinces and abroad, were condemned in Switzerland for immorality, and supported a policy that was half-conservative, half-revolutionary, the Jews and armchair Marxists. Throughout the Ethiopian War, they announced in six columns gigantic battles that never happened. They did not go as far, of course, as the pure Marxists, who predicted the victory of the Abyssinians every time Italy advanced, and still praised the strategy of the King of Kings when his capital fell. Cautious, to please their clientele, they knew that politics is not worth a good crime. But they cleverly equated the dispatches from one side with those from the other, just as they would later, during the Spanish War, equate Franco's seizure of towns with the Reds' takeover of a village of fifty inhabitants. All in all, slyly anti-fascist, democratic, burlesque and satisfied.

The intellectuals were starting to give. We had not yet reached astonishing fair at the Maison de la Culture, which was to last for about a year.

36. But it was the Ethiopian war that began to draw them out of their holes like weasels. Magazines and newspapers were founded, and people set about reforming the world: the peaceful days of pure poetry were long gone. I went two or three times to a very astonishing house called *the Union for Truth*. was founded by the old Desjardins of Pontigny Abbey, and serious problems are discussed in front of a stove, under a mask of Beethoven and a portrait of Descartes: an eminently 'Dreyfus Affair' setting. Old ladies of seventy-five, who at their age are not desperate to know what the truth is, meet there to find out. The atmosphere is distinguished and dusty. The sanctions war changed all that. In the tiny room in the rue Visconti, two hundred people stood without seats. The manifestos were discussed in a stormy atmosphere. I was bored alone at the back of the room on the day I went there, and to distract myself I interrupted Mr Bouglé who was praising the S.D.N.

It's about war, Monsieur Bouglé," I shouted. Do you want to go to war for the Negus or not? And M. Bouglé lamented, in a slightly Faubourg accent: "These young people have no ideals, no principles! People looked at me sideways, and then we got into a fight. There was Henri Massis, and Guehenno and Benda. Chairs nearly went flying. Other times, it was calmer: we just talked about Gide and Barrès. But the place was always as comical as ever, and there was a strong whiff of intellectuality. We laughed a lot.

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Living by taste, by profession, by chance, in a world where books had their place, we weren't very convinced of the importance books or ideas, and we never took ourselves very seriously. What we liked about books, as always, were the catchphrases that served as our personal jargon, it was a memory, it was the ability to become part of the very atmosphere of our games. We knew the pages of *Les Copains*, and we'll remember Jules Romains for a long time to come, because we'll be able to say in a certain tone of voice

"You have the air of an omnibus". And we loved Jouvet because we imitated his brusque voice, and Dullin too, and our dear Georges Pitoëff. The greatest

The reward for artists is to become inseparable from a certain group magic, a certain language. I don't know if this mania for language has always existed, but I'd like to think so. Let us find here the elements of the language dear to a group of young people in the pre-war period. For my part, I see it as the natural continuation of my childhood, when we would kindly put a book in the hands of a little friend who came to see us, saying: "You wouldn't understand our games". Then, our politeness satisfied, we returned to our deserted islands and our invented grammars.

During all that time, we had retained from our student days the habit of getting together in each other's homes, sitting on the floor, singing, sometimes dancing, imitating Georges Pitoëff if he fancied playing *Figaro* (I later found out that he had played it in Russia), or *the Cid* with a Spanish accent, or *Athalie* with a Jewish accent, and devoutly reviving rituals that we ourselves mocked.

"We'll look fine," we said, "when we're fifty and singing in chorus *Gastibelza l'homme à la carabine* or *Le Meeting du Métropolitain...*". But we didn't miss these ceremonies during our evenings out, and newcomers were quickly introduced to them, and after all, we weren't yet fifty, or even thirty.

Between the disappearance of *Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-Five* and 1937, I had no fixed job to impose any kind of presence on me. I remember those months with pleasure. I had got back into the habit of going to the Paris swimming pools almost every day, and in the summer to Molitor. I often came back to the Nationale, where I copied for my own pleasure from the *Paris-Journal* the literary letters written there by Alain Fournier in 1912, where I patiently studied the Latin writers of the Merovingian period, and where I translated the brilliant poems of Saint Fortunat. It is with uselessness, with lightness, with pointless work done for pleasure, that one builds one's life best. Ours was made of affection and insouciance, in those small, bright rooms full of books, to which we added, from time to time, a shelf, a carpet, nothing heavy, nothing cumbersome, in the same way that a ship's cabin or a gypsy's caravan is decorated.

Even misfortune brought us close to images that were beautiful, and we sometimes forgot anguish and illness to keep only this precious memory. In 1934, on our return Spain, we had just settled in.

We were immobilised by a very serious car accident. All that remains for us are the oleanders in the hospital in Perpignan, the mimosas, our first steps in the garden, the nuns' horns and, above all, that Mass where we listened to the Gospel of the paralytic before an audience of invalids, next to a woman who no longer had an arm:

"At that time Jesus got into a boat, crossed the Lake of Gennesaret and entered the town of Capernaum, where a paralytic was laid on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'My son, have faith; your sins will be forgiven you. But some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, 'This man blasphemes. But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said to them, 'Why do your hearts form unjust judgments? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins will be forgiven you,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? Now that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins, he said to the paralytic, 'Get up, take up your bed and go back to your house. The sick man got up immediately and went back to his house. No one moved in this audience of sick and wounded people, to whom the admirable text was read, which, with such patient and gentle harshness, taught them to despise their healing, and at the same time gave them the hope of recovery. I'm not sure that everyone was listening, that they knew that the divine phrases were addressed to each of them in particular. Overcome with emotion, ready to burst into tears at this prodigious coincidence, I would have liked everyone to understand that moment: for how many people was it just another episode in the Mass, the same as any other, worn out by habit? The armless woman's face was motionless and no one could tell if she had felt her heart being touched.

Some were moving away from our lives and our pleasures. Around our core group, ghosts danced, came and went. Jean Maxence surrounded himself with new people, got involved in politics, stood in the 1936 elections against M. Frot, a bizarre adventure, held contradictory meetings, always wild, always lively, always violent, and became an important figure in French Solidarity. He shone there for a while, but eventually left. But he constantly gathered around him his court of unrepentant night owls and would-be agitators. We sometimes met his brother Robert Francis at our meetings, always violent and gentle. The day after 6 February, he published a big political book with Maxence and Thierry Maulnier, entitled *Demain (Tomorrow)*.

France, summing up the hopes of those confused years. But also his fairytale novels, endless, glittering and misty. We were rather amused by Maxence, who, speaking of them in *Gringoire*, where he had recently been writing critical notes, gravely referred to his brother as Monsieur Robert Francis, just as he called his wife Madame Hélène Colomb.

Sometimes we took our games elsewhere. The outdoors was beginning to tempt French youth. Georges Blond, his wife and his sister spent their Sundays canoeing. One year they spent their holidays in the Dordogne with Maxence and José Lupin, in a château with turrets and ghosts that they had rented. Soon they were down the Tarn and the Landes rapids. During the year we sometimes went to see our friend José Lupin in Vendôme, where he was a teacher. We would stroll through the beautiful canal town, green and grey, and celebrate Christmas Eve. The Hôtel Vendôme, where our friend was staying, was requisitioned, giant bottles of alcohol were brought in, pieces of wood were thrown into the huge fireplace, we improvised songs on the piano, and in the summer we went to the countryside, to Saint-Ouen near Vendôme. I spent a few delightful spring days there, writing; in the evenings, we would read aloud from old reviews of the First World War, from Richepin's patriotic lectures, and we would have the time of our lives listening to the majestic brainwashing of the bourgeoisie of the time. Since then, we've had to see almost as much of the genre. We called our hostess sometimes the good hostess, sometimes Béatrice, sometimes Béa-Ba, and we talked until two o'clock in the morning by her fireplace. Vendôme is at the centre of these years of friendship, with its lavish Christmases, its carols, its deserted house that we would fill, and the beautiful blazing logs surrounded by bottles, tasty dishes and books.

Literature went on, and people started writing novels. We remember Lacretelle's *Hauts Ponts*, and Jules Romains' *Hommes de bonne volonté* is still going strong. In 1932, a newcomer, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, invented a kind of epic of catastrophe and insult with *Journey to the End of the Night*. Gide, who had become a communist, raised his fist at meetings and let it be known that he would gladly give his life for the USSR. Montherlant published *Les Célibataires* and Mauriac entered the Académie. I sometimes met him, at the theatre, in people's homes. I also met Colette at the theatre, and watched her with her long, lively eyes.

She had the eyes of a myope who sees everything, the most exact gaze that has ever been cast on earthly and carnal things. When I talked about her books, she would write to me, as if we had known each other for a long time, and I could hear the sound of her friendly voice in her letters: *"I'm harnessed,"* she would tell me, *"to a film script for which I'm also writing the dialogue. I'm harnessed during the day, harnessed for a long time at night... it'll be another eight days before I unhook my collar of strength. It's a very unusual job, writing dialogue for a film. It's a bit like punching a window and then painstakingly putting the pieces back together again. But I've read your Action française serial. Like every time I read you, it seems to me, once again, that we knew each other somewhere else, on another planet for example."*

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From time to time, in Paris, we would go to Pierre Varillon's, or I would meet him at the A.F. printing works, where his round, authoritative little person would slip between the marbles with great agility. I also saw him sometimes in the country, once even at Saint-Bonnet, in Forez, when I was in Lyon, or later in Senlis. He imitated Maurras with prodigious fidelity. He used to tell us about his fabulous problems with the typographers, the editors, the head of workshop, and even the faithful from the suburbs or the provinces who complained about not getting their paper time. One day a delegation even came to see the master who listened gravely, shaking his head in the face of so much suffering, then, raising his brow, and with imperturbable honesty, like one who has weighed up all the terms of the problem and proposes his solution, in his muffled voice, he said:

- If you consider, gentlemen, that I am the main obstacle to the development of *Action française*...

We didn't insist, of course.

Pierre Varillon, who had arrived in Paris with the last generations of the war, of which he was one, with the first of the post-war generation, also told us stories of those fabulous days. I remember one afternoon, a little later, it must have been in 1938, when he and Lucien Rebatet were walking through the wet paths of the forests of the Oise. Those were the days when a famous author would copy his manuscripts three times and sell them for twenty or thirty thousand francs.

the same to two brothers who showed it to each other with greedy looks on their faces. Pierre Varillon had been a publisher of luxury books, and he told us how some of his colleagues produced limited editions that never ended, and how a rare and unique copy on unnumbered blue vellum was secretly presented to enthusiasts, only to be replaced the following week, for another enthusiast, by an equally unnumbered and even more 'unique' green copy. Those were the days, we used to say, and Georges Blond swore that when he had another post-war period, he would make a fortune in wire sculpture, which he had not given up hope of learning. But the future tends to repeat itself, and we shall see. In any case, we were done with short novels of two hundred pages, and the fashion was rather for quantity.

At his place, we met Mario Meunier, Pierre d'Espezel, and the author of both a prodigiously obscene novel and the most delightful children's stories, Marcel Aymé. He looks like a peasant saint carved out of wood, or like Buster Keaton. He is as mute as the old comedians of silent cinema. This boy, whose verve is so astonishing when he's writing, raises his quiet, barely ironic eyes to you when you ask him a question, and after a few minutes drops a tired monosyllable. Admittedly, conversation is particularly difficult with him on the phone, where you never know if he's left the line. But no, he's always there, full of explosive, incommunicable humour, listening with all his ears, and ready to pour into his stories all those priceless conversations of truth in which he knows, better than anyone, how to stylize human silliness. As laconic as a Norwegian *troll*, he is always ready to hide his tenderness and the delicious heart he has given, once and for all, to children, the seasons and pets.

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The other pre-war period with Méliès, and the post-war period here, mixed their images with our lives. We continued to pursue the charming pleasures of our adolescence, we went to Jouvet's, Dullin's, Pitoëff's, we listened to *the Canard sauvage*, and *the Trojan War*, and *Richard III*, and, one fine day, we discovered the students at the Sorbonne

and their medieval or ancient games. I took Albert Thibaudet to see *Adam's Game*, the first play written in French, so sweet, so pure:

*Oh, heaven, you're such a beautiful manor,
Orchard of glory, you're so beautiful to look at...*

And on the very day that Addis Ababa was taken by the Italians, in the courtyard of the Sorbonne, in front of Richelieu's chapel, I watched King Xerxes, in his white and grey robes, whirling around, like the Nega, lamenting, as painted by Aeschylus in *The Persians*. That's how we marvelled back then.

Higher figures, moreover, had their place among us. I met Jacques Bainville especially at *the Revue universelle*. Of those I knew, he was perhaps the man who imposed himself most on me. Not that he wasn't perfectly kind, but I don't think that anyone who got close to him didn't feel his extraordinary domination. His last year was excruciatingly painful: month by month, almost day by day, he grew weaker and weaker, more and more translucent. His long, mysterious eyes shone in his thin, dry face. He was suffering greatly, and yet he continued to live, to write his prophetic articles, and even to entertain, to go out. I remember as a singularly moving day a reception at his home, some time before his death, where, standing pale, he spoke to everyone with his usual lordly courtesy; I even heard him, this man who no longer ate anything, engage in a gastronomic conversation, as if these things still interested him. He was an astonishing mind. People praised his clarity and lucidity. Of course he was. The fact that, on 11 November 1918, he predicted the very name of National Socialism and the resurrection of Germany by an authoritarian and popular regime almost makes you shudder. But what has always struck me about him is his mystery. A clear writer, he was interested in obscure authors. The last time I saw him, he talked to me about Rimbaud and the coloured children's alphabets that gave rise to the sonnet *Les Voyelles*. A sceptic, we know that he approached all mysteries, perhaps all miracles, with modesty and discretion. I think he hid the truth about himself in two or three poems, or even less, in two or three little-known sentences, dropped like a confidence. And also in those last months of his life when this Voltairean gave the image of resistance, of stoicism in the face of pain, - of heroism.

He disappeared one day in February 1936, when we, who were just beginning to look at the world, didn't know him well enough. We can say in

Indeed, those of us who have read him over the last few years, who have come so close to him, believe that few men have taught us so much, with such exact reason. But so little time, so little time to measure the extent of the gifts he gave us, of those he could still have given us... That's what we said to ourselves, at a time when so many young , unknown to him, felt dispossessed by the disappearance of a man whose seduction was so strong and so mysterious. Because we really didn't have enough time to experience this seduction, to become immersed in it, we didn't have our share of it. From now on, we will be nostalgic for it, as for those brief magical encounters where the conjunctions of the future are formed, and for which, left alone, we are left with so much regret. In the most beautiful page of his acceptance speech at the Académie française, a few months earlier, under the grey light of the cupola, we had heard Jacques Bainville quote that admirable scene from Sophocles' *Philoctetes* where, to each name of the heroes of the war named by the isolated one, the young son of Achilles replies: "He is dead". And Jacques Bainville also called out the names of Raymond Poincaré's former companions. It is now our turn to add his name to those of the other poets of the nation: but before us, he appeared only too briefly, before us who are the last to arrive, more amazed and more desolate than Neoptolemos. He abandoned a world where the services he rendered were of a price we have only begun to know. But the man who has sometimes been called the secret adviser of a rather unworthy state has now taken his place among the invisible advisers of the fatherland.

It was on the threshold of a troubled world, a few weeks before the triumph of the Front Populaire, shortly before the Anschluss, before the Russian madness that he denounced in his last articles, before the war. As *Action Française* was still condemned by the Vatican, he was refused admission to church, despite many friendly approaches. A priest came to bless him and give him absolution. A huge crowd accompanied him. It was on the way that Léon Blum was beaten up by some unknown men, in circumstances that remain enigmatic, and the anti-fascists took advantage of the situation to cry murder and make voters feel sorry for the poor Jew, at the very moment when one of the most lucid Frenchmen who had ever lived had just died.

And that was the beginning of that astonishing year 1936, when so many things changed. The National Revolution, 6 February 1934,

had failed: what was to become of the Marxist revolution? In Spain, after a series of conservative governments, in February the Frente Popular came to power, and every day a church was burnt, killed and looted. In France, we were waiting for the elections, and Gaston Bergery had launched the idea of a Common Front - that's what what became known as the Popular Front, an alliance of communists, socialists and radicals. Gaston Bergery was an odd fellow, once a radical, an anarchist by nature, but soon bored by the ideas he launched, accused of fascism by some, Bolshevism by others, surrounded by a young guard of fanatics, founder of a newspaper "to free France from the tyranny of money", *la Flèche*, unfortunately surrounded by little Jews or dubious characters, himself periodically accused of being the son of a German, a brilliant combatant in the First World War, adored by women, seductive and irritating in the extreme. The idea was launched, and others seized on it. It succeeded. In July 1935, the "14 July oath" united the radical survivors of the Stavisky affair, the Muscovites and the Jews of socialism in defence of democratic freedoms. The "attack" on Léon Blum at Jacques Bainville's funeral in February was the pretext for "dissolving the fascist leagues", including *Action Française*. The Croix de feu immediately disguised themselves as the Parti Social Français. We could feel the revolution coming. Belgian elections, French elections. In the Belgian elections, an unknown party, Rex, won twenty-five seats in one fell swoop, as a reaction against the threat of Marxism. In France, seventy-two deputies from Moscow entered Parliament. We went to the boulevards to wait for the election results. Crowds lined the streets, desolate at the Opera, triumphant at the Republic. From *Le Matin* onwards, on Boulevard Poissonnière, shouts of joy greeted the announcement of the results: "Communist, elected... Communist, elected... Communist, elected...". Gangs passed by singing *the Internationale* and waving their outstretched fists in the style of the German *Rote Front*. A month later a

The "Front populaire à direction socialiste", under the presidency of Léon Blum, came to power. The Communists did not take part in it, they supported it, but they fomented strikes everywhere. On 13 June, I was not in Paris, but in Brussels; in the hotels, they were beginning to refuse French money: what would it be worth the next day? The most sinister rumours were circulating: a general railway strike, riots. In fact, the underworld was invading the streets, la fermeture de tous les cafés rejetait sur les trottoirs

crowds. It was a gloomy day. Housewives (including strikers) stocked up on sugar, candles and petrol in the grocery shops, and middle-class people filled their bathtubs with water. It became known three months later that it was the day chosen by Moscow for a coup d'état. But 13 June was as much a failure for the Marxist revolution as 6 February had been for the national revolution. All that remained was to embark on the "pink terror (41) {The expression comes Alain Laubreaux, who has published a lively book on this burlesque era under this title} that was the Popular Front.

V

I HAD COMRADES

The fifteen or twenty months from May 1936 are undoubtedly among the craziest times France has ever experienced. The most damaging, no doubt, and we still have to bear the consequences, both internally and externally; but also the most burlesque. Never before have silliness, pedantry, swelling, pretentiousness and triumphant mediocrity been more superb. Time flies, and those extravagant weeks may not have been fully described. The features that some narrators have preserved will later seize historians with amazement, laughter and shame. Alain Laubreaux's *La Terreur rose* (*The Pink Terror*) recounts the dusty congresses, where everyone called each other "Mr Chairman"; it tells of unheard-of adventures: an old lady being prosecuted for keeping a German machine gun in her home, brought back by her son who was killed in the war; a nurse letting a patient die in hospital because his day's work was over. Then there was the death of a seven-year-old boy, Paul Gignoux, killed by children in Lyon because he was carrying tickets for a charity sale and was therefore a little fascist. The odious and the grotesque are intertwined at every turn in this unimaginable story, which we witnessed so recently.

Strikes everywhere. In Vaugirard, where we still lived, we ran into beggars. The windows were decorated with red flags, decorated with sickles and hammers, or stars, or even, out of condescension, a tricolour crest. In response, on 14 July, at the instigation of Colonel de La Rocque, patriots all over France flew the three colours. Factories were periodically occupied. The director and the engineers were locked in, and the workers did not leave the premises: this was called "the strike on the job". There was a blackboard at the door on which the days of the strike were written. Inside, there were some very photogenic groups with accordion players in the style of Russian films. Prime Minister since June, M. Blum lamented and wept twice a month on the radio, in a languid voice, promising appeasement and satisfaction for everyone. His false promises were published and republished.

He was reminded of his youthful books and his obscene and tired aestheticism. At the same time, on 18 July, in a Spain weakened by a more harmful Popular Front, an insurrection of generals broke out that was to become both a civil war and a nationalist revolution. The Communists were demonstrating in favour of sending guns and planes to Madrid to crush "fascism", organising the trafficking of arms and men, shouting "Blum in action" and thus combining their desire for war abroad with their desire to weaken Spain at home.

The Association des Écrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires (A.E.A.R.) had had its heyday. Covered in honours, its members would happily walk around with the rosette of the Legion of Honour *under* their lapels, proving their independence from the regime. May 1936 liberated these scrupulous consciences, and promotions, by divine grace, began to pour in at the same time. The House of Culture was born. It was a real house, located on rue de Navarin, with a licence and a street address. In the face of the "reactionary peril", it was supported by a tightrope-walking *anti-fascist Vigilance Committee* headed by professors Langevin, Perrin and Joliot-Curie. All the literature of the time, or very little of it, was rushed into the room. At the same time, with money from the red marquises, an astonishing newspaper, *Vendredi*, was founded.

Vendredi, which did not survive Franco's victories in Spain and the demise of the Front Populaire, was run by Jean Guehenno and André Chamson. It began by asserting that it would bring together "free men", from André Gide to Jacques Maritain. However, Maritain, a gobbler by nature, immediately withdrew his collaboration. And as for Gide, after writing for a while, he went to Russia and published his famous *Retour de l'U.R.S.S. (Return from the USSR)* when he came back. Naively a Communist for two or three years, he reappeared disgusted with Mr Stalin, and dared to say so. He was ruthlessly expelled, as Mr Chamson still held the holy homeland of the revolution dear. From time to time, M. Guehenno was allowed to shed a tear about the Trotskyists, about the Moscow trials where so many "right-wingers" and "right-wingers" were killed.

To the astonishment of the whole world, the "deviationists" confessed their crimes. So *Vendredi* retained a tinge of liberalism. But its real aim was to support the revolutionaries in Spain. On the other hand, the paper was very dull, with an accent of pawn that was typical of those good years.

The false revolution of 1936 was indeed a revolution of intellectuals. Rushing to the top, they came up with nothing but reports and theses. The humorists themselves lost all sense of comedy. The old anarchist newspaper that we had read a lot, *Le Canard enchaîné*, expelled most of its contributors who were guilty of a rebellious spirit, became strictly "Popular Front", and openly flirted with the Stalinists. At the Exposition in 1937, insane sums of money were paid to show absolutely unheard-of collective performances: the *Naissance d'une cité* by J.-R. Bloch's Birth of a City, in which there were more actors than spectators, *Liberté*, a collaborative work by twelve writers, each of whom had dealt in his own way with an episode in French history: after a burlesque *Joan of Arc*, a scholastic discussion between Pascal and Descartes on the heart and reason, whole thing ended with the apotheosis of the 14 July 1935 oath of allegiance. To "defend democratic freedoms". Because that was the meaning of the story.

Talented writers sometimes got involved in these games. The most prominent was André Malraux, whose dark, hazy, hard-boiled novels we had read, apologies for suffering and intellectual sadism, filled with Chinese torture and the crackling of machine guns, *the Conquerors*, *the Human Condition*: he was an official recruiter for Red Spain, and was even lieutenant-colonel in command of the *España* squadron. Faced with his glory, the other fireside blasters paled in comparison. But they reasoned with themselves when they thought they were getting to the action, when they thought they were going to the people they raised their fists in meetings, and Jean Guehenno, a little later, was to write a few pages of sincere, almost repentant, gherkin on the subject. Those were the days when, at a meeting on art, if a

When the "Sunday painter" declared that he was a communist, that he went on strike when he had to, but that when he painted, he liked to paint his wife and daughter rather than exalt class consciousness, he was booed. It was a time when Aragon and Jean Cassou deplored the fact that you couldn't tell whether a canvas had been painted before or after 6 February (these extraordinary phrases were actually said, and thought) and explained the decadence of art by the ugly faces of the "two hundred families".

France was governed by an oligarchy of "two hundred families". At metro entrances, vendors shouted:

— Ask for the official and complete list of the two hundred families.

No one was surprised by this enormous and buffoonish announcement. The bourgeois blissed out, thinking that they would be saved by the P.S.F. and the P.S.F. and that they would be saved by the P.S.F.

by the radicals, gave to the red beggars, let themselves be arrested on the roads, and got a good scare. Few were the ones who pulled punches with the strikers: there were some, though, and no one dared touch them. Others were more mature for revolutions which, it must be said, were not undeserved for everyone. In one company I know, we received notice that the Reds were coming to 'attack' on a Saturday afternoon. It was summer, and the boss was on his yacht. He phoned to say that he was coming, and that some employees were ready to defend capitalism. So some comrades came, with a small arsenal, all afternoon. No attackers. No boss either. The following Monday, however, he appeared and, gently mocking, declared:

— So, were you in a state of pious alert on Saturday?

It's hardly surprising that, caught between social conservatism and Marxist scum, many young people wavered. The triumphs of 1936 revealed abominable injustices, helped to understand certain situations and gave hope for necessary and just reforms. All the strikes, especially those at the beginning, where there was sometimes a joy, a freedom, a charming tension towards deliverance, towards hope, were not unjustified. We were well aware *that no workers' conquest was ever obtained willingly*, that the bosses moaned that they were heading for ruin when the eleven-hour day and the ban on children under twelve working at night were established under Louis-Philippe. We were well aware that nothing was achieved without struggle, sacrifice and bloodshed. We have no interest in the capitalist world. The famous

We didn't always feel the "breath of May 1936" pass us by with hostility in an unimaginable atmosphere of mismanagement, excess, demagoguery and baseness. This is how the fascist spirit is born.

We saw it being born. We saw it being born: Sometimes we saw those incredible parades of 1936, those vast trampling of huge crowds between the Place de la République and the Place de la Nation. Enthusiasm? I'm not sure. But an extraordinary docility: it was towards a red and mysterious goal that French destiny was heading, and passers-by raised their fists, and they gathered behind the free-thinking bigophonists, the anti-fascist anglers, and they marched towards the columns of the Place du Trône decorated with gigantic flags. They sold little puppets: Colonel de La Rocque. Giant Russian-style images were carried around: the liberators of thought, Descartes, Voltaire, Karl

Marx, Henri Barbusse. It was buffoonish and dusty, the primitive spirit that had become master of everything. And yet, if, in July 36, people answered "No, comrade, I'm a fascist", no one insisted. The fashion for the Roman salute almost became commonplace, not out of taste but as a retaliation, when the Communists marched with their fists outstretched towards the Arc de Triomphe. People raised their arms and sang *the Marseillaise*. The nationalist spirit demanded its rituals, and the Muscovites tried to steal them from it, by also singing *the Marseillaise* and wearing the tricolour, and declaring that they were fighting against the threat of fascism, for French freedoms. So spoke Maurice Thorez, a Communist MP who had since deserted. Strange times.

Thierry Maulnier had then founded, with Jean de Fabrègues, a small review, *Combat*, to which Georges Blond and I contributed, and which united the anti-democratic spirit with the anti-conservative spirit: it published texts by Maurras and Proudhon, which was quite in keeping with the colour of the time. However, there were a few liberal intellectuals at *Combat* who, in my opinion, spoiled things, and we had to stop collaborating with an organ that frankly condemned some of the positions we had taken elsewhere... But *Combat* had its place in our friendships, in the meetings we held, and in the fairly fascist atmosphere, despite the fact that it was anti-liberal, both national and social, of the time.

The 1937 International Exhibition will long be remembered as one of the most curious events of its kind. It was quite certain that it would not be ready in time. Strikes, manoeuvres and tricks had always suggested this. Mr Blum urged the workers to work. He spoke under banners proclaiming that "The opening of the Exhibition on 1May would be a victory against fascism". Despite the expected presence of Italy and Germany. On 15 May, I believe, a phantom Exhibition was inaugurated among the plasterwork. Fireman's hoses covered with grass to the metre represented the absent water jets, the detail is historic. Lucien Rebatet described this extravagant ceremony, worthy of Father Ubu, in *Je suis partout*. When the ten names disgraced by illustrious trials were called out," all the big names of the regime came forward. When M. Blum, M. Zay, M. Abraham, M. Cahen-Salvador and M. Moch appeared, the music of the Guard attacked:

Proud round-headed Gauls...

Then the doors were closed, and the public was not admitted to the building sites until a month later. The Mexico pavilion had not been completed by the time the exhibition closed in November.

It was a financial failure, of course, whereas the 1931 Colonial Exhibition had been a success. But there had been so much talk about it, so much publicity, that it ended up attracting a lot of people. It cluttered up the very centre of Paris, the royal banks of the Seine, with its flimsy buildings, which had not yet been completely demolished when the war broke out in 1939. There were, however, some easy, graceful successes, night-time on the river, children's playgrounds like toys, sometimes a regional house, a wooden palace. It was at this time that the old Palais du Trocadéro, bulging between its two towers, which had dominated the banks of the Seine since the Second Empire, disappeared. In fact, the building had only been disguised, replaced by a semi-circular structure with an unfortunate indentation in the middle, revealing hideous constructions. It was adorned with half-sibylline, half-ridicule expressions in gold lettering, for which common opinion blamed Paul Valéry. But the stairs at Chaillot were graceful, and from up there you could see the old Tower, which had become the queen and torch of this new Exhibition, and Paris. Facing each other, in the foreign pavilions square, the Soviet pavilion topped by a giant clock, and the German pavilion adorned an eagle. The antagonism made people smile, as did the two red flags, one with a swastika, the other with a sickle and hammer.

In the evenings, we sometimes had dinner with the Norwegians, on a barge, at the Hamburg pavilion or at the Alsatian house. And then, this ephemeral fair would at least have brought us a wonderful present (the Popular Front was certainly not to blame): the Exhibition of French Art. From the Master of Aix to the other master, Cézanne (we were also to see a series of admirable canvases by him in those years), Europe's most *continuous* and regularly revered painting took its place and its meaning. The portraits of Corneille de Lyon, the Jean Fouquets, all this gentle and careful respect for the human face, were not so far from the rest, from the red maternities of La Tour, which we recognised, from the grey and courageous Le Nain, and even from the most frivolous. Not that I discovered in the seventeenth century, or even in the eighteenth (with the exception of Watteau's *Flying Camps* and *Gersaint's Ensign*), the sources of enthusiasm that others found there. Perhaps it is because the painting that moves me most remains

that of the fifteenth century, in Flanders or Italy, and that these two periods are decidedly too far removed from it. But as we made our way through the attics and corridors of the new palace, the marvels burst forth, the great French pictorial century, the nineteenth, the animal and powerful Courbets, the children of Renoir so fresh to the eye, the Cézannes, the most beautiful Manets, frivolous and desperate in their furs, and we discovered that lesser painters sometimes have their brilliance, and that a woman by Millet bent over under a faggot painted in broad strokes is almost a Cézanne. And we were reminded, in front of some exquisite canvases, of a recent Corot exhibition, with the Italian Corots and the soft, deep portraits. All this blazed before us with prodigality.

But when we went out, we found the Front Populaire. I sometimes travelled a bit during those years, giving lectures in the provinces, speaking in Tunisia and Morocco, stopping off in Switzerland, Italy and Belgium. Everywhere, we suddenly discovered the senseless and lasting scandal of this revolution, which was mediocre to say the least, of this primacy of baseness. In North Africa, where demented projects were undermining French influence, the resistance of the colonists and conquerors was being organised, and it was there, no doubt, that the truth of France was least forgotten, and where we could find the greatest comfort. Meanwhile, in Paris, the extraordinary sarabande continued, the ruin of the State and private individuals, and above all the disintegration of the working spirit, the slow conviction that there was no longer any need to work, and that everything would come in time, by the grace of the government. Following a press campaign, the Minister of the Interior, Roger Salengro, committed suicide for no apparent reason. Streets were named after him, schools were named after Karl Marx, Lenin stadiums were created, and squares, Marty and Barbusse. To flatter feminism, Léon Blum had taken women into his cabinet: a fat, authoritarian Jewess, M^{me} Brunschvicg, and a skinny, shabby little schoolteacher. They were very popular. With an idiot with a fringe of hair, the Ministry's photographs lined the staircases with a series of unforgettable reels.

It should come as no surprise that reactions were sometimes quite strong, and that a number of ideas were beginning to emerge in France that were far removed from the lukewarm liberalism and the clouds that were fashionable in the post-war period. The arrival in power of the Blum ministry even gave rise to movement almost unknown in France since the Dreyfus affair, namely anti-Semitism. The Frenchman

is instinctively anti-Semitic, of course, but he doesn't like to appear to be persecuting innocent people for the sake of a vague question of skin. M. Blum taught him that anti-Semitism was something quite different. In the Chamber, the deputy Xavier Vallat dared to salute ironically the day when "an old Gallo-Roman country" had a Jew at its head for the first time. There were incidents: a Breton deputy, Mr Ihuel, having alluded to the wandering people, the minister Marx Dormoy exclaimed: "A Jew is as good as a Breton", which unleashed a sort of storm. The councillor Darquier de Pellepoix, who ran an extremely violent newspaper, *La France enchaînée*, seriously tabled a bill asking that Drumont's name be given to a street as compensation. *Gringoire* published an impressive list of Jewish ministers, cabinet attachés and heads of department under the Front populaire. In a kind of strange sadism, the Ministry of Education was given to a notable anti-militarist who had since become a warmonger and was famous for having published an offensive text about the flag. The cinema practically closed its doors to Aryans. The radio had a Yiddish accent. The more peaceful began to look askance at the frizzy hair and curved noses that abounded. All this is not polemic, it is history.

In April 1938, *Je suis partout* published a special issue on Jews around the world, followed by a second issue in February 1939 on Jews in France, a mass of documents compiled by Lucien Rebatet, and an attempt at a reasonable status for Jews. It was a great success, but also caused quite an outcry. At the same time, instinctive anti-Semitism found its prophet in Louis-Ferdinand Céline, the author of *Journey to the End of the Night*, who, with *Bagatelles pour un massacre*, launched a torrential book of joyous ferocity, excessive of course, but of grandiose verve. There was no reasoning in it, only "the revolt of the natives". The triumph was prodigious.

Fate, however, continued to knock on the door. In March 1936, Chancellor Hitler ordered the reoccupation of the zone that had been demilitarised since the Treaty of Versailles. I don't know whether the French army was ready or not, all I know is that the elections were imminent, and in a republic you don't impose a military operation a few months before the polls. Later, Mr Flandin, the minister at the time, revealed that he had asked the English for their opinion, and that they had been against any idea of retaliation. There were only a few empty speeches, and from then on people were convinced that the war was fatal. On the other side of the Rhine, people went back to work with a vengeance.

Unbounded joy, friendship was offered to France and the whole world, and patiently the sumptuous and hard machines of the Third Reich continued to be built. In March 1938, fulfilling the essential dream of his life, Hitler entered Vienna without a fight, and carried out the Austro-German *Anschluss* which had been on the programme of all the parties in Germany, applauded in advance by the French Marxists, and which the Nazis accomplished while France, as if by chance, was in a ministerial crisis. Italy, which had sent its troops to the Brenner Pass in 1934, did not move this time, separated from us by the criminal policy of sanctions. France just beginning to wake up.

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Such were the events that young Frenchmen in those years could comment on, and which, less and less, were subjects of historical and detached conversation, but were part of their very lives, and of their threatening future. And yet they continued their personal existence, they wandered, they played, they grew up, they grew old, they had homes, wives, amusements, work. None of this was completely secure, but you have to make the most of what's coming.

The spectacle was quite new, with so much madness, even so much mediocrity, the appetite of politicians and the fear of the bourgeoisie. As Pierre Gaxotte reminded us, that was the year when the big shoe manufacturers, to woo public opinion, launched a model for children called the "Bolshevik". That was the future. People were talking about the Russians and interested in their efforts. The trials of the Trotskyists and right-wingers, the official report of which is an unfunny bible of the police in the land of Raskolnikov, their spontaneous confessions, their indictments, seemed horrible to everyone.

— Did you put nails in people's butter? asked the public prosecutor.

— Yes," replied the accused.

— And in eggs?

— No. The hull wouldn't let me.

But Russia was still Russia, the holy mother, and a huge party was formed in France to ensure that nothing could be achieved without the support of Russia.

It was to this gospel that the Communists first devoted themselves, followed by certain journalists who claimed to be nationalists: Pertinax in *L'Echo de Paris*, Henri de Kerillis in *L'Époque* and others. Today it all seems as buffoonish as it is sinister.

I was twenty-seven at the time of the Popular Front. Well, we weren't always bored. Women wore dresses that were a little shorter than in 1932 and a lot longer than in 1925, and charming little hats that soon became bizarre headdresses in the shape of slippers, salad bowls and baskets, which were somewhat ridiculous, it has to be said. A soft-spoken singer, a young Corsican who broke hearts and whose T.S.F. consumed a hundred songs a day, was a huge success. It was the era of the most tender romances, the softest waltzes, the most sensitive souls. Tino Rossi reigned: *Dis-lui*, whispered one of his songs,

*Tell her that spring only
lasts a moment...*

We saw it for ourselves. And the West Indian dances were being abandoned, and there was a furious return to the figure dances that had been fashionable before the other war. 1938 was the year of Lambeth Walk, and this return to a kind of inorganic quadrille was merely a malicious warning from fate: yes, we were indeed in the pre-war period.

Other images were returning from elsewhere: people were once again taking an interest in the great of this world, in the princely families, as in the time of Robert de Fiers. The whole of France, the whole world, became fascinated because the King of England was giving up his throne for a beautiful American woman, Mrs Simpson. It was discussed in the evening papers with a disgusting lack of dignity, and the racing cyclists who kicked their mistresses in the stomach declared, with tears in their eyes, that you should always listen to your heart. There were other signs too: the two-up bicycle, the tandem, which had certainly disappeared for ages, and which suddenly sent couples dressed in identical green into the nearby forests. This was a good thing about the Popular Front: it opened doors. There is no denying that there was a certain snobbery in the movement that sent thousands of young people to the ski slopes every winter. But at least it was a snobbery of the great outdoors. The same was true of the movement that led people to the forests, rivers and countryside, even for

A simple weekend for walkers, cyclists and canoeists. People started camping. *Youth hostels*, whether secular or Christian-democratic, attracted penniless young people. Others preferred solitude, leaving with their tents on their backs for Provence or Luxembourg. When they had a bit of money, they went to the Austrian Tyrol or the Dolomites. The young bourgeois, the young workers, were seized with the same appetite. Nothing was more charming, at that time, than snow trains filled only with young people. There, at least, the snobbery of the Front Populaire was not unhealthy, and for us fascists it was on a par with the exaltations offered by totalitarian regimes to their youth. There were a few grumpy conservatives, of course, but they proved that they understood nothing of the fascist spirit.

Not that we were fanatics: a few days in the snow in 1936 or 1937 were merely 'contemplative' for us, if I can put it that way. But our friends spent their holidays rowing, camping, but Georges Blond, his wife, his sister, José Lupin, went down the Tarn or the Landes rapids. But all over France there was a love of freshness, of trees, of the group. Not without ridicule at times, and nothing was sillier than these villages of campers, brought together by fear of solitude, and who thus found a way to enjoy the discomfort without the pleasure of being away from their fellow human beings. These were not real campers. Real campers shunned their companions and strayed far from the beaten track. At the gates of Paris, couples sometimes waited, waving to the cars that would take them to Fontainebleau. Serious people, full of their rights, of what-is-me-is-me, protested against *hitchhiking*, which the Germans and Americans had been practising for twenty years. They were obviously not fascists.

In the midst of this invasion of nature into the hearts of city dwellers, we for our part continued to enjoy the cities, foreign travel and the tranquil sea. We spent our holidays in the mountains of the Pyrenees, in Vernet, or on the shores of the wonderful gulfs of Villefranche, where the American navy landed with just one word of French as luggage: "Champagne! In 1936 we left Vaugirard to return to the very shores of the school of our youth, in a new house on rue Rataud, in front of a *maquis* full of trees. Alas, on the eve of the war, the *maquis* had completely disappeared, the trees that had made rue Rataud into a village street had been felled, and work had begun on the construction of a new house.

hideous buildings for the École des Sciences, which took away the joy, the greenery and the friendly company of plants. But for a while, we rediscovered here, not far from the rue Mouffetard and the rue Lhomond, the charming, popular and ancient atmosphere of the first district of Paris that we knew and loved.

It was Paris, moreover, all around us, inexhaustible, with each season opening up a new province to us. Never had I returned to the canals of La Villette or Saint-Martin foggy or moonlit nights as I did in '37 or '38. Never had I sought out, around Père-Lachaise, those sudden country streets, suddenly set against a peeled wall, or, near the banks of the Seine, those low-period churches to which the grace of the proportions, the finesse of the forms, the smallness, a sudden harmony between the neighbouring trees, the space of the houses, suddenly confer a soft, Italian beauty. It was a friend of Lucien Rebatet's who took me one day to Saint-Germain-de-Charonne, which stands at the top of the rue de Bagnolet, its village bell tower adorned with a cockerel, its walls repaired with cement, its marvellous peasant simplicity. All around, a garden, but no, a cemetery, the last, I believe, of the Parisian village cemeteries. A little man with a tricorne stands there among the weeds, in a sort of enclosure. I learned that in his lifetime his name was Bègue dit Magloire, a house painter, and also that he was a philosopher, poet, patriot and secretary to M. de Robespierre. He was the great lord of the place, and it suits his old sensitive soul, this asylum from which you can see nothing but trees and a country bell tower, and from which the enormous city with its tall buildings has disappeared. And I would also walk through a nobler Paris, from Les Halles to Place des Vosges, and I would go into the Archives, into the old hotels, and at every step of these crowded and narrow streets of the Marais, suddenly a door would open onto a courtyard, a façade, giving me back the city of Louis XIII as young Pierre Corneille must have disembarked there one day on the patache from Rouen. And we would go to the flea market at the Porte de Saint-Ouen, where Jacques and Assia Lassaigue would take us. We met them at a Bernstein play, because they were the only ones to laugh, as we did, discreetly, when bourgeois emotion was at its height. We saw them often during those years, Jacques would tell us about the Romanian Iron Guard, and we had great conversations about our cats. For we had given them a child of ours, epileptic, and fruit of incest horribly

complicated. We'd rummage through second-hand shops with them, dying to buy a black and gold bedroom in the style of the 1900s, and we'd look for Louis XIII farm tables from Polish Jews who had mastered the art of transforming bread boxes into secretaries. Gravity is not everywhere in life, it's even much less important than lightness.

The fashionable song in those momentous years was joyous and ferocious: it described a chain of catastrophes in ironic fashion, and had as its refrain *Tout va très bien, madame la marquise...* People were always discussing trivial matters, and the great literary event of those days was a book by Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, in which a kind of misogynistic passion was expressed with joyous ferocity. The women were all crazy about it, and all it took was the announcement of a lecture by this voluptuously hated man to fill the hall, whatever the subject. made books ourselves, although we rarely talked about them amongst ourselves. It made more sense to us to joke about Georges Blond's eternal adolescence and spiky, thick hair than to start him on the ironic, slightly bitter, slightly disenchanted and secretive stories he was writing in those years. And we knew that Thierry Maulnier's *Nietzsche* and *Racine* were excellent books (while we waited for the extraordinary pages of *Introduction à la Poésie française*), we often said so to each other, but preferably when he wasn't there. We joked with him, we went to Chartres, we joked about his noctambulism, we looked for him from Lipp to Les Deux-Magots with the young novelist Kléber Haedens, who was as long as he was, and who followed him like a shadow, but we would never have resigned ourselves to talking seriously. One day, one of his comrades made a bust of him. We unveiled it with great ceremony in the studio occupied by Thierry Maulnier in an old house on the rue de Bellechasse where Gustave Doré had his own. You climb up to it by a wooden staircase, at the end of a small garden, and the night owl that Thierry Maulnier is was surprised to find it gone when he came home one night at four o'clock: workmen had taken it away to repair it before daylight. We sometimes went there to drink, listen to records and dance with our friend Annie Jamet. That day, we solemnly surrounded the greenish bust, and Georges Blond gave a short 'cultural' speech, as we used to say in Marxist jargon, in praise of the People's Commissar Thierry Maulnier. It was important to leave the Popular Front with its ignorance of humour.

We also always went to the theatre. I think the most beautiful performance of those years was, at the end of 1937, a wonder, a miracle that will always shine for us, Claudel's *L'Échange* at the Pitoëffs'. Other plays by Claudel seem even more beautiful to me, especially *Partage de Midi* and *Le Soulier de satin*. But illuminated in performance, the tragedy of marriage blazes above the ugly patois of the theatre like a unique mystery. I had been to a few rehearsals, in front of the black set where a golden tree was growing. Claudel was looking at the stage, gesturing and speaking in his big country voice:

— You've got to pull yourselves together, stick together like a bundle of grass. A bunch, you understand...

And dear Georges would say to me:

— We sometimes regret not having met Homer or Shakespeare, not having heard their voices. But you can meet Claudel.

And for a long time I will be able to remember the young woman dressed in blue, raising her arm, crying out: "O shame!" and murmuring the immortal verses of marriage:

And now someone is always there, even sharing his bed when he sleeps, and jealousy presses and grips him.

He was idle and now he has to work as hard as he can, carefree and now he's worried,

And what he earns is not for him, and he has nothing left.

And he grows old while his children grow up.

And where is his wife's beauty?

She spends her life in pain and that's all she brings with her, and who will have the courage to love her?

And a man has no other wife, but she has been given to him, and it is right that he should kiss her with tears and kisses.

And she'll give him money to marry her.

Never before has Ludmilla Pitoëff, perhaps not even in *Sainte Jeanne*, achieved such nobility and such pathos. Those of us who saw it sat beauty on our knees, found it beautiful and honoured it.

And then, as time went by, we also sometimes had strange, somewhat bitter pleasures. A child would appear at Gaston Baty's, in a melodrama by Lenormand, *Les Ratés*, in which Ludmilla Pitoëff had once played a frail ingenue: and now it was a little girl with a long, pale head, with Venetian blonde hair, it was Svetlana Pitoëff who was taking over the role. It was Svetlana Pitoëff, marvellous, fragile and pure, that we were going to see.

and later, in September 1938, in Jean Anouilh's comedy-ballet, *Le bal des voleurs*. How full meaning and dreams it all was for us!

Yet theatre was no longer the mirage it had once been. It was losing its richness, sometimes even its soul, dissolving into stagecraft, and Gaston Baty was no longer the only one committing the sin. Only Giraudoux remained. *Électre*, his masterpiece, was written in those years, as was *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu*, when we could repeat to ourselves so many prophetic phrases: "*A minute's peace is always good to take...*". I didn't meet Jean Giraudoux very often, maybe two or three times. His serious young student face and brilliant, smiling way of expressing himself enchanted me, as did his books and plays. I discovered that he spoke as he wrote, in a less ornate way, no doubt, but profoundly identical, in other words that his way of writing was perfectly natural to him. Probably no other being seemed to me to have an easier and more magical conversation, with his light phrases, his pure French, his necessary images. He spoke to me, discreetly and carefully, it seemed, about La Fontaine, the theatre and the Renaissance. For a long time he wrote on paper for the Quai d'Orsay, at the head of the "Commission des dommages interalliés en Turquie", and this body, twenty years after the war, seemed an invention from one of his novels, an accessory to the poetry of the civil servant. But it was also worth remembering, when listening to him, that he was the only one to fill the living stage with harmonious passions and golden, embroidered dreams.

Cinema, too, almost always used formulas, and we became more regular customers of the clubs where silent films were shown. And so the shows had already taken on the unchanging colours of the past, however close it may have been. I left for Morocco in the spring of 1937, carrying in my suitcase, like a travelling salesman, old films by Méliès and the Swedes, to talk about the other pre-war period, the ancient pleasures of the screen. In the phosphate mines of Khouribgah, an audience of foremen, workers and children laughed wildly at the naive tricks of *Le Locataire diabolique*, the emphases of the Comédie-Française of 1912. But two or three months later, in Tunisia, I met poetry itself. His high commissioner in North Africa, a boy of thirty

Armand Guibert, a teacher in Tunis, used to show me his precious *Cahiers de Barbarie*, where, all by himself, he edited Garcia Lorca and the Mediterranean poets; he told me about his friend Jean Amrouche, a Berber poet and Catholic; he gave me a photograph of Patrice de La Tour du Pin, standing among his dogs. We were among the first to love the *Quête de joie*, and then to follow with some trepidation the obscure and learned fragments that would one day make up the *Somme poétique*. I met the young poet a few times: he seemed mysterious and moody, like an adolescent Ariel. He laughed, however, explaining to me that, in his family, there was Robert de Baudricourt, who did not guess Joan of Arc, and Thomas Corneille, who did not guess poetry, and Grouchy, who did not guess victory, - but I knew very well that he had guessed enigmas that we ourselves will never enter, and that it was his task to tell them. One morning during the war, no doubt like one of his angel hunts, Lieutenant Patrice de La Tour du Pin was wounded and taken prisoner by the Germans. But he could populate his camp with a thousand invisible companions.

So we would gather around us the living figures of those whose books we had once known only, and sometimes we would try in our turn to bring together their images in our own books. The opportunity also arose, always by chance. Only once did I see René Doumic, then permanent secretary of the Académie and director of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, which he looked after with real passion and skill. He was a small, thin old man, prodigiously active, who seemed to me to be living on a low flame, to save his breath, and who received me in a low voice, his knees wrapped in a plaid, in a caulked flat. He wanted to ask me, very kindly, for articles on the theatre, and I was delighted to collect my memories of the Pitoëffs, Dullin, Juvet and Baty. I went to see them again and , reconnecting with my admirations. Gaston Baty appealed to me greatly, because he is a clever, if false, mind. Moreover, he had just staged *the Caprices de Marianne* admirably, turning it into an intoxicating evening, grey and blue, with sets à la Hubert-Robert. He sighed when I spoke to him maliciously about those who accused him of preferring the set to the text. He cleverly quoted *Bérénice* :

— In the seventeenth century, the sympathetic character was Titus. Today, in the post-Romantic era, it's Berenice. If I were to perform this play, I would try to find a staging capable of turning the situation around,

to throw all the light and sympathy back on Titus. Would this be a betrayal of Racine?

Of course not. I was close to believing Gaston Baty a victim of the commentators. Alas! when he staged Goethe's *Faust*, in the first scene, at the Prologue in the sky, he kept only Mephisto's speech, to which the invisible God replied with winking lights. Replacing the word of God with a spotlight - what a terrible symbol!

I saw Dullin again, in his little old provincial theatre, where we always went, once or twice a year. And Louis Jouvet, who told me about Corneille's *Illusion* (he would have it performed at the Théâtre-Français in 1937), and Molière's *Don Juan*, which he should show us:

— During the war, I found the complete works of Saint François de Sales in a dwelling between a cracked basin and an Aubusson armchair. It was there that I read the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, one of the great books of our language. Well, read the role of Elvire again. It's the very tone, the very rhythm of the *Introduction*. As for Sganarelle, that's another adventure. He has been drawn into Italian comedy: but who is the real Sganarelle? He's a poor fellow, who expresses himself badly, who has the faith of a coalman, and who, deep down, is tender. He is the "little brother" of the *Fioretti*.

And at length he reminded me of the performance of the *Don Juan* he dreams of, with that storm at the end of the first act, which is like the first manifestation of God, the invisible hero of this drama about grace. When the storm has died down, just as in Beethoven's work we hear the first notes of the village fete, then Don , still proud, still defying fate, and who has not understood the supreme opportunity offered to him, emerges into a pastoral landscape, and walks disdainfully towards death and damnation, in the soft, ravishing light of spring. Louis Jouvet had just staged *L'École des Femmes*, which he had turned into both a series of exquisite images and an admirable resurrection of what Molière had wanted, drama never separated from farce. Why didn't he play *Don Juan*!

I collected these conversations and others, as well as memories of my dear friends Georges and Ludmilla Pitoëff, in a small book which appeared at the end of 1936 (42). {*Theatre hosts* (Corréa, publisher). At that time, with the help of snobbery, which is not always a bad thing, Jean Zay had decided to rejuvenate the Comédie-Française and dismissed a few old men,

imposed the dictatorship of Edouard Bourdet, assisted by four technical advisors, Jacques Copeau, Louis Jouvet, Charles Dullin and Gaston Baty. Each of them took it in turns to stage an old play, generally less well than he would have done at home. There were some successes, including *L'Illusion*, and later Rostand's old melodrama *Cyrano*. But on the whole, it is not certain that the rejuvenation of the Comédie-Française produced any great results: despite the merits of a young troupe, too many serious old defects were perpetuated in the house, under the whitewash of modernism, and some people claimed that there was perhaps only one way to really reform the Comédie-Française, a totally anachronistic undertaking, and that was to abolish it. These were radical minds.

In those years, I quite often met Maurras for dinner. I will no doubt see him again for a long time, in a beautiful house in the rue Saint-Dominique, under a tenderly lit painting by Corot, or under some fleshy and delicious princess of the Empire painted by David, and discussing poetry in the evening. I will humbly confess that I liked contradict him, I spoke ill of Lamartine, whom he adored, and he complained about contemporary youth, and he asked for a Lamartine, and he read, in his beautiful muffled voice, *the Ode aux bardes gallois*, which brings together everything he disliked, Celticism, democracy, illusions, Anglomania, - and he said to me: "Isn't it beautiful? I didn't believe him, I told him so frankly, and Abel Bonnard shook his hair and claimed that Lamartine was only "la mère Hugo", and that if he had been a man, he would have been called Lemartin. Charles Maurras laughed like a schoolboy at these blasphemies, and, to make up for it, I asked him to tell us the verses of Moréas that he loves most of all, Eryphile's complaint:

*O youth, your arms
Are like ivy around oak trees...*

It was at the home of Countess Joachim Murat, who was also to disappear in the early months of the war. Perhaps with her disappeared a world that we young people have known very little about, and into which I am happy to have entered, however little. These beautiful, softly-lit salons, these marvellous paintings, these constant reminders of so many high periods of the past, I am not sure that this ensemble is now possible, and that we can so naturally rediscover a distant and precious atmosphere. Countess Murat was curious about many things.

She was always asking questions and asking questions. People talked freely in her home, in admirable surroundings, and she received guests with a natural pleasure that I don't think happens very often. What a dinner or an evening at her house represented in terms of effortless effort, culture, the past and traditions, we will probably never find again, except in Proust's books. The Countess de Noailles, Colette and Barrès had come to see her. We met Maurras there. I often found myself with René Benjamin, who always drew me to the Corots and with whom we talked about Spain at war, with Edmond Jaloux, calm and wise as a Buddhist elephant, with Abel Bonnard, Léon Daudet, Lucien Corpechot and others. Pierre Gaxotte and Henri Massis came here, and we met Léon Bérard and the Spanish ambassador. I remember one day congratulating Hélène Vacaresco on the oil springs that had been discovered on her land in Romania.

— There were fires at night when I was little. My mother said they were the souls of the dead, and had prayers said for them. So many prayers for this oil!

She laughed and recounted with great humour how she had asked that no pumps be installed in a small wood where she had played as a child.

— But the engineers insisted, and my sister Zoé thought I was becoming so short-sighted... She ended up signing!

We listened to these remarks without emphasis, we had fun, and then we came back to learn about Provence, poetry and the world from Maurras.

This magnificent man, this prince of life, I was also to see in more surprising places. For having written that parliamentarians guilty of wanting war with Italy should be killed *if they had their way*, the Blum ministry had Charles Maurras imprisoned at La Santé. He stayed there for eight months, writing every day in *l'Action française*, under the pseudonym of Pellisson, and continuing to analyse the world and France. I went to see him one afternoon in July 1937. He had just published *Mes idées politiques*, the most essential of his books, I think, the one that should first be read by those who do not know it, preceded by an admirable preface on natural politics. I had never been inside the prison, whose doors were opened for me by Jacques Bainville. If I remember correctly, Charles Maurras had the right to receive visits, in a limited number: on the list of his friends, he replaced, from time to time, and in a way that was not unusual for the French, the French and the French.

one name by another. There couldn't have been more than five of us in the prison, and I left to let the Duchesse de Vendôme in. We passed through several gates, climbed a very theatrical spiral staircase, and reached the floor of the political prisoners. Charles Maurras was alone there. He had papered the wall of his room with photographs of Martigues and Greece, pictures, and even a caricature of himself at La Santé by Jean Effel was pinned to the wall. The next room, which served as his refectory, was full of flowers. We went down into a narrow courtyard, adorned with a few trees:

— Don't I look good?" he says sincerely. It's delicious.

He seemed to see nothing but flowers, pictures and books piled up in giant heaps. Yet every day, in this prison that was no longer an asylum, people came to talk to him about everything, and about the quarrels of the world. He talked to me about peace and war, about a book by Jean Fontenoy on communism, *L'École du Renégat*, and told me a few things. His Athenian eye twinkled with mischief as he explained how the articles written by Liebknecht the father against Dreyfus in a Viennese newspaper had been translated for him by an eminent figure in the French Socialist Party forty years ago. He quoted the *Stances de Moréas* that he had copied from the hand of M. Bracke, director of *Le Populaire*, and the dedication that the latter had put on one of his editions of Greek classics: *To Charles Maurras, who is the most expert in political matters*. I didn't ask him any questions, I just listened to him, in those hideous walls where the government had locked up the greatest thinker of his time, I drank with him from the coarse glasses, and he talked about art, and his country, and the future. I will long think of that day in 1937 as the young listeners of Socrates might think of the deep morning.

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This Italy, for which the greatest defender of the Latin idea had been imprisoned, was precisely what we were to get to know that year. We went there twice, in a rainy spring and a splendid summer. I sometimes gather around me, in my thoughts, little medallions, each containing a city. I know that in Florence, seized from the top of San Miniato, with its dome and its old bridge, and its dungeons standing in the evening mist, I saw gathered together the treasures of the city.

of plastic art, and also Tuscan grace, the ironic and singing Italian people. We strolled along the Ponte Vecchio, weighed down with shops like the bridges of Paris under Louis XIII, we went to San-Marco to admire what the Paris Exhibition had not shown us, the Angelico, so violent in his pure tones, his blues, his golds, his dominating power where people only wanted to see gentleness, - and in the painting of the Ponte Vecchio, and in the shadow of the Palazzo Riccardi, the sumptuous procession of golden, curly-haired youth, among the pines, rocks, horses and deer, the Three Wise Men by Benozzo Gozzoli. And at San Gimignano, among the high towers and narrow streets of this admirable city, we saw the same Gozzoli walking his young Saint Augustine through the Tuscan countryside that we had barely left behind. And we arrived in Siena one Good Friday night, with hooded penitents emerging from the huge, mysterious, embroidered cathedral, and the next day on the shell-shaped Pallio, surrounded by curved palaces, we understood the joy and grace of Siena, hidden in its severity. And the first time we saw Venice, all the sluices to heaven were open. Dead cats swirled in the canals, the storm threw peelings and weeds in the face of the strollers, the black gondolas were like cockroaches, and the patriarch had closed the Ducal Palace in honour of Easter Day. But you have to have known Venice like this, a ghost town, a city of water, where Saint George the Greater emerges in the mist, on the other side of the Grand Canal, like a church in Ys or Thule.

During the summer, we were able to return to the region, passing through some less famous towns and stopping off at Prato, where one of Italy's most ravishing churches stands in a village square. We had seen Verona in spring, with its beautiful herb market. We had seen the miraculous Ravenna in summer, a big city almost identical to our southern cities, without character, and suddenly, in three or four sacred places, one of the most enigmatic cities in the world, the silent witness of a prodigious century, incomprehensible and more exotic perhaps than Islam or China: Saint Apollinaire *in Classe*, the mausoleums, the mosaics fresh to the eye like green grass, like newly woven wool, the remains of this prodigious civilisation of gold and theology, Byzantium in its pride and beauty. And finally, in the evening, after we had taken a walk with an old coachman who talked to us about d'Annunzio and La Duse, and recited to us the

Francesca de Rimini's canticle, a small, courteous and succulent Italian inn.

It was modern Italy too, Fascist Italy. First of all, we found it in the trains, full of children singing and shouting, being taken everywhere to breathe better air, to contemplate the most beautiful sun in the world, or even simply to admire and love, because Italy is beautiful, and children mustn't ignore it. Along the route, on all sides, you could see camps where hundreds of naked children were playing in the sun. In the carriages pulled by slow locomotives, here were ten-year-olds dressed in white and black, wearing the little fascist "fez". Arriving in Venice, a group from Sarajevo, girls and boys dressed in short black skirts, tumble out with their backpacks. In Piazza San Marco earlier, little Venetians (some no more than four or five years old) disembarked from a cruise ship, their mothers greeting them with loud shouts.

And they sing. They sing children's songs, which mean nothing, as they do in every country in the world. They also sing, together, in a chanted voice, fascist songs. Fifteen-year-old avant-guardists and twenty-five-year-old fascists lead these laughing herds, teaching them the anthem of a country that has chosen the word "fascism" as its password.

"youth". But also the songs that are maliciously whispered behind the backs of foreigners (especially if you suspect them of being English or French), about the "twenty-five nations that have taken sanctions against Italy". And the hymns for the Ethiopian campaign, the dead of Adoua, printed on red and blue scarves and light fabrics.

We heard them everywhere, and we spent a fortnight in Rapallo, in front of the perfect gulf, a few days of admirable peace, before resuming our peregrinations through northern Italy. It was there that I finished a fairly long story, *Comme le temps passe*, in which I tried to capture, with time slipping away, the other pre-war period as I imagined it, and the war as those who didn't fight it saw it, and even a few years of our post-war period (or what we called it). Then we set off again for the beautiful cities of the interior, and for deadly, marmorated Pisa, where the storm broke as we reached the Campo-Santo, supernatural under the lightning, and again for Venice.

We still remember how crowded it was and how we wandered around for a whole day looking for somewhere to stay, before finally finding a small Renaissance house, exquisite in its lines and colour, in a maze of empty streets near San Giovanni Crisostomo. It has been turned into an inn, and as it is opposite the Malibran theatre, it bears the theatre's name. The living room is decorated with portraits of actors on tour. It brings to mind *Les Ratés*. The Danieli, the Bauer, the Grand Hôtel are far away. But there is no choice. Let's try the Hotel des *Ratés*. It's charming, by the way, in the centre of the little Venetian people, the truest part of the city. How we loved these narrow streets, this green water, these explorations in the depths of discreet churches and palaces rich with admirable paintings!

This is the year of the Tintoretto Exhibition. Here, at Pesaro, is the extraordinary *Last Supper* of Saint George the Greater, under angels blowing up a storm, with its disturbing lighting and its large empty spaces around the table. Here is the *Garden of Olives*, where, in a thicket of branches, the apostles sleep, and where, under the leaves splashed with torchlight, the soldiers led by Judas approach. This is an incomparable masterpiece in which Tintoretto rediscovers all the elements of his genius: night, light, the forest and drama, which we find again in *Arsinoe* and *Susanna* of Vienna. But the Rezzonico is also home to the Exhibition of Venetian Festivities and Masks, a marvel of enchantment and magic. Firstly, because the Palazzo Rezzonico is ravishing, with its antique furniture, reconstructed interiors, small paintings by Longhi, soft green silks and a reproduction of the famous Tiepolo villa. These unbearable painters of pink divinities wriggling in a bluish sky painted frescoes of dancing masks, minuets and satyrs in soft grey tones, masterpieces of skilful grace. Then, on the top floor, where you can see the tiled roofs of Venice and its interior gardens, next to the pharmacy, the costumes and the puppet theatre, there is an exhibition of paintings depicting the festivals of Venice. Here we find Canaletto, gleaming with sunlight and gilt, and Francesco Guardi, who was one of the revelations of the Italian Art Exhibition in Paris. Here he is, making the evening fall blue and grey on Piazza San Marco; elsewhere, almost at night, when powdered lords stroll about, their shadows turning them purple. He casts a kind of silvery magic and graceful melancholy over his canvases. And then..,

Suddenly, in a little Venetian river, he shines his bare light on a yellow or grey wall and a gondolier's jacket. How beautiful Venice is...

But it is also inexhaustible. Do those who have spent two days in the city even know what is most precious about it, these immense working-class districts, full of tomato and courgette stalls, and where, between gloomy walls, in narrow streets and on rotten canals, lives a small, singing, laughing and courageous people? I have to admit that these colours and the slightly heavy sadness of the scenery affect me much more than the beautiful succession of palaces on the Grand Canal. And then, in every street, in a Renaissance or Jesuit church (Venice will reconcile you, if you haven't already done so, with all the Baroque churches in the world), there are hidden paintings by some of the greatest painters of all time. Here is Saint-Georges dei Schiavoni, which little Proust used to dream about. This Sansovino chapel is deserted. Yet it is here that you will find the most beautiful Carpaccios, the legends of Saint George, Saint Tryphon and Saint Jerome. What a beautiful and patient will of the illuminator, what imagination in these oriental costumes! But also what accuracy in this desert, adorned with dry palm trees and poor walls, where the saint comes to die, just as a twentieth-century administrator dies in a colonial town.

Then we have fun talking about the patriarch. The patriarch, whom I respect with all my heart, is certainly one of the most important figures in the city. People say his name with a certain awe, and lower their voices in veneration. At the café one day, some Swiss were asking the waiter about the pleasures of Venice.

- Oh no," he replied, "there's no casino. You have to go to the Lido for that. The patriarch doesn't want you there. He's very religious, you know, the patriarch. (I suppose he meant he's very strict, as no reasonable doubt has ever been cast on the orthodoxy of this venerable bishop). He doesn't much like people riding around in gondolas at night either. He doesn't want people kissing in the streets. He wants a lot of morals, a lot of morals.

The unfortunate Swiss looked very distraught. If I had dared, I would have advised them to take a walk through the old streets, around the churches. They would have seen the effects of the patriarch's personal propaganda. We know that fascists love inscriptions, and all travellers to Italy have brought back some very beautiful ones. Here's one that I didn't know, and that we can dedicate to all nationalists: *"A fascist doesn't disown his*

*And everywhere, of course: "Long live the Duce! And everywhere, of course: "Long live the Duce" (Vive is spelt with a sort of W), "Long live the King". "Long live the volunteers" and even "Long live the railway militia". All duly printed on strips of paper. In the whole of northern Italy, I saw only two handwritten inscriptions, which were often repeated. One was "Viva Guerra", which doesn't mean "Long live the war", but salutes a racing cyclist. The other was "Viva Binda", not intended to honour the author of *La Trahison des clercs*, but another racing cyclist, no doubt. The patriarch probably felt that fascist inscriptions were not enough to uplift the soul of the people. And so we see, around the churches, strips of paper proclaiming: "Long live the patriarch", "Long live our parish", "Long live our bishop", and even "Long live the new priest", which is not very kind to the old one. Without the patriarch, Venice would not be quite the same in 1937, and that would be a pity. In the churches, he spread notices, in four languages, forbidding women without hats and men without jackets (rest assured, it's only a jacket). When admission is free, nobody pays any attention. But when there is a security guard, he sometimes has to deal with painful issues of conscience.*

One of us wanted to see the Titian paintings in the Frari again. He went there at the stroke of two o'clock in the afternoon, dressed as the sun demanded, i.e. without a jacket and wearing a green tennis visor. A little brother, who could see the entrance lira, stopped him in despair and asked him if he had come on foot. When he answered in the affirmative, he shook his head to say that he was well aware of how hot it was, and whether the Titian candidate had nothing to cover his arms, which were bare to the elbow.

- I've got nothing.

The little brother waved his sleeves, uttered a few mysterious phrases and finally took out his handkerchief and put it on his arm. We understood and complied. One arm was covered, but what about the other? The little brother, again in despair, scratched his forehead, smiled and pointed to the green visor. The bewildered visitor didn't understand. Eventually, however, he realised the obvious: the little brother was advising him to take this five-centimetre wide visor on his arm. God and the patriarch would be watching. And he went to look at the Titians, a handkerchief on left forearm and a tennis visor on his right forearm, much to the astonishment of the other tourists. So

the most serious case of conscience that ever presented itself to the mind of a faithful disciple of the patriarch had been settled.

But for me today, with or without a patriarch, Venice is still Venice, the most unusual and overwhelming of cities. Wandering through these sumptuous markets, along the green *rii* where a fleeting seaweed runs, along the wide, deserted *fondamenta* that border the city, in the Zattere opposite the Giudecca, or in front of this cemetery adorned with monumental gates that rises out of the water like the very castle of death, you realise that you will never fully know this unique city. Its painters have reproduced its festivals, skies and masquerades, and no doubt others its popular joys and sorrows. What you need to know first of all is that Venice is not simple, that it cannot be defined in a single word, that you can find it in its wealth as well as its poverty, in its canals as well as in its suburban gardens, a little bare, where the washing dries, and which you can sometimes see from a window. This is Venice, just as well, this tight expanse of brown roofs, seen from the top of the Campanile, without a rio, without a street, as crowded as an Arab city. It's Venice, this water where the land meets the surface, this water that doesn't have the colour of the sea so close by, and that has been colonised like a desert, with here and there a small town, an arsenal, a church, a warehouse, a factory, a lighthouse. This is Venice, these long walls of the Zattere, with their sad little cafés where sailors drink, and this is Venice again, this gloomy ghetto with its Renaissance synagogue, and this is Venice, these deserted squares in front of the churches, where grass grows around a well that is always closed. This is Venice, this sun, and this is Venice, this rain. Because Venice has treasures other than its palaces, its marvellous paintings, its evenings painted by Guardi, its miracles by Gentile Bellini, where mitred archbishops do the crawl in the Grand Canal, its festivals by Canaletto, its saints by Tintoretto, its Virgins by Titian. Venice has countless faces, a supernatural heart that nothing can ever confine or limit.

It is very difficult for me to talk about *Je suis partout* today, when I still feel so close to my scattered comrades, past pleasures, hopes and memories (43). {We know that in 1943 Robert Brasillach broke away the staff of *Je suis partout* and that from that date on he had a falling out with most of the editors mentioned in this fragment, with the exception of Georges Blond and Henri Poulain}. I also don't think it would be easy to evoke the atmosphere, which bears so little resemblance to

that of the usual newspapers, and where the very organisation would seem improbable and baroque.

Founded in 1930 by Arthème Fayard, it was originally a foreign policy weekly devoted to the study of foreign countries. It was edited by Pierre Gaxotte from the very first issue. Gradually, however, *Je suis partout* began to devote more and more space to French politics, insofar as it related to foreign affairs. Its first special issue devoted to the Soviets was, I believe, in 1932. Others followed. In 1936, the paper ran a violent campaign against the nascent Front Populaire for several months. The elections were as we know. *Je suis partout*, which was making a very normal living and covering its operating costs, was nevertheless no bargain: it was thought that the rise of Marxism would prevent it from making a living at all, and it was decided to close it down. The contributors, saddened by the disappearance of this excellent organ of combat and information, the only one of its kind in France, did not accept this rapid end, and, without there even being a break between two issues, the paper (perhaps unique in the history of journalism) was resurrected. It must be said that costs had been drastically reduced, and all salaries had been cut, or even abolished altogether. The former owners agreed to leave the paper to the contributors, and the new society that was organised a few months later only served to highlight the strange principles of the only *soviet* that exists today in the French press. I mean the only newspaper that is actually run by a team and owned by the contributors.

Of course, this form of de facto cooperative would be nothing if it wasn't underpinned by a spirit of camaraderie and joy. I contributed to the first issues of *Je suis partout*. In 1936, Pierre Gaxotte offered me a regular column, and in April 1937, as the paper was keeping him very busy and he wanted to finish his book on *Frederick II*, he asked me to help him as editor. Events had moved on, and the weekly's increasing violence was earning it a lively following among some, and growing hostility among the majority. We were moving forward in a very exciting atmosphere of slander and rubbish: sold out to Hitler, sold out to Franco, sold out to Mussolini, sold out to big business, sold out to the two hundred families and the Mikado, we were becoming for our opponents something like the official organ of the

international fascism. But we knew that above all we were the newspaper of our friendship and our love of life.

A book of memoirs composed according to the rules includes those solemn moments when the author pauses to compose a portrait. I would be hard pressed to describe them, and indeed a whole gallery would be needed. Suffice it to say that in those years you must have seen Pierre Gaxotte, with his mischievous schoolboy air, approach any event with the mistrust of a cat, walk around it, touch it delicately with his paw, and come back to us with the calm assurance of someone who has understood. We listened to him as a sort of cheerful, mocking oracle, and although he was sometimes unstable, nervous and disappointing, we knew that he knew our country's past, that he didn't have much hope in men, but that he knew how to listen to them, look at them and understand them. He liked serious historians, movies with chases and cream pies, and ballet performances. On Fridays, we'd go and pick him up from *Candide*, and drink terrible fruit juices in a bistro on Place Denfert-Rochereau, which was scarily ugly but deserted. We were the only customers, along with a noble drunkard with a beard whom we called Victor Hugo, and this clientele did not prevent it, alas! from promptly going bankrupt. We used to talk about our work and the world, as we should, without pedantry or respect. When the weather was fine and our frugal café had disappeared, we sometimes went to Parc Montsouris. Those late Friday evenings, in the spring leaves, the warm scents of lime and honey, are among the most charming memories in this diary.

These Friday meetings were almost always attended by the same comrades. Those of *Candide* first, Georges Blond and our mischievous mot-croisiste Max Favalelli. Then our administrators, André Nicolas, always between two car repairs, between two trips to Spain, because, nostalgically, he spent most of the Civil War in the most unhealthy ditches on the Spanish front, - and don Carlos Lesca, an irreducible fascist as much as a calm one, under his big American hat. Dorsay also came, a pink Norman called Pierre Villette who, as a journalist with *the Dépêche de Rouen*, had been familiar with the interplay of men and parties in Parliament since before the war. Finally, always justly irritated, the most stubborn and violent among us, Lucien

Rebatet. What an astonishing boy! He knows painting, he's hung out in all the museums of Europe, he's anti-Semitic and has drunk with Pascin and Modigliani, he's passionate about music, he's a Maurassian, he knows Rimbaud by heart, he's the best, if not the only, film critic today (under the name François Vinneuil), he's one of the most remarkable polemicists I know : because he has it all: verve, style, verve, a gift for seeing, a talent for caricaturing, and sometimes even a sense of justice. Always angry at people, things, the weather, food, theatre and politics, he creates a climate of catastrophe and revolt that no one can resist. And it doesn't take long to realise that this passionate man is the heir of Dauphiné peasants, solid, calm, skilful and even capable of common sense. A military man to boot, a poet in the French army, a born grunt, and capable of discovering poetry in an infantry depot. He is certainly one of those who made *Je suis partout* what it has become. You must have seen him at the printing works, in the big moments, when, for example, he was composing our two special issues on the Jewish question, which he wrote almost entirely; walking up and down the tables, crumpling papers in his hands, smoking a hundred cigarettes and moaning in pain at the thought of having to cut two or three columns per page. Ah, what admirable moments we spent there!

The printing works is, of course, the place I regret most today. First it was the printing press for *l'Intransigeant*, then for *l'Action française*. Sometimes, in the morning, around ten o'clock, I would find Charles Maurras, who hadn't left the place since the evening before, eyes flashing a little, newspapers in the pockets of his big yellowish American gangster coat, and we would look with piety and affection at this unique man who was going to take a few moments' rest through Paris that had been awake for a long time. We spent Tuesday afternoons and Wednesdays there every week. For a long time the editorial secretary was André Page, as curly as his name, highly competent on the subject of cacti and in the choice of foreign caricatures, and to whom, because he was a father (although he was not the only one), we always asked for the articles on the birth rate, covering them with jokes. When he had to leave us because the Fayard bookshop was preparing a new weekly, he was replaced by Henri Poulain, whom René had once told us about. He is a gentle boy, whom I believe

a stubborn, shy-looking man who cultivates laziness, friendship and poets, who can recite long pages from *Bagatelles pour un massacre*, and who is a delightful wit. We spent many happy hours in that narrow print shop, occasionally going out for a drink on the nearest zincs with the head of the workshop, Louis Mora, a lively, dark-haired Italian, with our draughtsmen Phil and Ralph Soupault, and with François Dauture, who always came to finish his articles at print shop. There were also the eternal latecomers: Claude Jeantet, who usually arrived around five o'clock in the evening with a few notes on scraps of paper, and from whom we had to tear out the pages one by one, - and André Nicolas, always back from Spain, - and Japonicus, who glued his typewritten sheets *end to end*, like antique scrolls, like long Japanese sheets, and who, above a tall European body, wore a Far Eastern face. Woe betide us, if the same issue were to bring together articles by these three contributors! Then, always late as well, Alain Laubreaux entered with undeniable majesty. He was our drama critic; he was even more our host, a born journalist, always full of stories and echoes, a round fellow full of remarkable verve, full of heart with that, and who seemed to have discovered with *Je suis partout* the freedom to write, the very pleasure of camaraderie and disrespect. It was he who organised our dinners, where the most serious of our contributors fraternised with the most outbursts, where Pierre Lucius, the only economist who knows to be He applauded Ralph Soupault when he sang the most horrible songs of the French navy. It was he who, during the 1939 war, brought to the paper his tonic strength, his great laugh, his prodigious memory, his inventive powers and his taste for friendship. He is capable of anything; I have seen him replace the foreign policy columnist at a moment's notice and, what seems to me to be even more difficult, produce the crossword puzzles; it would certainly be possible for him to write the newspaper from start to finish in twenty-four hours, and perhaps illustrate it and fill it with advertising. At the printing works, he reigned supreme, competing with the typesetters to see who could go, he to write, they to typeset, cursing the time, the delays, his own in particular, swearing to write earlier, to get up in the morning, never to go to bed again, and all ending with imprecations directed Mr Bernstein. Among the contributors to *Je suis partout*, I found my good master André Bellessort, who has since joined the Académie and was elected Permanent Secretary in 1940. At first, it really seemed very

disrespectful to measure the length of his articles with a string, to ask him to cut a few lines, or even to cut them myself. It wasn't up to me, but to him, to correct the copies: but sometimes in life there are these delicious interventions.

This is how we spent our days of material work, which were sometimes quite hard, but exciting. People liked to come and see us, to entertain us, and because journalists are not those who don't like contact with machines and lead. Bernard de Vaulx came by, reading history books, or watching the French peasants living in Burgundy. And Camille Fégy, who was a Communist, then editor-in-chief of Jacques Doriot's *Liberté*, and who knows what working-class life is like. From time to time, an astonishing young man, Jean Fontenoy, a born adventurer, newspaper editor in Shanghai, agency correspondent in Moscow, fascinating to listen to, to read, a prodigious observer of life, - and engaged in Finland during the war. He sometimes looks like a Briard peasant, sometimes like an Oriental, with his slanting eyes and tanned face. He has published some very tasty books on communism and his travels; he likes to wander through the brawls of our time, hands in his pockets, eyes in all the wrong places, and very quietly amused. He leaves for China as one would leave for Robinson, discusses the coup in five or six languages, does extraordinary imitations of the dismissed generals of 1914, and I think he is the most curious character I have ever met. When our work was done, we used to go for a few half-drinks at the local bistro, with Charles Lesca who, under his calm exterior, never thought the paper was too violent, and the all-powerful master of our printing works, Pierre Varillon. There were strikes in those years, in the printing works as elsewhere. Not at *l'Action française*, which for a long time was the only newspaper published on 1 May. We used to come there on foot, because there was no metro or taxi, and we used to lock ourselves behind the iron gates, guarded by salesmen, in an exciting atmosphere of conspiracy. Those were the days.

There were still others, whom I cannot name all (44). {We know that in June 1940, the police under Mr Mandel, then Minister of the Interior, invented an absurd "plot against State security" against *Je suis partout*. Charles Lesca and Alain Laubreaux were arrested and released on 28 June at the instigation of Marshal Pétain. Naturally, the case was dismissed. Robert Brasillach had been recalled from the Lorraine front, detained for three days at the police station, and had returned to his post by the last train through the bombardments. Subsequently, contributors to the newspaper, Robert Brasillach, Pierre Cousteau, Robert Andriveau, Jacques Perret,

Claude Roy was a prisoner in Germany, and Georges Blond a prisoner for five months in England (Editor's note)}. Our youngest son was Claude Roy, of whom I had read a very fine article several years ago in *the Étudiant français* on the death of Kipling. He wrote ingenious and charming articles on poetry, and went camping with Georges Blond. Because he was blond and curly, we called him the sheep. He sometimes came to see us in uniform, as he was doing his military service. He loved Apollinaire, Supervielle and Patrice de La Tour du Pin, and he began to write short stories, both childish and learned, in a delightful form.

We didn't limit ourselves to Paris and friendship meetings. We sometimes travelled together and gave collective lectures. The best of these was held in Lyon two years running, organised by friends who were passionate about our journal. We called it our *parteitag*, after Nuremberg. The meeting was obviously more modest than the Nazi congresses, but it took place with a truly magnificent fervour. Georges Blond, P.-A. Cousteau and I were there, and in 1938 we brought Lucien Rebatet. He was applauded three times in his first sentence, aroused considerable enthusiasm, and the crowd that listened to him felt ready for anything, from revolution to pogrom. We never wanted to believe that the Lyonnais were a cold people. It's true that to remind us of our modesty, the next day we went to Saint-Étienne to speak in a dark, dingy, empty auditorium, where we had all the trouble in the world preventing Lucien Rebatet from causing a scandal. "I'm too bored," he would murmur in a voice that was frighteningly perceptible. He would leave the stage without a fuss, dreaming of drawing obscene inscriptions in the corridors, exploring the attics, and planning to return to the stage with a pair of stilts he had discovered, while we died of anxiety and contained laughter.

Our regular driver was Pierre-A. Cousteau, whom we liked to call Pac, after his initials. The French army understood the rational use of his skills, since it was in the capacity of driver that they made him start the campaign. I spent a lot of time with this dear boy: in France, in Germany, and twice we went to Spain together. He was also a born journalist, the most direct and lively of us all in this field, along with Alain Laubreaux and Lucien Rebatet, and the most outspoken person in the world, and the best comrade. I don't think we're very much alike, I'd say.

But I didn't get on with anyone in those years the way I did with him. He hates camping, and he has done sixteen thousand kilometres of camping in America. He doesn't like cars, and he's been all over Europe in one, and he's still at the wheel. He's passionate, he's clear, he's full of good and funny ideas. It was he who wrote almost all our parody pages in *Je suis partout*, including his masterpiece, a fake *Paris-Soir* called *Paris- Sucre*, with a portrait of the murderer in the cradle, revelations about the journey of Mr Chamberlain in Munich for the love of a little umbrella seller, a historical novel in the style of Paul Reboux about the love affair between Saint Louis and the beautiful Fatma, and statistics about jam slices and the steamroller that Russian and Chinese democracy can put in the balance. But it was he who also wrote the foreign policy bulletin, and the most serious studies on Soviet deficiencies. There is no one more pleasant to travel and work with: he is always in a good mood and always inventive. We had fun, we did a lot of work, we pulled off a few pranks, and we attracted some solid hatred from the right and the left. We were neither conservatives nor Marxists. In May 1938, when the Communists marched in Père-Lachaise in honour of the dead of the Commune, we published a list of the "dead of the National Revolution" since the war, from Philippe Daudet to the little Gignoux, and we went to the Mur des Fédérés to lay a wreath "to the first victims of the regime". And we also considered the Marxist workers of Clichy who fell to the bullets of the Front Populaire police during a strike to be victims of the regime.

In this astonishing newspaper, more than anywhere else, we have experienced what must be called true camaraderie. In order to develop, it undoubtedly needs shared work, shared hopes and even shared dangers. It also needs trust, sympathy and cheerfulness, and not to take itself too seriously. We had all that, and we had it with youth still with us, in an increasingly troubled and changing world, where our camaraderie seemed to us to be one of the few fixed points. That's what gave us the pleasures that can't be taken away from us, the liveliness, the gaiety, the freedom, that we're desperate to convey to those who don't know what we're talking about.

life, humour and freedom. In a day at the printing works, a discussion, a trip, we recognise today the taste and smell of this unique camaraderie. It cannot exist in newspapers, which are subject so many human and customary rules: you need something other than working in the same place. It requires the feeling of forming a gang, for better or for worse, and what we will call, to shock the bourgeoisie, the sense of gang.

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I have to confess that although we loved Paris and its shows, we had never really attended lectures until then. In ten years or so, apart from certain political meetings, I don't think I'd ever attended anything other than the lectures André Bellessort gave in 1929 or 1930 at the Institut d'Action Française on the origins of the Third Republic, where we would happily meet up with our good teacher. It was not until 1936 that we began, in a strange way, to pronounce them ourselves, and, no doubt in response to a taste for them, to go and listen to them. At the *Annales* we heard Jean Giraudoux talk about La Fontaine, hesitating a little, as if embarrassed by such a task, and portray him as haunted by sleep, women, the world, truth, fables more than fables. Above all, we soon came to know *Rive gauche*, where we brought the spirit, the pleasure, the imprudence, the fantasy, the laughter and the joke that we had brought, a few years earlier, to *the Revue française*. Nothing was ever done among us without the collaboration of irony, and if the pleasure we took ended in pain and irreparable regret, it is all the dearer to us.

Rive gauche began at the end of 1934, I think, when a young woman from Bordeaux, with almost no connections, set about organising a young, lively lecture society. Annie Jamet had given talks to Charles Maurras, Henri Massis and Louis Juvet. At home, in a small flat on Boulevard Péreire with six children, she wrote letters in her bad handwriting, typed by her husband, the maid, the housekeeper or visiting friends. Sometimes there were mistakes, of course. Nothing is as fickle as the lecturing bird. It promises, and it doesn't come. He changes his mind, the subject, the day, time. He has to be replaced at a moment's notice. The audience

is not always warned. One day, some pious people came to hear a lecture on Catholic scouting and came across Salvador Dali, the surrealist painter, who began by spouting enormous obscenities and ended his lecture with his feet in a bowl and an omelette on his head. Annie Jamet repaired the errors as best she could, apologising, writing and laughing under her breath. She must have seen many others. One day, to illustrate the lecture given by a pro-Chinese novelist, she candidly had a Japanese propaganda film shown. Penniless, of course, always in debt, always looking for a sponsor who never came, she had the idea, one fine morning in 1936, of setting up a travel agency, and she convinced a big Swiss businessman, who liked her ideas. An agency was set up in Paris, which lasted a few months, but where I believe the organisation was lacking. The fine team was dismissed, and the majestic plans to show the Swiss around Paris with cards that would give them free entry to theatres, cinemas and buses without paying were abandoned: a free and complete package, the advantages of the caravan and those of individuality. It was too good to be true, and nobody understood. Some of our friends worked with her on it. A brother of Maurice's, Henri Bardèche, who had returned from the seas as a commissioner, the desert as a hotel manager, Paris as a candidate for a job, Europe as someone who was always engaged to girls who were always pretty and always foreign, brought her his smile, his friendship, his kindness, and by a miracle, was the only one to escape the dispersal. By the summer of 1937, there was only one agency left, like all the others, and Annie Jamet returned to *Rive gauche*.

I had met her at the beginning of 1936, when she had asked me to give a lecture on Jacques Bainville that Charles Maurras was to chair, and it was then that I got to know her, on those rainy days in February when we were scouring the halls for hire. Because M. Léon Blum had had ear flayed, and Charles Maurras was a dangerous malefactor whom nobody wanted. Mr René Rocher, director of the Vieux-Colombier, where Annie Jamet gave her lectures, had banned him, and others, terrified, barricaded themselves behind their doors. In the end, however, a brave man was found, but during the search I got to know this lively young brunette woman, who was so quickly a comrade, excited by the resistance, courageous like no one I've ever seen, who advanced through the obstacles, her nose pointed forward, and we called her the Jamet bird.

In the winter of 1936, Pierre Gaxotte gave five lectures on France at *Rive gauche*. It was in the evening, in the horrible Salle des Sociétés Savantes in the Quartier Latin, which was always full. We would gather there as if for a ritual: it was what we called "la messe de Gaxotte". The lecturer would arrive, his thin, mocking student face all smiles, young and slim, he would place his papers on the table, and in a clear voice, he would begin to explain France. His pride, not his prudence, his prodigality, not his avarice. He quoted the letters of Louis XIV and those of Lyautey, taking us on a tour of a sentimental and marvellous geography, where the smallest town was rich with so much effort, pleasure and joie de vivre. A mocker, he had no respect for the great of this world or their principles. But he saluted youth, and reminded us that the watchword of France in the great century was not reason, as has been said, but *glory*. And that France was not measured, but great.

She asked us to speak at her place, happy to take risks, to gather an audience for young people who had never appeared on a stage. She also sent us to the provinces, we all more or less landed with a suitcase and a few sheets of paper in a small town to talk about fascism, the press, literature and our travels. In this way we sometimes got to know some astonishing circles, some erudite, wise and charming, others full of life, others still strangely narrow-minded, strangely limited on a single subject, ignorant of everything in the world except, for example, masonry, or the way to kill oxen, or medals from the Lower Empire. The most surprising, varied, accurate and exotic picture of the French bourgeoisie could probably be drawn by a slightly diligent lecturer. Our friend wanted to give an accurate picture of her time, and she encouraged parliamentarians and left-wing writers, who sometimes refused to come to a society infested with the spirit of Action française, foreigners and travellers. At the beginning of the winter of 1937, we organised three *Je suis partout* conferences for him, which were a great success. The slightest idea, if it seemed original, was always welcomed, whatever the risks. And people knew about it, and began to come and welcome this determined young woman, with her adventurous, sometimes scrappy spirit, and the extraordinary atmosphere of life and youth that she carried with her.

She got her client, who spoke very little French, to talk about her ideas, which essentially consisted of buying the most expensive products on the market.

empty seats in theatres, empty rooms in hotels in the off-season, what he called 'buying the hollows'. But as he gave no explanation when he used this apt and baroque expression, the audience wondered what this Swiss with the appalling accent meant. She asked for a German to explain what Nazi youth was, but they sent her a German who didn't speak French: and this lecture given in German almost caused a scandal, through no fault of poor Annie's own. She shrugged her shoulders, laughed and ran around on cold nights, always in need of friendship, camaraderie and even excitement. It was she alone, of course, who led her conferences, and who thus got people who were hardly friends of ours, such as M. Benda, to speak out of curiosity, unless she asked Vaillant-Couturier to explain what communism was. We attended a few, or, when it was too boring, we dragged her out of the Bonaparte cinema where they were held in the afternoon, and went for a drink at the nearest bar-tabac. She would also sometimes bring together speakers, friends and ladies of the world in small gatherings, sometimes at her home, more often at the homes of friends with large empty flats, who willingly entrusted them to her. It was always a surprise party, a picnic or a student evening.

Last year, *Rive gauche* offered us many pleasures. She began in 1935 with an act by Paul Morand: why not go back to the theatre? Annie Jamet was beating the drum in her social circle. I offered her four lectures on Pierre Corneille. The tragedy would then be performed for these Sciences-Po students, these lawyers, these young women of the world. A young Norwegian was discovered at Dullin's, a young Russian at a dressmaker's. Perfect, they would be Rodrigue and Chimène. Perfect, they would be Rodrigue and Chimène, and the confidante would be Romanian. From this pure extravagance would emerge one of the most serious moments of my life as a spectator, the meeting of a twenty-year-old Cid, as handsome as a young Viking, with golden hair on his golden armour, and a pale, white Chimène, with a huge black cross on her white dress, and the Cid on his knees offering his life, and Chimène turning away with a marvellous trembling. I'll never see that again. We would rehearse whole evenings, the lesser-known plays, sometimes the most beautiful, the serious and marvellous *Suréna*, and *Titus and Berenice*, and *Attila*, and we would put on an act of *Nicomède* in an Arab set, and the central scene of *Sertorius* in fascist black shirts, and

the first act of *Clitandre* with placards as a backdrop, in a style that was half parody, half sincerity. For *Attila*, Thierry Maulnier had imagined a production in the style of Camp du drap d'or; He and Annie Jamet had borrowed pale green curtains from Georges Pitoëff for me, he had built a light tent, and thirty thousand francs worth of furs had been thrown on stage (amateur actors have their advantages), and the actors had rented antique costumes, but they wore canes and wigs to give this comedy of love its true Louis-Quatorzian style. It was a sumptuous success.

At the same time, Georges Blond was preparing a cruel and ingenious lecture on pre-war theatre. An act of Lavedan was performed, and above all two acts of *Amoureuse*, which were prodigious: the burlesque of this pre-war pathos, accentuated by the shabby set, the costumes of the period, the moustaches and lorgnon of the irresistible seducer, the beard of the cuckold, gave this performance the look of a 1912 film, and put Porto-Riche in its true place. Even so, it was perhaps his least mediocre play, as if Georges Blond, who could have chosen Bataille, whose faults were more apparent, had played up the difficulty, the better to bring out the fundamental stupidity of this theatre. It was January 1938, it seems like a century ago, and we were having a great time. We were rediscovering the pleasures of our youth, once again, and the world of *tapirs*, and the parody that has always been dear to us, and the taste for jokes, and the pleasure of work, and friendship.

All that has disappeared. The third lecture on Corneille, on Friday 25 February 1938, took place without a performance, and the last one, eight days later, was given, with *Suréna* and *Psyché*, only as a farewell. On 25 February, Annie Jamet had died of an unexpected peritonitis within forty-eight hours.

What was she? A friend of ours once said to me:

- The most extraordinary thing about her was her courage.

I think that's the right word. She was courageous, she never gave up, not in the face of material difficulties, not in the face of any other, not even in the face of rebuffs, which is perhaps more difficult for a woman. And she was a friend, as few friends are, a bold, ingenious, devoted comrade, ready to use any trick or resistance for her companions. But above all, she was the closest thing to life that I have ever known.

I'll never forget her: I give this banal phrase its full meaning. I used to go out with her at night, in the bright lights of Paris, and we'd talk until two in the morning. The doors of the cafés on the Champs-Élysées were closed to us, and we almost always ended up stranded there. Sometimes we'd have dinner in a small, cramped bistro in Neuilly, where I never went back, - or we'd go to La Villette and take a walk along the canal. I don't think you could say that we shared confidences. That's not exactly my habit. But we exchanged words, under the guise of general ideas, that we would probably never have said to anyone else. Everything about Annie Jamet became extraordinarily alive, extraordinarily present. Sometimes she would phone me for an hour, for her lectures, or for nothing. Not to chat, but to accentuate her presence and her grip on life.

I think she loved everything about life: the pleasures as well as the pains. Imprudent in all things, rushing through dangers and temptations, her little bird's head in front, not thoughtless though, but stubborn on the contrary, and wilful, she was the most human of human creatures. Not without worries, of course, without some inner turmoil, burnt out, sleepless, in need of friends, noise, nightlife, almost afraid of being alone, it seemed, and suddenly leaving for a few days of solitude in the mountains, as far away as possible, without anyone. We made a few trips together, with other friends, always quick trips, as if nothing lasting could be established with this being: one day to Brussels, to see the Comte de Paris, one day to Switzerland, five days to Germany. She seemed relaxed, a little drunk, oblivious to Paris, its ambitions and its worries. And then, this woman who loved the theatre, the dance, the noise, the nightlife, suddenly took on a low voice, bright eyes, and you realised that the thing in the world she cared about most, even though her life kept her away from them most of the time, was her children, her six children.

I went to see her two days before she died, she was lying sick, all yellow, she had been suffering since the morning, but we would never have thought of leaving so suddenly. After the operation, which was attempted too late, a priest was brought in. I was told that she had a long talk with him, and that he came away full of admiration for this astonishing woman. She must have put in the same tenacity, the same eagerness to convince, which she certainly didn't have.

which she abandoned before God, and which always helped her to achieve her goals, with her little voice, a little breathless, a little out of tune.

For me, who perhaps never had a true friendship, a friendship that I would like to call virile, for any other woman but her, I still cannot believe today that she is no more. I'm not saying that I want to write to her, we never wrote to each other. But I do think that when I get back to Paris, I'll hear her on the phone again, that I'll find the city shimmering in the rain, our evening cafés, Suzy Solidor's cabaret where we once went, the Molitor swimming pool where she used to take one of her children from time to time. I think she's alive. I don't think I'm wrong.

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To conclude this series images of friends, living or dead, I feel I must finally seek out one of the most precious of them all.

Former admirers of Péguy, we had been talking for a long time about making the pilgrimage to Chartres. We weren't all keen walkers, of course, and I less so than most. But we didn't know the cathedral, we didn't know the town, and we wanted to see. Young people were beginning to take to the roads and sleep outdoors. Our first pilgrimage was on Ascension Day 1936, when the weather was cool and rainy. When Péguy made the pilgrimage, the suburbs were more pleasant, no doubt, less industrial, less criss-crossed by cars: from Notre-Dame de Paris to Palaiseau, via Sceaux and Croix-de-Berny, the road is very boring. We talked curiously about the poem and its appendices:

We've left our shop for three days...

and Péguy's comment to his friend Lotte: "One hundred and forty-four kilometres in three days... Ah, old chap, the Crusades were easy...". What was that figure? There are ninety kilometres from Paris to Chartres. I know that Péguy passed through Dourdan, which makes the route quite a bit longer. But he only left from his house in Lozère, in the suburbs, and not from Notre-Dame. We knew that he had travelled there and back. In three days? That was a lot. These mysteries remained unsolved for a long time, and Pierre Bost, who made the pilgrimage the following September and wrote about it in *Marianne*, asked himself the same questions. As he had Alain Fournier among Péguy's companions, I asked him

I asked M^{me} Jacques Rivière, Alain Fournier's sister, whom I met one day at the Corrêa publishing house (she showed me a photograph of her brother, her daughter dressed as a nun, and her son, who looked a bit like the young men of 1907, whom I had read so much at Louis-le-Grand...) It was she who gave me the key to the mystery. First of all, Alain Fournier had not taken part in the pilgrimage, but he had promised to accompany her on a second trip, which never took place. To put it another way

"Péguy set off from Lozère, on a Friday I think, after mid-morning, arriving in Chartres on Saturday evening, which represents a good average walk, but is not implausible. He left again on Sunday morning, and returned to Paris on Monday. His journey had taken some seventy-five hours, or three days, but in four days. Everything became clear to us.

We were more modest, contenting ourselves with twenty-five to thirty kilometres a day, so that we too could reach Chartres in three days. We weren't quite used to campers yet, and people looked at us sideways in the village hotels where we stopped, even though they should have been delighted with this opportunity. There were Georges and Germaine Blond, José Lupin, Maurice and me on the first day. But we weren't all free enough to have three days to ourselves, and some of us had to go back to work. I myself abandoned the route on the last day. But we all met up again on Sunday in Chartres, with other friends who had come by train. We had been on the march before:

*At an even pace, without haste or recourse,
From the most present fields to the nearest fields.*

When I left, I borrowed a camper's bag from Jean Effel that he had brought back from Russia, and we used to joke about it a lot because it was of rather mediocre quality, its leathers tore like paper, and it inspired in us the strongest doubts about Soviet industry and the army. However, I've kept that 'komsomol bag' ever since, and I'm not unaware of the humour in carrying it around with me today.

The following year, in September 1937, we did the Chartres pilgrimage again, this time in its entirety for me. We went through the Chevreuse valley, which was more pleasant, and in the mild autumn we found the same impression, the same freshness.

And so we set sail for our cathedral...

It's a bit of a long walk, I admit, for someone who's not used to walking on roads like this. But the landscape is less monotonous than you might think, undulating and grassy, and the rest on the slope of a field, in front of the millstones, is unforgettable, as is the tiredness, in the evening, when the knees no longer bend, on the third day. I sometimes look at the photographs we took, to prove Péguy wrong:

This is the area you can't miss in photos...

And I'm thinking above all of that indistinct, pure line that suddenly, when you're really on the plain, begins to rise on the horizon, to call out, from twenty kilometres away, gradually becoming clearer, "the only arrow in the world":

*Tour de David, here's your beauceronne tower,
It's the hardest spike that ever went up...*

Ambulatory literary criticism has its charm.

As I write these lines on a snowy day in Alsace, I think even more of my friends from those two pilgrimages. I think of the marvel that appeared in the little square, of the two towers, the flowery one and the simple one, of the soft blue stained-glass windows, of the musical angel, of the donkey, of the seasons, of the charming or comical figures that lift up the songs of the earth to the Creator, I think of the French marvel, of all that sculpture, the most tender there is, the only one in the world that moves me, of the Middle Ages of miracles and incarnations. If Notre-Dame wills, one of these summers we will return to Chartres, along the dry, ringing roads, we who have made the two pilgrimages of these years, and other friends, if they wish. We will rediscover our preserved youth,

*The image and layout of our turnarounds,
The wool and spindle of the most modest spells...*

Perhaps we'll bring other images than those we used to present to the Black Madonna, in the Chapel of a Thousand Candles, or in the low, cool crypt. Today, we know that we have nothing to ask of Our Lady of Chartres: all we have to do is do as Péguy did, hand ourselves over, entrust ourselves, and it is no longer our task to watch over ourselves. But we will be able to think, as we are thinking now, for the dead and for the living, of the sacred poem:

*Et nunc et in hora, we pray you for us, Who are
greater fools than this poor kid, And no doubt less
pure and less in your hand, And less inclined
towards your holy knees...*

*When they have put us in a narrow pit, When they
have said absolution and mass over us, Please
remember, queen of the promise,
The long journey we made in Beauce...*

VI

THAT EVIL OF THE CENTURY, FASCISM...

We are a long way from the vague promises made in Geneva around 1925 by the builders of clouds and illusions. Perhaps the French youth of ten years later is not free illusions either. But their dreams have another colour, and perhaps this colour is the most difficult to understand in all its nuances, if we want to describe the intellectual adventure of the pre-war period. It was a time when everyone was looking to foreign countries, seeking and often rejecting warnings and instructions. It was a time when, in the face of other nationalisms, French nationalism became more clearly aware of itself, but it was also a time when it listened better than ever beyond its borders. And it was the time when a spirit was being formed that would prepare the way for what could be called French "fascism". This was the last adventure that tempted some of young people around us on the eve of war, and the one that has been told the least.

When a leader, whether friend or foe, addresses his comrades in the Empire and across the seas, when we see the harsh flowering of nationalist youth on the silver screens, we have to take his side: It is not only the men confined within dictatorial borders who feel a blow to the heart, but everywhere, across the vast universe, those who still believe in the virtues of the nation, of race, of history, and who, sometimes moved, sometimes enraged, think of the past and present of their countries, and say to themselves: "Why not us? "

And thanks to the adventures of millions of men in a few countries, in power or on the way to power, thanks to the lines of fortune divined by old and young book writers, we have seen the birth, over the last twenty years, of a new human type, as different and as surprising as the Cartesian hero, as the sensitive, encyclopaedic soul of the eighteenth century, as the Jacobin 'patriot', we have seen the birth of the fascist man. Perhaps, as science between *homo*

faber and *homo sapiens*, perhaps we should offer classifiers and lovers of small labels this *homo fascista*, which was born in Italy, but which can also claim the universal designation of Latin entomology. Those who do not accept his domination would undoubtedly do well to get to know him, even if it means fighting him. For there is no doubt that he stands before them, just as the Christian knight, leaning on the cross and the sword, or the pale revolutionary conspirator in his clandestine printing works and smoky cafés stood before other times - one of the most certain incarnations of his time.

If we were making history instead of putting together images, we would say that, just as the young and sensitive democrat, trained by the Encyclopaedia and its principles, discovered a new exaltation at the birth of the United States of America, created by Freemasonry, so, in the twentieth century, it was Italy that brought the first political realisation of a nationalist and social doctrine. Oliveira Salazar's Portugal, founded on Christian principles, provided the model for a corporative system inspired by La Tour du Pin, which had only been applied in Italy within the framework of a more rigorously statist administration. When Germany, in its turn, completed its revolution, it brought its own personality to it. The cult of the fatherland was expressed in day and night services, in Walpurgis nights lit by floodlights and torches, in huge bands, in songs of war and peace sung by millions of men. Finally, in the years that followed, the various nationalist movements, whether victors or candidates for power, whatever their differences, each contributed a particular feature, or reinforced the notion of a universal revolution, similar to the one that burnt the whole of Europe in 1848, for example.

We were interested in Mustapha Kemal's attempts to create a Turkish national feeling. People were watching the fire being lit everywhere, glowing with a low or high flame, and seeing the whole old world gradually threatened. It was on the plains and canals of Holland, among the pastures, the tulip fields and the armies on bicycles, Mussert's *National-socialistische Beweging*; it was in the suburbs of London itself, in the English meadows, the English mines, Oswald Mosley's *British Union of Fascism* (even if Mosley was mocked); it was the nationalists of Switzerland; all the peoples in turn, from the Balkan gaps

to the dry landscapes of Greece, to the icy fjords, from the red plains of Castile to the green and white mountains where a lost bell rings, began a long, restless, sleepless night, during which they heard everyone singing in their own way: "Nation, wake up! In Romania, Corneliu Codreanu addressed his legionnaires in speeches full of harsh, colourful poetry, appealing for sacrifice, honour and discipline, calling for that "state of collective enlightenment, hitherto encountered in the great religious experiences " which he called the state of "In Belgium, a land of traditional liberalism, Rexism, because of its thirty-year-old leader, focused on the most spectacular and attractive element of the new world: youth. Finally, in Belgium, a land of traditional liberalism, Rexism, because of its thirty-year-old leader, placed the emphasis on the most spectacular and attractive element of the new world: youth. The world was ablaze, the world was singing and coming together, the world was working. Germany, attentive to the new times, was biding its time and constantly preparing for the future.

And finally, while all the various doctrines were either still waiting for power or had seized it without a long war (even German National Socialism), a terrible struggle broke out one of the noblest lands in Europe, pitting *fascism* and *anti-fascism* against each other in bloody combat. Spain was thus completing the transformation of the long simmering opposition in the modern world into a spiritual and material struggle, a genuine crusade. Its international brigades, on both sides, sealed alliances in blood. All over the world, men felt that the siege of Toledo, the siege of Oviedo, the battle of Teruel, Guadalajara, Madrid and Valencia were their own war, their own victories and defeats. The Chinese coolie, the labourer from Belleville, the rogue lost in the London fog, the poor and disappointed gold , the master of the Hungarian or Argentine pastures, could flinch with anguish or pleasure at some misspelled name in some unknown newspaper. In the grey smoke of shells, under a sky ablaze with fighter planes, Russians against Italians, ideological contradictions were resolved in this old land of acts of faith and conquerors, through suffering, blood and death. Spain gave its consecration and definitive nobility to the war of ideas.

This is how myths are created. *It matters very little,*" said Sorel, *"to know what details myths contain that are destined to appear curtly on the plane future history; they are not astrological almanacs... It is a matter of knowing what myths are....*

myths must be seen as a means of influencing the present...". The flames of the Spanish war gave these images their power of expansion and their religious colouring. We cannot ignore them.

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It was during a trip to Belgium in 1936, when, as I didn't know, the communist revolution in Paris was expected in the middle of June, that I first met a few people possessed by the new spirit. A walk for journalists and travel agency directors had been organised by Belgian tourism and, for some reason, I had been asked to take part. I've never been on another group trip: at least once, it's both boring and great fun. The disadvantages were less for me, who already knew Belgium. All I saw was the comical aspect of the caravan, the human microcosm where everyone was rushing through their daily lives, and the strange characters. I also met some companions to whom I could show the streets of Bruges and the quays of Ghent, far from the regimented crowds: Roger d'Améras and Jean Barreyre. We passed through the villages of the Ardennes, still enchanted by Shakespeare, where an ordinary castle in the false style of Louis XIII, in the falling night, in the rising dawn, to the distant sound of horns, becomes a magical, green place that I will never forget. And I took the opportunity to go and see someone who had been much in the news in France over the last few weeks, the leader of a new Belgian party, Léon Degrelle.

French people travelling to Belgium shortly after the 1936 elections were surprised to see large inscriptions in white on the pavements and in black on the houses, alternately commanding "Vote Rex" and announcing "Rex will win. hundred metres on the roads of Flanders and in the beautiful forests of the Ardennes, these fateful words blazed out; or there appeared ingenious posters in bright colours, or huge photographs of a vigorous young man. These were the last witnesses to this electoral campaign, so harsh and surprising, which was to bring to the Belgian Chamber, out of two hundred deputies, twenty-one members of a new party, unknown a year earlier, the famous *Rexist* party.

I remember seeing Léon Degrelle for the first time, on his thirtieth birthday. He was a boy with a full, smiling face, who didn't even look his age. I watch him walk behind his table, listening to the sound of his voice even more than he's telling me. If it is true that a certain physical radiance, a certain animality, is necessary for a leader of men, it is certain that Léon Degrelle possesses this radiance and this animality. I haven't heard him speak in public yet, but I'm sure he must make a remarkable orator.

You have to remember that in 1936, part of Belgium (and also a little of foreign opinion) was quite literally in love with the Rex leader. People were asking about the movement's guiding ideas, and he was contributing to major French newspapers. Men used to say with a touch of irony: "Women are very fond of Léon Degrelle. They think he's so handsome! But the rexists themselves joked about it and even made a terrible pun about it, in their own style: "It's what we call the Rex-Appeal," they said. That's no reason because the Rex-Appeal was in decline in 1939 to prevent what had been from having been, rightly or wrongly. For me, a curious foreigner, I contemplated this phenomenon with growing interest, and it helped me to understand, on another level, how the leaders of Europe had managed to win over their peoples, *by speaking to them the language they expected*. It is all too easy to cry "rape" of opinions, as has been said: the seducers at least knew, even the worst of them, the realities that the men of our time needed.

I saw Léon Degrelle several times in those years, in Paris and Brussels. Pierre Daye used to introduce me to him, and the contrast was striking between this level-headed, smiling man, curious about everything, and this impetuous boy in perpetual turmoil. He used to get very emotional when talking about his little Chantal, who had been seriously ill for years and for whom the whole party made pilgrimages, and he himself would sometimes run to Notre-Dame de Ham on a snowy night because she was in danger. He seemed to me to be symbolic of our time, and lively, and rugged, and picturesque. He ran to adventure with glee, tempted by life, its pleasures, its promises, and without worrying too much about the dangers he might run from the temptations of life and the blunders of action.

I suppose I'll long remember that night in the car, on the road from Namur to Brussels, in the wet woods, when Léon Degrelle, on his way back from a trip to Brussels, was in his car.

At a meeting, he was telling me, in no particular order, about his childhood in the country as a birdwatcher and apple thief in clogs. In his voice, a little muffled by his great oratorical efforts, a voice that I can hear without seeing his face, amidst the wind of speed, the sliding of the car, the rain against the windows, he told me about his family:

— My father's whole family is French, from Solre-le-Château, near Maubeuge. All my relatives are buried in the little cemetery. We were an extremely large family. All this is recorded in our *livre de raison*, which I still have. It recorded births, the reason why children were given certain names, and how old people died. I had an ancestor who was killed at Austerlitz, and on that day a daughter was born to him, and she was called Souffrance. Another, born during Napoleon's wars, was called Victoire. For four hundred years, farmers called Degrelle cultivated the same field. Love letters from the fiancé to the fiancée were also kept in the *livre de raison*. As well as talking about their love, they give each other news of the weather and the harvest, saying: the wheat or rye will be good this year. You see, I think that in France, in the time of the kings, there were millions of families like mine; and that's why France is a great country.

Following the anti-religious laws, his father, a staunch Catholic, had come to live in Bouillon as a brewer. As he talks to me, I recall this little town of three thousand inhabitants, so close to the French border, and which once formed one country with our own Sedan. It's one of the jewels of the Ardennes, with its brown, curved bridge over the Semois, its deep-set river, its castle overlooking the town, and above all its nearby woods and the wonderful softness of its hills and its light.

— Put me twenty kilometres from Bouillon, in the woods," said Léon Degrelle. I'll know my way with my eyes closed. When we were children, we used to see the wooden trains coming down the Semois, all tied together. The great wonder was winter. It would bring us tree trunks, fir trees, ice and, sometimes, a huge wild boar, all swollen and tangled up in grass, which would stop against the bridge piers.

Then came spring. The boys would run up and down the slopes, looking for eggs to unearth.

— We were looking at the young pines. Birds don't nest in old pines. For hours, we had to wait to see the mother.

approach the young tree. So we climbed up and found the nest. We'd eat the warm eggs. Or we'd go and steal apples. My father had apples too: but stolen apples taste so much better!

And Léon Degrelle adds:

— You see, I'll never forget those moments. Nobody can have as much fun as me and my brothers and sisters did. Just think what a party was like for us. We'd go and wait for the fairground cars at the top of the hill, four or five kilometres away. On the first day of the festival we were given one franc, on the second day ten sous, on the third five sous. I've never been richer, I've never been happier.

It was here that the little boy learnt a great deal and developed his skills.

— I used to play with the other children in the village. We were all the same. You know that in Wallonia, we often put the adjective before the noun, in the old fashion: we say "la dure vie" (hard life), "le blanc pain" (white bread), "le noir café" (black coffee). Back home, there was mostly black bread, and not always coffee. But everyone loved each other. My father was a bourgeois, and the notary and the doctor were bourgeois. But when they passed their door, they would say hello to the blacksmith and the tanner, because the blacksmith and the tanner, like them, earned a living and had lots of children; they were honest and hard-working. In fact, everyone had lots of children: there were eight of us, eleven in my father's family, ten in my mother's, twelve in the notary's and seven in the doctor's. You know, you're never alone. You know, you can never be very rich when you have so many children to bring up, and that's the good thing. So the worker thinks his boss is doing his duty. So we respect him. And a bereavement is a bereavement for everyone. Look at the big cities. When someone dies, the neighbours don't even know. In Bouillon, the whole village mourned when someone died. That's where I learned about social community, the community of a people.

I'd be remiss if I didn't interrupt this boy, so sensitive to everything that surrounds and sustains him, when he evokes the familiar demons of his childhood.

— And imagine the war over that. Imagine how much this communion of an entire village was increased by the war, by the hardships, by the pain of the invasion. We withdrew into ourselves.

Before the war, many Bouillon residents had never left their town or the Semois valley. You had to be my grandfather, the doctor, or my father, the brewer, to visit the sick quite far away or to deliver beer. Some of them went on foot to Namur or Liège, with a ham hanging from each shoulder, to sell it at the market. I've seen them do it: they'd travel a hundred and fifty kilometres or more, in three days, without a car or horse, like pilgrims. But others never left their houses. At the bottom of the hill, there's a place called Day Point, because that's where the sun rises. And the top of the coast has a magnificent name: the Terme. Beyond that, there's nothing. I remember when I was a child, they organised a bicycle race in Bouillon. I'd never seen anything like it. I followed the riders and went as far as the Terme. There I discovered, to my immense surprise, that the road went on, that the world went on, that it wasn't confined to Bouillon. I have never been so amazed. Well, it's this coast, this Terme that we've been watching out for for four years, waiting for the French soldiers. And one fine day we saw the Americans arrive. We didn't understand a word of it: perhaps they were even afraid that we would do them a bad turn, because they were immediately sent off by another route. But you can understand what the coast meant to us.

Bertrand de Jouvenel once spoke of those boys in secondary schools around whom people naturally gravitate, who rule the class, whom they love and admire. And, although most of the time these admirations don't survive into manhood, he said he found in Léon Degrelle a reminder of the "playground dictator" he must have been. The word seems accurate to me. There was in Léon Degrelle something of the Dargelos of *Enfants terribles*, ("the pupil Dargelos was the school cock") who knew how to fight with snowballs.

He was funny, violent, lively and passionate. I remember his familiar line to a boy who complained that he hadn't slept for two nights:

— You can rest when you're dead. And he said to me:

— Ah, how I'll rest when I'm dead. It will be magnificent. Then, after a moment's reflection:

— After all, I know I won't. As soon as I arrive, I'll have half the saints on my side, I'll have to convince the others, I'll have a terrible job to do, I'll have to get rid of them.

start a newspaper...

— *The real Paradise?*

And in the night, as the fast car takes us back to Brussels, he continues to speak, for me, for him. I can't see his face. I can only hear his voice in the shadows. I don't know at that moment what Rexism will be, I don't know what Léon Degrelle will be: everything is possible in the universe, even failure after victory. But I do know that I will never be able to forget that walk in the night, and those magical words that came from a young man faced with his destiny. I'm sure there's no presenter without deep poetry. When he spoke to the Italians about the land of his birth and beyond the seas, Mussolini was a great poet, in the line of those of his race, he evoked immortal Rome, the galleys on the *Mare nostrum*, and a poet too, a German poet, this Hitler who invented Walpurgis nights and May festivals, who in his songs mixes cyclopean romanticism with the romanticism of forget-me-nots, the forest, the Venusberg, the blueberry girls engaged to a lieutenant in the assault sections, the comrades who fell in Munich in front of the Feldherrenhalle ; and poet Codreanu of the Romanians with his legion of the Archangel Michael. There is no politics that does not have its share of images; there is no politics that is not visible.

He falls silent, then laughs softly:

— Don't you think it's wonderful to go and hold a big meeting, where we talk about such serious things, and then come back with a doll as a reward.

It was given to him for his granddaughter. He dreams, while the needle on the counter oscillates between one hundred and one hundred and twenty and, as he realises :

— What can I say? When you've walked on foot until you're fifteen, speed is still a great pleasure for you.

And always, in the endless glide of speed, on the wide, beautiful roads, he lets gracious country images come to him, his family, the bridge, the Semois, the hill above Bouillon.

— When you think of what we have been able to do in the past, when you think of the Crusades and the thousands of men who set out to liberate the tomb of Christ, you can no longer despair of mankind: they are capable of any effort.

He speaks with such calm, with such confidence in the future... I listen to this invisible young man, who has called upon his childhood for help,

who spoke to me with such emotion about France, its past and its graceful heroism. I confess that I am primarily interested in the figure that human beings form in time and space. That's what I'll remember, whatever the future holds.

As a journalist and out of curiosity about the figures of our time, I attended a few meetings in those years, as did others, and, for *Candide*, the 1937 election campaign in which Léon Degrelle was defeated by Mr Van Zeeland. Rex subsequently lost its power of seduction, its appeal to the masses. The success of Rexism can be explained by the atmosphere of 1936, by the Front Populaire, by the Communist threat. Thousands of good people, who certainly had no dictatorial ideals, believed in Rex against Moscow. Outside Belgium, their efforts were viewed with immense sympathy. The leader's youth and undeniable dynamism made for a charming legend. Agreement between the classes, agreement between the different fractions of the country, the programme was seductive, and it was right. The proof is that all the parties and the government more or less adopted it.

The mistakes were, at first, manoeuvring errors, then perhaps serious imprudence, I don't know. Rex was carried along by the anti-parliamentary wave and, independently of his leader's talent as an orator, by the profound needs of a whole generation of young people who had believed that the movement was the answer to their deepest aspirations.

When war broke out in 1939, Léon Degrelle strongly supported the policy of neutrality. Belgium was to enter the war on 10 May 1940. The head of Rex was arrested to prevent any disorder. For months, the party had been falling apart, and several very serious accusations had been made against the young leader and his actions. But we must not forget that in 1936, at any , there were on the Rex platforms veterans of the old war, recipients of the French Croix de Guerre, patriotic and genuinely Francophile fighters. In 1936, in any case, a Frenchman did not have to regard the rexists en bloc as enemies of his country, or as subservient to Germany, any more than their leader, the son of a Frenchman, married to a Frenchwoman. However we judge his later actions - and the Rexists have shown moments of tragic lucidity in the midst of disordered errors - we will have seen the curious birth of a movement, and come close to a surprising figure. Above all, we will have understood that the success of nationalism in these years

came from its power to propose images to the crowd and to be first,
good or bad, poetry.

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In this way, we learned about the national fervour that was spreading throughout Europe at the time. Friends would come back from Romania and tell us about the Iron Guard, whose admiration for Germany we did not hide, and which also included many good people, peasants or sons of peasants, often friends of France, students in France like Codreanu himself (who, contrary to what is said, spoke with friendship about our country). We listened to them with curiosity, anxious not to neglect the Europe of today, and to defy fables. But it is clear that the country to which we were all looking in those years was Spain.

The Spanish war lasted from 18 July 1936 to 1 April 1939. Suddenly, it was revealed that a group of generals, soon to be commanded by Franco, had risen up against the Popular Front government: "rebels" against "governments" or "republicans", as the Marxists put it, "Nationalists" versus "reds", said the others. It can be said that until the alert of September 1938, it never ceased to fascinate French opinion for a single day. First of all, we had to defend ourselves at all times against the Marxists, who were desperate for us to intervene alongside the Spanish Reds: public collections, demonstrations, newspapers and members of parliament were all the rage. Misguided Catholics such as Georges Bernanos and Jacques Maritain sided with those who had exposed unearthed Carmelite nuns on church steps, killed sixteen thousand priests and ten bishops.

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One day I met Georges Bernanos, driven out of Majorca where he had set up his tent as a wanderer. For an hour, this fat, hairy man rehashed his grievances in front of me, repeating the same fuliginous phrases over and over, shaking his head like an intoxicated old lion, and going round in circles, attached to his hobbyhorses. He was going to publish a book against Spain, and then, on the very eve

of the 1939 war, a book against French youth, both incitements to despair. This encounter stunned me, and I convinced myself that I had seen a madman.

This Soir, a Communist newspaper that didn't dare to speak its name, was specially founded to support the cause of the 'republicans' in Spain, because *Vendredi* was just a weekly, and too intellectual to be successful. But we followed the beautiful events of the war with wonder. The whole world was fascinated by the besieged Alcazar in Toledo. Later we learned of the resistance of Oviedo and the sanctuary of La Cabeza. People spoke of General Franco's administrative skill, the human reforms, the *Auxilio Social*. The figure of the young founder of the Falange, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, was revered. The left-wing press portrayed as ridiculous General Queipo de Llano, who had single-handedly taken Seville, and who was a picturesque and attractive man. Italy and Germany sent volunteers on Franco's side, France, Belgium and the émigrés on his opponents'. Everyday incidents and constant danger made Spain our constant companion. We learned the songs of the Falange and the Requetes, the *Arriba España* salute:

*They will return victorious, the flags,
With the cheerful step of peace...*

In October 1936, Henri Massis and I wrote a little book on the Alcazar, the idea for which had come from him. Charles Maurras had been received almost as a head of state by General Franco. In April 1938, Pierre Gaxotte and Pierre Daye, accompanied by M. de Lequerica, made an almost triumphal journey to Seville. We hadn't forgotten Spain, and we wanted to see it again. Pierre Cousteau had once lived in Burgos for several months. We decided to take a short trip for a fortnight at the beginning of July 1938. At the same time, we would bring back documents for a special issue of *Je suis partout* on the war, which would be published to mark the second anniversary of the National Revolution. There were three of us: Pierre Cousteau in his valiant beige car, which had been all over Europe, Maurice Bardèche and myself. We were also thinking of collecting testimonies to write a *History of the Spanish War* (45). {It was published in June 1939 (Plon éditeur).

In those days, crossing the border was difficult. First, you had to sign papers in Paris absolving the French government of all responsibility and

swear that we would do nothing contrary to the non-intervention clause, nothing that might suggest that we were leaning towards one party rather than another. What a joke! At the international bridge in Irun, you were fingerprinted and photographed, though with good grace. When we had passed, we realised that an anonymous person had written on our *salvo-conducto* (46) {Except-conduct, pass}: "*Viva I'm everywhere! Viva Je suis partout!*" Incidentally, they had mistaken Maurice's first name and had generously given him don Manuel's, which is more Spanish, and stayed with him. We were very well received. In San Sebastian, we were given a press officer, a young man who had fought in the war at the beginning, the Irun campaign, and who had subsequently been discharged as "totally useless", as he told us in his French. But he spoke quite fluently, was resourceful, found us rooms in hotels that were full as an egg, and we sang with him on the roads, alternating between nationalist songs and revolutionary songs, because he understood jokes, and even anti-Italian songs. He took us to Burgos, where we were met by Mr Pablo Merry del Val, Director of Propaganda. In the hall of the Condestable, where you meet everyone, we greeted the author of the best book of memories of the war, Jacinto Miquelarena, dark-haired, peaceful and ironic. In San Sebastian, we had dinner with Juan Pujol, director of *Domingo*, and met Don José Félix de Lequerica, who was to contribute to *Je suis partout* and, a few months later, become Spanish ambassador to Paris. We then toured around Madrid, along the front, towards Avila and Toledo, we went to the trenches of the Cité Universitaire, then to the Grand Quartier in Zaragoza, and came back through Navarre to San Sebastian and France. It was a magnificent journey.

For anyone who has only known war as a child growing up in small, remote towns, it is a great thrill to rediscover sights that are more than twenty years old as soon as you cross the border. In San Sebastian, in Burgos, there are the wounded in uniform, there are the laughing bands of nurses who roam the Espolon, very proud because they have just been awarded a collective decoration, there are the collections in the streets, there are so many forgotten details: signs indicating shelters, posters urging people to beware of spies (*Be quiet, be wary, enemy ears are listening...*), bonbonnières in the shape of shells, patriotic newspapers for children, bags of earth between the

the pillars of the galleries, the strips of paper criss-crossed to prevent the windows from shattering. Just now, five minutes after five, siren announces the alert, and the bells ring for calm. This is the eternal face of the war at the back, the Spanish war or the French war, and it will take us a few hours to discover the original aspects of these days and not stop at the similarities. But a Frenchman who is not yet thirty years old enters the new Spain first of all through childhood.

Everything was organised in the towns behind the front lines, not only for the fighting at the front, but also for the national revolution. The foreigner's first surprise is to find that the cost of living has not increased since the war: except for a few manufactured goods (shoes in particular), people in Spain live for the same price as they did two years ago. There is the same abundance of earthly goods and the same wonderful bread. Very strict laws have prevented any increase. And these are not just empty verbal measures, as in democratic countries. In Zaragoza, in particular, we will see several times in the shop windows a large, clearly legible sign: *"This shop has been fined for selling at excessive prices... This shop has been fined for concealing goods"*. The various methods of indirect taxation devised by nationalist regimes are well known everywhere: Monday is a no-pastry day here, Thursday a single-course day, Friday a no-meat day. We pay at the café, at the cinema, with stamps from
In addition to the "subsidies for combatants", cigarettes for the army are sought everywhere. These are good ways.

There are others. On the whole, it is certain that the Spanish high bourgeoisie and aristocracy understood their duty admirably. The greatest families - starting with the royal family - have had sons killed in the modern Reconquest. But lesser families sometimes balk at the duty of gold, which for them replaces the duty of blood. The Falange took it upon itself to make them understand the necessities of the moment, and, as the Italian Fascists did, to remind them that voluntary contributions are most useful to the State. Rather than be robbed by the Marxists, isn't it better to sacrifice part of your assets? The great liberals of yesteryear were made to understand this with firm discretion. Some of the great lords who were approached thought they were being generous enough to sign a cheque for 6,000 pesetas. One of them told us in

riing our *oficial de pr ensa* (47) {Press officer}, had a magnificent beard which was his pride and joy and which was famous throughout Spain. He was visited by a number of young men who seated him in a spacious armchair with great respect, courteously placed a beard dish around his neck and shaved his precious fleece. The next day, he "completed" his offering to the party.

This discipline, moreover, hardly needs to be exercised towards those who have understood, from the outset, where the intelligence of their time and charity should lead them. In the social works of the new regime, the daughters of the aristocracy, those of the upper bourgeoisie, work with their hands alongside the daughters of the working class. They are the women of a great people.

The most important part of the *Auxilio Social* is the meals-on-wheels service, which is delivered in small three-tiered containers (in keeping with the Spanish tradition of multiple dishes). We saw these meals being distributed in Valladolid, where we were guided by a French-speaking doctor who even had a French assistant. No amount of orders or propaganda could have given the poor people who came to collect them that look of satisfaction and *freedom*, of coming because it was right. The pretty Castilian women who handed them the crusty bread, the spicy sausages and the chickpeas in oil were joyful and fraternal. It was the furthest thing from a *soup kitchen* we had ever experienced. And these people were going to eat this meal at home, on their table, with their family. And the charity that distributed the food to them bore a name that had been desecrated in France, but which took on its full meaning over there: it was not called a charitable enterprise, or help for the destitute, it was called *hermandad*, meaning fraternity.

Yes, Spain at war experienced a kind of inner peace. When evening descended on Spanish cities, it was the same joyful stroll, the same charming *paseo*, with only a few more soldiers than usual, and a few blond or brown "technicians". But the war was still there, present, the war united with the necessary Revolution. At half past eleven in the evening, all the French TV stations, at maximum strength, in the restaurants and cafés, in the public squares, broadcast the communiqué. Beforehand, they gave a fairly long list of names. As we asked what it was, we were told:

- This is news for the families of the red prisoners. The prisoners we take. The Reds, almost always, content themselves

to report them missing, without explanation. When they are injured, we tell their families where they are being treated and what their condition is. They listen to the

T.S.F. to hear from them.

After the press release was read out, the official anthem was played, the *Song of the Grenadiers*, which was the *Marcha Real*... Everyone stood up and waved with outstretched arms.

But after Burgos, where we recognised on the Espolon the unforgettable crowd of eight o'clock in the evening, the pleasant and marvellous animation, we left dusty Valladolid, full of resting soldiers, to go to Toledo. Barely two kilometres from the enemy lines, Toledo is even deader than Barrès saw it; Toledo is a strange city buried by night. In the tortuous little Arab streets, there are no lights other than flickering blue lamps. The cafés of Zocodover are sheltered by earthen sacks, padded up to the first floor, and closed at midnight. The streets are deserted, the shops poor. You could feel the war looming, the frontline close at hand, even if the marvellous green and yellow square had not been destroyed from top to bottom. The rest of the imperial city has not suffered too much. But Zocodover is in ruins, gone forever from the face of this world: it is conceivable that a monument could be restored, and San-Juan-los-Reyes, opposite the Alcázar, will soon repair its wounds; it is not conceivable that a masterpiece of chance could be restored, these fifty irregular balconies, these unstylish but exquisite houses, these poor but marvellous facades. Guns and mines have destroyed this unique Spanish achievement for ever.

So close to the front, Toledo has not yet returned to its former life. At the Café l'Alcade, we meet Don Fernando Aguirre, who lived through the seventy-two days of the siege of the Alcazar. He tells us about it with a sort of charming elation:

- I didn't like boiled horse at all," he confesses! I didn't like it at all. Even if there had been salt... But there wasn't any. So I ate wheat. It wasn't very good, because of the bran. But it was better than boiled horse.

And he laughs out loud at his gastronomic embarrassments.

Outside the Alcazar, there is little or nothing left but monumental ruins. We visit the underground tunnels, with their enormous walls, see the door on which the only small cannon was aimed, the mill made from a motorbike engine, the telephone from which the

colonel Moscardo heard his son's voice, the bakery, the humble souvenirs of the siege, the last bottles of pharmacy, the bread, the wheat that was left. The infirmary had been set up in the chapel, covered with a large red carpet. A copy of the Virgin of Alcazar, the original of which is now in the cathedral, was placed there. Here is the room where one of the two children of the siege, Ramon-Alcazar, was born, here is the swimming pool where around twenty of the dead still sleep, and the bathing cubicles where some of them were buried standing up. Here, in the courtyard, standing with its armour pierced by a bullet, is the statue of Charles V.

Every step of the way we encounter the presence of war. In the town hall where we are going, a little old lady clutching an oilcloth shopping bag asks for the *señor* alcade. She speaks quickly and weeps, opening her oilcloth bag from time to time. Her husband and son have been killed, and she has no potatoes. Who? The Reds? The Whites? We don't know, she mixes everything up in her terror, and taps her canvas bag in despair. She goes from one to the other, weeping as she explains her three interchangeable miseries: her dead son, her dead husband, the lack of potatoes, and all of this is mysteriously linked to her waxed canvas bag, to her despair, to her quiet, demented chatter.

There was a Frenchman in the Alcazar, but we didn't know it. His name was Isidore Clamagiraud. We'll meet him later: he's a pastry chef in the Place Zocodover, he's got a little rat face, with freckles, and he tells us straight out, with a slightly sardonic smile:

- I'm the famous Frenchman from the Alcazar.

He went out twenty-one nights in a row, at the end of July and the beginning of August, to look for flour in his shop. On the twenty-first night, he was caught. The next morning, they were ready to shoot him. But that day, the French consul in Madrid was touring Toledo to arrange for the repatriation of French nationals. He was told that Isidore was to be executed. He waited for the motorcade on the way to the Transite synagogue, pounced on the condemned man, shoved him into his car and sped off in the best style of American cinema. The pastry chef explains this calmly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

In the streets of Toledo, we see a few legionnaires who come from the Madrid front, sometimes to relax for forty-eight .

One of them, a Frenchman who fought in the last war and has been fighting in Spain since the beginning, tells us some beautiful and horrible stories.

— The Reds tried to retake Toledo in 1936," he tells us. We sent the Legion against the tanks. Do you know the best way to attack tanks? You throw a bottle of petrol, it breaks, you throw a grenade, and the tank lights up like a match. Only, when we got to the tanks, the bottles were full of water! The Reds' little friends had played a nice trick on us. We came back one hundred out of seven hundred.

He shrugs. It's the misfortunes of war. We ask him how the French are judged in the Legion.

— In my *bandera*," he told us, "the commander has given an order: any legionnaire who speaks ill of France will get two days in the *platoon*. Do you know what a platoon is? You get up at four o'clock, work non-stop and go to bed at two in the morning. When you have to deal with a bad head, you put the bag on him: a very heavy bag on his back, which he must never leave, even to sleep. So we take it for granted.

He tells us stories, and he certainly makes up a lot of them. But one of them is true:

— Do you remember Captain M... of the Mobile Guards, killed three or four years ago in Colombes by the Communists? He had a son, sixteen at the time of the Revolution. One fine day, the kid left for school with his books under his arm. But he had borrowed money from his sister: three days later he was in the legion. I guess he was interested in fighting against those who killed his father. He's eighteen, he's been wounded five times, everyone loves him. He doesn't drink, he doesn't think about women. He plays a lot, for example. We live together at the Cité Universitaire. When he has a bit of money, he goes down to Toledo and buys himself a kilo of toffees. He's a kid.

Tomorrow, Toledo will no doubt resume its former destiny as a sumptuous city, a city of enchantment. Perhaps the Alcazar will be rebuilt, perhaps not. And we must also hope that a wise leadership policy, that the social works of the Falange, will revive life in these streets and in this desolate countryside. Today, it may only be the museum of Spain at war, but it is the most moving and superb of museums. It was not unusual for life to have resumed everywhere else, and for Toledo to remain wounded, torn apart, with its ruins and its memories. No other

No other city in Spain, however attractive, Burgos, Seville or Segovia, could have claimed a similar fortune. While waiting to become a great living city again, it was foreseeable that, in this war, Toledo would choose to be, for a few months, under its veiled lights, in its abandoned streets, the very city of death.

As for the Cité Universitaire in Madrid, it is no further from the capital than the Cité Universitaire in Paris is from ours. It is in Madrid itself, at the gates of the city, that Franco's soldiers have been entrenched for a long time, in a sort of 'pocket' that is besieged on all sides, constantly mined, and only connected to the hinterland by a few undergrowths and a footbridge. This is the land they have occupied, organised, where they live, and where they show with commendable pride the astonishing achievements they have begun to undertake and bring to fruition.

When we said we wanted to go to the Cité Universitaire at the border, we were told with a thin smile:

— Ah! Ah! la *pasarela*...

Mr Merry del Val told us again, and our *oficial de prensa*. We're going to look for a permit in a small, dry, golden village, San Martin de Valdeiglesias, I think, which we're having trouble finding in the desert without any signs. The *teniente-coronel* (48) {Lieutenant-colonel.} tells us again about the *pasarela*, and he says to us with a laugh:

— *Pequeño riesgo*, a small risk.

We are firmly convinced that this is a "boat" for foreign journalists. We were told that we had to cross a gangway "under machine-gun fire", one by one. This morning, Pierre Cousteau sings, to the tune of the Legion (*Un légionnaire sait mourir...*):

Periodista sa morir...

Well, it's true that we pass one by one, but the machine gun never fires on individuals. However, at the end of the famous footbridge, there was a stretcher ready to receive the wounded... with a rather macabre bouquet of flowers. We were much less impressed, I must admit, by these ten metres than by a journey five or six times longer than the one we had just completed, through very bare undergrowth, with the bee-like sound of nonchalant bullets hitting the air or the trees around us. Eighteen months later, it all seems like an ironic introduction to our new life. There will be for us, for our comrades,

Other footbridges, no doubt, other undergrowth, and we won't tourists any more. But, of course, that won't stop us talking about the *pasarela tragica*, which still holds a special place in our memories.

Once over the famous footbridge, we find ourselves in a camp that looks like a holiday camp. The lieutenant-colonel has a little pink house in the trees: it's the "Villa Isabelita", recently built for him, with the strictest of comforts, including kitchen and bathroom. As for the soldiers, they've just had a swimming pool dug for them, and it's quite large, I'd say, so they can happily forget about the sun and the scorching heat. Earlier, we visited a *tabor de regolares*, petted cats in the cagnas, and played on a piano sheltered by foliage. In truth, we forgot that the enemy lines were not a hundred metres away. We'd almost forget it, during the miles we'd cover under the sun, through the trenches of the Cité Universitaire, if, from time to time, a little whistle, or a dry, dull noise, didn't teach us novices to distinguish between bullets that pass over us and bullets that don't hit very far.

These trenches are curious, extraordinarily clean and paved in the strangest way. The most varied and sometimes luxurious materials have been borrowed from the little palaces next door to the Cité Universitaire. Marble, mosaic and vulgar brick alternate with a delightful eclecticism. But the architects seem to have had an obvious predilection for radiators. The radiators, which lie on the floor, let the water run off, and are a great replacement for the wooden slats that are usually used. In addition, we walk bent under the ground, sometimes looking twenty-five metres away, through a loophole blocked a large stone, at the lines of the Reds, looking at the tall houses of Madrid so close by, the giant Telefonica building and the churches.

In the university estate itself, few buildings (or ruins, rather) belong to the nationalists. The colonel in charge of the sector, who had courteously come to wait for us and who would accompany us everywhere, pointed to them with his cane:

— This is Philosophy... It's red...

— Naturally...

— This is Medicine, Dentistry... Red too. But the hospital-clinic is ours. And Architecture too... And Casa Velasquez.

We look at the destroyed Palazete, which was the "folly" of the Duchess of Alba, we visit the ruins of the Casa Velasquez, which was once a French house, and the even more imposing ruins of the enormous hospital-clinic, one of the most beautiful in Europe, now completely ransacked, with dozens of floors collapsed and *folded* on top of each other like paper. The architecture is in better condition. It's here that the officers of the post office will be inviting us to the most sumptuous of lunches, which would suggest the Cité Universitaire is one of the gastronomic stops for tourism in the new Spain - a stop that is, to be honest, a little difficult to get to. There, in the shadow of the armoured shutters where a machine gun bursts from time to time, we will visit some of the rooms of the non-commissioned officers and soldiers (only religious pictures on the walls), and the hospital.

The Cité Universitaire hospital is perhaps the wonder of Spain. In the most sheltered corner of the architecture, sophisticated surgical services have been organised. The wounded were taken there immediately and treated immediately. The enemy was fifty metres away. We were constantly firing and bombing. It's not far from here that we're going to pay our respects to a formidable scree slope where thirty Moroccans were caught one day when a mine exploded. Everywhere else, mines are ready to explode. Trenches were left under the surveillance of a single sentry, almost evacuated, waiting for them to explode. It is in these conditions that a modern hospital has been set up and is operating, saving untransportable wounded every day.

— Here's one," says the surgeon. Injured three days ago in the lung and liver. Today, his temperature is 37° 5, so he's safe. If we had had to transport him, he would have died. As soon as we can, we'll evacuate him at night, via the gangway.

Just now, at the bend in a tunnel, Pierre Cousteau and I lost Maurice and our guides. Here we were in a line of unknown, deserted trenches. It was time to start firing again, the bullets whistling above us. Soon Moors appeared, looking at these civilians with curiosity. We try to talk to them, but they don't know Spanish. Let's face it, we're not

very reassured, and that we were beginning to find them a little strange-looking: being French, in the Cité Universitaire, so close to the International Brigades (they are thirty metres away at certain points) is perhaps not a recommendation. But it was a Moroccan who approached us when he heard us talking: "You French?" he said. He was from the French zone of Morocco and was pleased to see us. He led us to an officer who would take us back to the Villa Isabelita, where our guides were very worried and, in front of don Manuel, who was supposed to know no Spanish, made some not very reassuring remarks in which the words "to kill", "to shoot" and "Mores" were very easily recognisable. We seem to have had a narrow escape, and our *oficial de prensa*, who is responsible for us, breathes a sigh of relief when he finds us.

Arriba Francia" was the cry, and we made our way back to Toledo, then to quieter areas. We drove for a whole day to reach Zaragoza, where the Grand Quartier is located. It's a very amusing city, which we won't see again so lively, just as we won't see again the Burgos of the war, enormous, swollen with ministries and troops. We stayed at the Grand Hotel, which is a caravanseraí where three of us were given a small lounge with cots. In the mornings, we wandered the corridors looking for a bathroom. The city is swarming and sweaty. Italian journalists, *teniente-coronels* in full costume. We made friends with Coudert, Vincent, a correspondent for the Havas agency, who was a very jolly fellow, telling us horrible and superb stories with astonishing verve, and giving us the most exact details about the bad places and shapes of contraceptive objects in Republican Spain. Apart from that, they are connoisseurs of Spain, brave boys, and perfect companions. In San Sebastian, on the way back, they'll take us to the Chicote bar, which you have to have seen, packed to the rafters with journalists from all over the place, true or false news, gossip, and the boss who pays his friends for the house cocktail called *combinacion*. In Zaragoza, they take us to the only concert in the army zone.

This is the *Royal*. We enter a narrow street, a door ajar, a corridor cluttered with boxes. On the first floor, we were shown to a dressing room. The room is fairly large, but poorly lit. There are wooden benches and tables. Everything was full, more or less all soldiers: legionnaires in green shirts, two or three soldiers in red berets (no more), a few Phalangists. A few Germans too, blond and clearly recognisable. They

offer drinks, silently, to women. The spectacle resembles that of any garrison town café-concert. But at the foot of the narrow stage, where a discoloured creature in a wide black skirt, castanets in her fingers, twirls, a dozen soldiers in arms stand guard. They are hilarious, moreover, leaning casually on their rifles, but they have rifles.

— Are there any fights?

— Sometimes. Last week it was the Legion. You know how it is. One guy beats the shit out of another, shouts "*Legion!*" Sometimes it's the Phalangists. Or foreigners.

— The Germans?

— No. The Italians. They argue with the Spaniards about women.

Some lukewarm *refrescos* have been brought in, and we listen, vaguely numbed, to the singers. They are neither very beautiful, nor very learned, nor very well dressed. But they are women. We understand that in this city of soldiers, the rigour of Fascist Catholicism is somewhat attenuated. And under the dubious lights, this shadow with a slightly crumpled face that twirls, raises its long arms, its sequined dress, it represents many things. But it's the room that I'm mainly looking at.

In the box on the right, from which we are separated by a low ledge, two young men in green shirts, it seems to me. I look more closely. One of them is a woman, very beautiful, with short black hair and, on her sleeve, two bruises signifying two wounds.

— She's a female legionnaire," I'm told. There are a few like that in the Legion. Didn't you meet Mathilde at the Cité Universitaire? We tolerate them. They're loyal to the man they're with. When he's killed, they take another. Until then, everyone respects their comrade.

In this war, all romanticism becomes banal truth. On the left, I lean a little, there seems to be a firm celebration of the latest nationalist victory. Three or four bawlers are applauding wildly for the singer, who must be the star of the *Royal* or a friend dear to their hearts.

... So goes Spain, across a thousand leagues of war and peace. There are other landscapes that time has not allowed us to explore. But Spain eternal and Spain of the moment,

The beautiful villages of Navarre are empty of men today. The beautiful villages of Navarre are empty of men today: because from the start of the conquest, by the thousands, the red berets sprang up, and the fathers left with their fathers and with their sons. And in Valladolid, the blue city, the home of Onésimo Redondo, the city so dear to José Antonio, the young men of the Falanges were killed.

The twofold ideal of the "Holy Tradition", as the Carlists sing, and of the new "dawn", of the "spring" that comes laughing over Spain, as the Falange sings, is visible at every step we take in this admirable land of exaltation and faith. We find it in the inscriptions on the walls, in the portraits that adorn the streets - José Antonio, Franco - in all the measures taken by the leader. We found it at Mercedes Bachiller's *Auxilio Social*, and among the officers of the Cité Universitaire. Just as we find him at the men's masses that fill the chapels of Burgos Cathedral. Just as we see the fervour with which these officers, soldiers, red beret-wearing *requetes* and blue-shirted phalangists kiss the sacred pillar of Our Lady of the Pilar in Zaragoza.

In the small, quiet towns we pass through, Avila, Vittoria, Burgos, in the big cities like Valladolid or Zaragoza, we find the same Spanish genius, and I have to say that no people will probably ever be able to touch me as deeply as these people. Admittedly, there is still a lot to do. But when

At the pace of peace,

the victorious flags celebrated in José Antonio's song, the task will already have begun, which is not only a warlike task, but a work of construction. The men of our time will have found in Spain the place of all daring, all greatness, and all hope.

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We had seen nationalism struggling in Spain. But we also had to see nationalism triumphant, even if it was a rather different kind of nationalism, that of Germany.

We were always curious about Germany. Our two peoples are what history, and even more geography, have made them. But there are many things to see in Germany, if you want to understand your time: perhaps many of us also thought that we had to hurry, and that we wouldn't have long to contemplate this country peacefully.

In 1937, we decided to go to the Nuremberg Congress. We'd be lucky to find a few newspapers happy to have special envoys who weren't too greedy and who could help us cover part of the cost of the trip. Annie Jamet joined a trade mission from Lyon, which was going to attend the Congress, accompanied by a few curious members of parliament, including Mr Pomaret, now Minister of Labour. Pierre Cousteau, the official motorist for *Je suis partout*, was taking his wife, Georges and Germaine Blond (Georges would write the report on the Congrès pour la Liberté). I only joined them for the last few days (49). {The account of these *Hundred Hours with Hitler* was published in the *Revue Universelle*}.

We had a great time. We travelled by coach from Nuremberg to Bamberg (where we stayed because there was no room in the holy city) singing *the Madelon* under the respectful eyes of the Bavarians, which was a very exciting feeling. We talked to a few Germans who worked on the *Cahiers franco-allemands*, with Fritz Bran and Otto Abetz, whom we met. And we looked at the new Germany with all our eyes.

A hundred hours is about the time I spent in Germany, and in these few days, what can you do but let yourself be overwhelmed by vivid, varied, even contradictory impressions, without presuming to judge a country on the basis of such a brief experience? Neither Germany nor Hitlerism are simple things. Once you've read a few books and met a few Germans, you think it's all too easy, when it comes to visiting this strange country for the first time, to know in advance what you'll like and what you'll dislike. But the reality is quite different, and the pleasures and displeasures blend together in a way that is very different from what we had expected. This hundred or so hours was full of surprises and contrasts, perhaps erased by habit and time for those who know the country too well and have lived there for years. Sometimes you learn something from looking at images. Indeed, it is images that Germany offers us first and . These small

The towns and Bavarian villages that the train and car pass through are set, in the midst of charming green landscapes, like childlike objects and scenery. The pointed or round roofs, the brown crossbeams of the visible beams, the flowers in every window - it is the Germany so dear to the Romantics and to Jean Giraudoux that greets us first. Perfectly clean and graceful like a toy from Nuremberg, medieval and feudal, it sets up along the roads the ravishing framework of its enormous festivals, in a contrast that might surprise. In the small cobbled streets of Nuremberg and Bamberg, along the rivers and canals, beside the cathedrals and the admirable stone statues, it is the former Germany of the Holy Roman Empire that marries with the Third Reich. However, the millions of flags decorating the facades do not stand out. No posters here, as in Italy. Just flags, some huge, five storeys high, others smaller, but always at least three per window. Can you imagine such cheerful finery under this grey sky, combined with the touching baroque of the sculptures, the old houses and the flowers on the balconies? We all know that these people love flowers, and every morning the workers in the garages devoutly decorate the flower holders on the cars. In fact, it was always flowers that attracted the believers of the past, the lovers of 'good' Germany, the fat M^{me} de Staël. Flowers do not prevent other realities.

It's true that there's not a village that isn't decked out in flags on the triumphal roads leading to Nuremberg, during the week from 6 to 13 September, when the National Socialist Party holds its meetings in the old town of Franconia, the holy week of the *Reichsparteitag* (50). {The Nuremberg Congress or Reich Congress (in German *Reichsparteitag*) was the annual gathering of the NSDAP (National Socialist Party) held in Germany from 1923 to 1938. Since Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933, it has been held every year at the Reichsparteitagsgelände, a gigantic complex built by Albert Speer in Nuremberg. It serves as an instrument of national socialist propaganda. It was the setting for Leni Riefenstahl's film *Triumph of the Will*}. This refined setting simply introduces us to the ceremonies we have come to see, and prepares us for the sacred rites of the new Germany. Large banners here and there welcome us, and at the gates of the towns others have placed inviting us for coming year. other inscriptions, except for those at the entrances to villages and a few inns, where it is simply stated, with restrained politeness: "Jews are not *wanted* here". Outside the

places dedicated to the celebration of the new cult, nothing but flowers and flags. If we want to know more, we'll have to go beyond this appearance of grace and freshness.

You can visit the Exhibitions. In Nuremberg there is a great Anti-Marxist Exhibition, where photographs and posters show Marxist crimes around the world. The sailors of the *Deutschland*, a ship bombed by the Spanish Reds, are given special honours, as is only natural. France is included among the revolutionary nations, because of Jean-Jacques, but no doubt for our own self-esteem, the racist theorists have made room for Voltaire and Napoleon, whose anti-Semitic phrases they display in large letters. This Exhibition is clever, despite the fact that it shows a bus set on fire on 6 February 1934 as an example of 'red' barbarism. The French, it must be admitted, walk past this bus with a smile on their faces.

What I found more amusing was the Erlanger Anti-Masonic Exhibition, where the lodge was surrounded and taken a few years ago, before the Venerables had time to move it. It has now been turned into a museum, and you can walk through the dark corridors, the initiation rooms, the coffins, the skulls and crossbones, and all the masonic paraphernalia. Ingenious paintings show us the history of the world seen from a Masonic point of view: they go back to Hiram and Solomon, and here again the Revolution of 1789 plays an important role, but also, rather oddly for the land of the Reformation, Luther, Calvin and Zwingli. In the showcases are Masonic jewellery, photographs of officers wearing pointed helmets and insignia (the army was highly Masonic before the war), correspondence with foreign lodges and an iron cross grafted with a triangle. A learned professor, wearing the Hitler badge, the Roman bundle and the five Phalangist arrows on his lapel, guides us through the rooms and mimes the initiation in French. Next to him is a table listing the ranks, and we look up what "Sublime Prince of the Royal Secret" means. The scene, has to be said, is prodigiously comic.

These exhibitions, these villages decked out for the great festival, are not a bad introduction to Germany. All that remains now is to enter the magical enclosure and watch the Hitler service unfold.

It is indeed an office, and all travellers have already remarked on it. Parades through the city are not the main attraction.

part. One evening, from the grand hotel in Nuremberg, we watched tirelessly as groups of SA men in brown uniforms passed under the windows, lit only by the glow of torches. Elsewhere, it would be a village torchlight procession. Here, there is already a different gravity and a different feeling.

At Zeppelinfeld, outside the city, a huge stadium has been built, in the almost Mycenaean architecture favoured by the Third Reich. The bleachers could hold a hundred thousand people, the arena two or three hundred thousand. The swastika banners flapped and shone in the bright sunshine. And here come the labour battalions, the men of the *Arbeitskorps*, in rows of eighteen, music and flags in the lead, shovels on their shoulders. They come out of the stadium, they go in, the heads of the department follow them, bare-chested, then the young girls. The shovels are presented and the labour mass begins.

— Are you ready to fertilise German soil?

— We're ready to go.

They sing, the drum rolls, the dead are remembered, the souls of the party and the nation are merged, and finally the master completes his task of stirring this enormous crowd into a single being, and he speaks. When the stadium slowly empties of its officiants and spectators, we have begun to understand what the new Germany is all about.

We must understand him even better, however, the next day, at this unheard-of ceremony, which goes by the banal name of the call of the political leaders (*politischen Leiter*). It was night. The huge stadium was barely lit by a few spotlights, revealing the massive, motionless battalions of brown-clad SA men. There are spaces between their ranks. One of them, wider than the others, formed a sort of avenue, leading from the entrance to the stadium to the grandstand where the Führer would pass. It was exactly eight o'clock when the Führer entered the stadium, followed by his staff, and took his place to the cheers of the crowd. The Austrians were the loudest. We'll see them on every parade, with their rhythmic call:

— Austria salutes its Führer!

The Bavarians smiled, ogled the diplomatic stands and applauded.

At the very moment he entered the stadium, a thousand spotlights all around the stadium were switched on, shining vertically into the sky. They were

A thousand blue pillars now surround it like a mysterious cage. They will be seen shining all night in the countryside; they designate the sacred place of the national mystery, and the ordinators have given this astonishing enchantment the name of *Lichtdom*, the cathedral of light.

Here is the man now standing on his platform. The flags fly. Not a song, not a drum roll. The most extraordinary silence reigns when, at the edge of the stadium, in front of each of the spaces separating the brown groups, the first rows of standard-bearers appear. The only light is that of the unreal, blue cathedral, beyond which butterflies can be seen swirling, perhaps planes, or simple dust. But there is a spotlight on the flags, highlighting their red mass and following them as they move forward. Or are they? One might rather say that they are flowing, flowing like a stream of crimson lava, irresistibly, in an enormous, slow slide, to fill the gaps prepared in advance in the brown granite. Their majestic advance lasts nearly twenty minutes, and it is only when they are close to us that we hear the muffled sound of footsteps. Only silence has reigned until this minute, when they come to a halt at the foot of the standing chancellor. An unearthly, mineral silence, like that of a show for astronomers on another planet. Beneath the vaulted ceiling, blue-striped to the clouds, the broad red streams have now subsided. I don't think I've ever seen a more prodigious spectacle in my life.

Finally, before and after Hitler's speech, which caused a stir in the silent crowd with outstretched arms and shouts, the following songs were sung: *Deutschland über alles*, *Horst Wessel*, in which the spirit of the comrades killed by the Red Front and by reaction hovers, and the song of the soldiers of the war:

*I had a friend;
The best I'll have...*

Then there were other songs, created for the Congress, which easily suited the cool night, the seriousness of the hour, the beautiful dark voices, and all the musical enchantment without which Germany could conceive of nothing, neither religion, nor homeland, nor war, nor politics, nor sacrifice.

During the hours I spent in this surprising country, which seemed further away than the farthest Orient, I had enough opportunity to be surprised not to remember these minutes. For all this is not

empty, but means. It's all based on doctrine. It's because these ceremonies and songs mean something that we have to pay attention to them.

First and foremost, they mean something to the country's youth. It is to them that everything is addressed here, and one is almost astonished to discover, in the SAs that fill the streets, debonair Bavarians who are pacific, small and paunchy, who turn these uniforms into the clothes of a quiet national guard. In truth, we had forgotten that there were Germans over the age of twenty-five - and that it was they who had created National Socialism. But they may have created it, from now on the movement is no longer for them, it is for young people.

We wanted to see them too, these young Germans. Through the countryside, its small villages, its woods (the tree is the German divinity par excellence), we talk with those who lead us. This is a good time to remember something M. de Ribbentrop said, and Charles Maurras once quoted it, about the profoundly historical consciousness of the German. What are we talking about here, in front of these swastikas and this new decor? We are being told about the Thirty Years' War.

— This is the key to German history. There were twenty-five million Germans before, only five million after. Everything had to be rebuilt. From the Rhine, Bavaria and Austria, the axis moved north to Prussia. And we built Germanism, a Germanism that is first and foremost a particularism, that does not want to impose itself as a universal rule.

I leave the responsibility for these historical musings to this young German. But it is curious that they should be made.

But here we are, on a small sunken road, arriving at a village of plank houses, and that's the end of our historical controversies. We're looking at a labour camp, like the thousands of them in Germany. Only fifteen delegates took part yesterday's shovel parade. The rest are here, eighty or a hundred nineteen-year-old boys. We cross the fence, the empty courtyard surrounded by huts and flowerbeds. They are, we are told, behind the camp.

They are there, in fact, under the tall birch trees, sitting in the sand, their spades in the distance - and they are singing. These young people dressed in brown, under the trees, so naturally composed a picture of eternal Germany, at the hour of rest, that we stopped a little taken aback. They explain:

— This is the singing lesson.

Over there, this word certainly doesn't evoke any sweetness, but gravity, virility, the hard and powerful love of country, total devotion, all expressed in that language of sound and chorus which is the true mother tongue of the German.

In front of us, we interviewed some of these young people. Almost all of them are from Saxony and Franconia. Later, they will tell us their daily routine: get up at five, go to bed at ten, it's a very military and fairly strict schedule. However, in the relationship between these boys (they belong to all social classes), as in the relationship between leaders and subordinates, there is a kind of unity, a rough camaraderie. This was the undeniable novelty of the Third Reich, and Germany's most formidable strength. At *Hitlerjugend* (51) {Hitler Youth.}, the SS slept on straw in their bivouacs. Here, there were beds and rooms that were rigorously clean and decorated with a large cross (and I do mean a cross, not a swastika). And of course, all over the place, these boys destined for a harsh life have drawn flowerbeds.

We left the camp under the trees while an orchestra played dance tunes for us, and it was an orchestra again the next day, this time in the mist and on ground soaked by the night's rain, at the large tent camp of the *Hitlerjugend* visited in the morning by the Youth Führer, Baldur von Schirach. From top of a plank tower, we watched the light shelters where Hitler's teenage years were spent stretching out across the wooded plain in the distance. Apart from the sheer numbers - several thousand children are housed here - there is nothing profoundly different from a Cub Scout camp. They simply rushed to the orchestra and ran to sing, with a kind of hungry ardour that would perhaps be unknown to French youth. And on a wooden stele are inscribed the names of the hundreds of party children who fell to Marxist bullets. A flame burns, a child watches. We silently salute the young dead. Here again, what strikes us is the nature of the discipline. The militarisation of childhood in Germany is not at all what we thought. Those who come to talk to us approach us happily, without fear, and of their own accord. I confess that I find this much more important, from the point of view of German power, than dry caporalism.

But night has already fallen, and we have to go to the SS bivouac at the gates of Nuremberg for dinner. We will be received by Mr Himmler, head of the SS and head of the Gestapo, and Mr Goebbels himself will preside over the dinner. To be honest, the picturesqueness of the camp, with the tents reserved for the Führer's personal guard, only appears so to the naive. The atmosphere of major manoeuvres is the same in every country in the world, - and that of official banquets too, even if they consist of sauerkraut, Bavarian sausages and dry Franconian wine. All this would have been of little interest if we hadn't been led, on our way out, to the camp flag. It was the hour when the colours are brought out, a little later than on warships. A bugler played a nostalgic tune, and slowly the red flag with the swastika came down. Such a spectacle is beautiful in any country, no doubt, but here it was part of a whole. After the party, as after the game, after the banality of everyday life, it is now customary for Germans who live as a group to be suddenly reminded of the most serious thoughts that govern their nation and their race. Just as the Hitler Youth have their monument, so after this official banquet, which may have been pleasant and vulgar, we are reminded that there is something else too, and that is the honours paid to the very symbol of the Empire.

We are thinking of France. There are many things in Germany that are different from those we need, that we have the right not to like. But are we really to be led to believe that from now on great feelings are incomprehensible to France, that they cannot be relearned by French youth, that we cannot endure them at home, in our own way? It's a kind of regret that pursues us at every moment when we think of what democracy has done to France. All the more so because we do not take away from this brief stay in Germany the wonder that seizes so many slightly naive French travellers, "brothers who find beautiful everything that comes from afar", and who have been seized by the sudden grace of Hitlerism. Even in such a short space of time, one would have to have no eyes to see, and if our feelings about the phenomenon across the Rhine are complex, it is precisely because there is so much to say.

I wondered what my impression would be of the man who carries on his shoulders not only this Empire, but also this whole world.

new religion. And once again, the complexity of the impressions is so great that we cannot, in good faith, draw valid conclusions from them, and must content ourselves with trying to sort them out a little.

I remembered often listening to Hitler on the radio or in the cinema during his election campaign in 1933. Today, he speaks much more calmly. Admittedly, Germans still get excited when they hear him, and applaud fervently when he promises them privations to lead to power. Certainly his voice seems to move when, as the other day at the *Politischen Leiter* parade, he proclaimed that he was sacrificing everything to Germany, and that he would give his life if necessary. But the whole thing gives us the impression of greater moderation. He stopped gesturing, spoke with his hands folded almost non-stop, and the loudspeakers echoed the end of his sentences. Admittedly, the stranger is a little surprised, and contemplates the enthusiasm of those listening to him.

I had just seen it, admittedly, two hours earlier, and much more closely. Eighty to one hundred guests foreign had been invited by Mr de Ribbentrop at a tea where the Chancellor was due to appear. Rudolf Hess, the Führer's right-hand man, who had always worked with him, even on *Mein Kampf*, it was said, had received us first. He was a man with an energetic face, his eyes deep-set and hard, who briefly expressed his satisfaction at seeing foreigners taking an interest in the new Germany. Then we were led to another room, where we discovered, in a sort of mob, a man who was surrounded without ceremony and who was the master of seventy million men.

The usual surprising uniform, the yellowish jacket, the black trousers. The wick. A tired face. Sadder than we thought. It's only up close that you can see his smile. An almost childlike smile, like so many leaders of men have. "He's so nice," his colleagues say in surprise. We introduce him to a few people, he shakes hands with an absent gaze, responds with a few words. And we just stood there, stunned.

But you have to look at her eyes. In this face, only they matter. They are eyes from another world, foreign eyes, deep blue.

and black where you can barely make out the eyelids. How can we guess what is going on inside them? What else is there than a prodigious dream, a boundless love for *Deutschland*, the German land, the real one and the one yet to be built? What do we have in common with these eyes? Above all, the first and most astonishing impression remains: these eyes are serious. An almost insurmountable anguish, an unheard-of anxiety remains in them. We can make out in a flash the present difficulties, the possibility of war, the economic crisis, the religious crisis, all the worries of the leader in charge. We can feel, physically, what a terrible ordeal it is to lead a nation, and to lead Germany towards its all-consuming destiny. Especially when that leader has to transform it in such a way that a "new man", as he calls it every moment, can be born and live there.

We don't want to be romantic. And yet, looking at the man with the distant gaze, who is a god for his country, how can we not think that on a June dawn, he descended from heaven, like the archangel of death, to eliminate some of his oldest companions out of duty. And no doubt we are quite free to see 30 June as a palace revolution. But it is *also* something else. For this man sacrificed what he considered his duty, and his personal peace, and friendship, and he would sacrifice everything, human happiness, his own and that of his people above all, if the mysterious duty he obeyed commanded him to do so. Hitler is not judged as an ordinary head of state. He is also a reformer, called to a mission that he believes to be divine, and his eyes tell us that he is bearing the terrible weight of it. This is what can call everything into question at any moment.

I believe I shall never forget the colour and sadness of Hitler's eyes, which are undoubtedly his enigma. Of course, I do not claim to judge him on this impression, even though it was experienced by many others during those solemn days in Nuremberg. But above all, as Frenchmen watching this series of extraordinary spectacles, we were asking ourselves: of all this, what can we one day have in common?

On Sunday morning, the most unusual ceremony in the Third Reich took place: the consecration of the flags. The "blood flag", carried by the demonstrators killed during the failed *putsch* of 1923 outside Munich's Feldherrenhalle, was brought before the Führer.

*In Munich, there were several of
them when the bullets hit them...*

With one hand, the Chancellor grasped the flag of blood, and with the other the new banners that he was to consecrate. Through him, an unknown fluid was to pass, and the blessing of the martyrs was henceforth to extend to the new symbols of the German fatherland. A purely symbolic ceremony? I don't think so. In Hitler's mind, as in that of the Germans, there is a real idea of a kind of mystical transfusion similar to that of the blessing of water by the priest - if not, dare we say it, to that of the Eucharist. Anyone who does not see in the consecration of flags the analogue of the consecration of bread, a sort of German sacrament, runs the risk of not understanding anything about Hitlerism.

And that's when we get worried. In front of these serious and delicious decorations of old romanticism, in front of this immense flowering of flags, in front of these crosses from the East, I wondered the last day, if everything was possible. You can give a people more vigour. But is it possible to want to transform everything to the point of inventing new rituals that penetrate the lives and hearts of citizens to such an extent? The Frenchman, who misunderstands foreigners, begins by being astonished before he understands.

The flag itself accentuates this astonishing oriental impression, and you have to make an effort to realise that some of the virtues given pride of place - work, sacrifice, love of country - are part of the common heritage of all peoples, so surprised are you by the impressions of disorientation and exoticism. There seems to be a certain irony of fate in emphasising the Oriental appearance of these myths, in a country that rejects everything that seems to come from the East. But Hitler, who introduced Walpurgis Nights on 1 May, pagan festivals and the consecration of flags, was in fact faithful to the deep vocation of Germany, which from Goethe to Nietzsche and Kayserling had always looked to the sun of the East. It is true that not everything in this new politics, or rather this poetry, is for us, and there is no need to insist on this. But what is for us, what is a constant call to order, and no doubt a kind of regret, is this sustained preaching to youth of faith, sacrifice and honour. Just as Jacques Bainville returned from pre-war Germany as a monarchist, so every Frenchman returns from today's Germany persuaded that his country, his youth,

could do at least as well as our neighbours, if we first restored certain universal virtues. And that's a lesson that applies to everyone.

That's the final impression we take away: beautiful spectacles, beautiful youth, an easier life than they say, but above all the surprising mythology of a new religion. When we try to remember those days that were so full, when we recall the night-time ceremonies lit from the side by the glow of torches and spotlights, the German children playing like wolves around their memories of civil war and sacrifice, the leader lifting the subjugated crowd in wide swells with plaintive cries, we say to ourselves that this country, so close to us, is first and foremost, in the full sense of the word, and prodigiously, and profoundly, *a strange country*.

*
* *

And what did France do? It was living under the regime of the Front Populaire, sometimes under socialist leadership, sometimes under radical leadership, under the perpetual threat of Communist blackmail. But among young people, we could also see, without forcing the issue, the pre-fascist spirit that had perhaps been born, in spite of everything, around 6 February 1934. This spirit was to be found in the Leagues for as long as there were Leagues, sometimes among certain members of the P.S.F. despite the cups of tea, in Doriot's Parti Populaire Français, and in the crowd of non-partisans.

Not everything was happy in the career of the young nationalist. We had generally followed with sympathy the efforts of the Count of Paris to make himself known to the French: he was an aviator, which appeals to the masses, he had married in Palermo a beautiful princess of legend, he had many beautiful children. He wanted a newspaper, the *Courrier Royal*, and wrote articles and books in which we found the alliance between the social and the national that we considered essential. One day in 1936, I went to see him in Brussels with Annie Jamet, who wanted to organise one or two conferences under his auspices. I saw him again during my trip the following month. He seemed to me, as in 1930, fine, moving and attractive. He always listened admirably. His words were wise and fair. However, if he happened to talk about workers, about French working-class life, it was clear, unfortunately, that all that was far from him, that he had no interest in it.

direct knowledge, that he was ignorant of the men of his country. His reasoning was correct, but a misty, impalpable *je ne sais quoi* stood between reality and him. It was, of course, difficult to tell him, and the strongest thing about him was precisely a fairly strong assurance, confidence in his destiny. But the conversation was more difficult than one might have thought, given the kindness of his welcome.

The following year, we were astonished to learn from a manifesto that he had condemned *Action Française*. No doubt his advisers had led him to believe that his cause would be served by abandoning this discredited party. What happened was as it should have been: people on the left did not become royalists as a result, and the royalists were somewhat bitter. The old fighter, Charles Maurras, was dealt another blow. We repeated to ourselves that the King's person is of no importance, that ingratitude is a royal virtue, and that time arranges many things.

Others had similar worries. There was the great La Rocque trial, in which the leader of the P.S.F. was accused of having received funds from the Tardieu ministry. Disgusted with all the parties, adventurous young people wanted something different. They organised secret societies, like the Carbonari. The first were dissidents from *Action Française*, unfortunately infiltrated by the police, as they should have been, and given the ironic name of *Cagouards*. At the same time, in the provinces in particular, societies were formed to defend against communism. Everyone knows that there were agreements between the local commanders and the notables of the towns to deal with a bad blow if necessary. Elsewhere, even different societies were organised. The police kept an eye on everything, and the Marxists confused things to their heart's content. One fine day, a vast plot against the Republic was launched with great fanfare, the plot of the *Cagouards*, a soap opera which kept the crowds gasping for breath. In no particular order, some very brave people were arrested, and even some genuine heroes, such as General Duseigneur, who was to disappear at the start of the new war, and Sergeant Darnand, thanks to whom the German offensive of July 1918 was uncovered. We, for our part, have never known a member of the French "*Cagouard*" movement of any kind. But we do know that in these often vague and always diverse organisations there were police informers, scoundrels, oddballs, gherkins - and a majority of brave boys tempted by virtues of action. The lowliness was to confuse everything,

The *Cagoule* served as a scarecrow for the Popular Front for two or three years, and was the answer to everything. For two or three years, the *Cagoule* served as a scarecrow for the Popular Front, and was the answer to everything.

But it was a sign of the disarray of the spirit, of a certain slightly romantic despair, which many patriots of those years experienced. At the same time, André Tardieu was abandoning his political career and publishing books on the fundamental incapacity of the regime.

Even more encouraging was the success Jacques Doriot enjoyed from the outset. We had always been curious about him, in the days when, lean and hairy, he was the devil the bourgeoisie feared, and the strongest head of the Communist Party. He had split from it and founded the Rayon communiste de Saint-Denis (there were a few dissidences, the most important of which was the P.U.P., or Parti de l'Unité prolétarienne, in the Chamber). In the old royal city, we knew that they liked him, that he was involved in welfare work and that he was hated by the Muscovites. We used to sing:

*Onwards and upwards, Saint-Denis,
revolutionary unity...*

We also knew that this Marxist, former combatant, former worker, former agitator, was gradually moving closer to the national reality. Yet he was still elected in 1936 as a non-communist revolutionary. It was only later that he founded the Parti Populaire Français, whose first slogan was to support industrial strikes and fight against political strikes. His personal influence attracted many workers to him. Marxists were enraged by his successes. He brought communist methods and cell organisation to his party. On some pretext, he was removed from his seat as mayor of Saint-Denis. He had the audacity to give up his post as town councillor, he resigned, stood again in the elections, and after a very tough campaign, was beaten. Then, out of honesty, he gave up his seat as deputy.

At *Je suis partout* we had PFP comrades, and we all had a lot of sympathy for the movement. Unfortunately, it was weakened by internal quarrels, and deprived of money by big business, which found it more intelligent to subsidise the radical party. But that in no way detracted from the lively, lively, popular aspect that the PFP had during those years.

the day after the *Anschluss*, when the ministry had resigned, and in that room full of rough-and-tumble delegates from France and the Empire, the cry of "Doriot will win" seemed another word for "France will win! I also remember one night when we invited Jacques Doriot to a *Je suis partout* dinner. After dinner, Alain Laubreaux, Jean Fontenoy and I went to drink in the cellars Saint-Denis to celebrate a P.P.F. legionnaire who was returning to Sidi- Bel-Abbès the next day. I watched Jacques Doriot, this calm, solid, patient, energetic giant, amidst the hooting and hollering of good boys who were a bit tipsy, singing sentimental songs or applauding our comrade Robert Andriveau who, perched on a barrel, sang the great aria *from La Tosca*. It was all very pleasant.

Thus, from these various elements was formed what our opponents called fascism and which we ended up calling that. For these words were commonly used in the immediate pre-war period. And the elements of our fascism were not difficult to enumerate. We knew, from all over the world, what so many young people who, with all their national differences, resembled us were like. Some of them had suffered in child wars, others in revolutions in their own countries, all of them in crisis. They knew what their nation was, its past, and they wanted to believe in its future. They saw the imperial glitter constantly shimmering before them. They wanted a pure nation, a pure race. They often liked to live together in these immense gatherings of men where the rhythmic movements of armies and crowds seemed like the pulsations of a vast heart. They did not believe in the promises of liberalism, in the equality of men, in the will of the people. But they did believe that from the independent researcher to the industrialist, the poet, the scientist or the labourer, a nation is *one*, just as a sports team is *one*. They did not believe in justice through force. And they knew that out of that strength could come joy.

For the extravagance of the opponents of fascism lies above all in this total ignorance of fascist joy. Joy that can be criticised, joy that can even be declared abominable and hellish, if you like, but joy. The young fascist, supported by his race and his nation, proud of his vigorous body, of his lucid mind, contemptuous of the thick goods of this world, the young fascist in his camp, in the midst of the comrades of peace who can be the comrades of war, the young fascist who sings, who

Before judging it, we must first know that it exists, and that sarcasm will not undermine it. I don't know whether, as Mussolini said, "*the twentieth century will be the century of fascism*", but I do know that nothing will prevent fascist joy from having been, and from having stretched people's spirits through feeling and reason.

For us, however, fascism was not a political doctrine, nor was it an economic doctrine, nor was it the imitation of foreigners, and our confrontations with foreign fascisms only served to convince us of our national originality, and therefore of our own. But fascism is a spirit. First and foremost, it is an anti-conformist, anti-bourgeois spirit, and disrespect had its place in it. It is a spirit opposed to prejudice, class prejudice and all other prejudices. It is the very spirit of friendship, which we would have liked to see rise to the level of national friendship.

VII

SEPTEMBER STORMS

Later, we may not fully understand the state of mind of those who missed the war as children, who grew up in a Europe full of illusions (even if they did not believe in them, they formed the atmosphere of their adolescence) and who, suddenly, for several years, waited for the war to come in the spring or autumn. I'm not just talking about the great crises when you open the newspaper one morning and see the battle approaching. But I am thinking of that insinuating combination of fate which does everything to persuade us, day by day, hour by hour, that war is inevitable, that it will come, from democratic stupidity or some other fatality, but that it will come. So, from time to time, men of thirty lose not their courage, but their confidence, but their moral health, and they struggle with their nerves so continuously that they cannot help but feel a little tired. For perhaps deep down they no longer believe in miracles, which is not a particularly comforting form of hope. They know that reasonable doctrines don't stand a chance, and they do their job, the job of a man, of a politician, while waiting for something better, wondering whether they might one day abandon it for the job of war. And although they may put a brave face on destiny, they experience a fairly quiet form of *hopelessness*.

As I conclude this account of our last pre-war year, I believe it is this feeling that I am encountering. The first clear call we heard was on 25 July 1934, when, as we unfurled our newspaper on the platform of a bus, we learned of the assassination of Chancellor Dollfuss: summer was coming, the similarity with a tragic anniversary. War was possible, as possible as it had been after Sarajevo twenty years earlier. Then came the re-establishment of the German army, and the remilitarisation of the Rhineland in particular, in March 1936, days when France would no doubt have accepted war. And then there was Vienna, in March 1938. All this was German business, of course. Whatever the danger, we never believed wholeheartedly in a

war against Italy, against Spain. It was too stupid (but fate can be stupid). Finally, there was the most serious scare, in September 1938, the so-called White War.

For months, we had been sensing (and the soothsayers, like Jacques Bainville, had been sensing since Versailles) the approach of the war born of this heterogeneous Czechoslovakia neighbouring a powerful Reich. After the *Anschluss* of Austria - didn't an illustrious Czech statesman say: "Rather the *Anschluss* than the Habsburgs"? - Czechoslovakia hastily tried to solve its internal problems and come to an agreement with Germany. But it had three and a half million Germans, and propaganda was gaining ground every day (52). {Let's not rush to talk about cheating. In the middle of the war, as citizens of a country at peace, 75 per cent of Germans from the Tyrol, asked to choose between Italy and Germany, chose to move to Germany}. Czechoslovakia should have been turned into Switzerland, with respect for nationalities and cantons; alas, it takes seven hundred years to make a Switzerland: Czechoslovakia was twenty years old. The Nuremberg Congress that year would take place in the heat of European expectation.

It had been going on for a month. When we promised a certain autonomy to the Germans of the Sudeten Mountains (which had come to be known simply as the Sudeten Mountains), "the point of view was outdated", and they demanded something else. Germany wanted outright annexation. And yet, on the evening of 12 September, at the close of the Nuremberg Congress, when Chancellor Hitler, amid the torches and spotlights shining obliquely on the red flags, announced that he was renouncing all claims to his western borders, people began to breathe again. Then each day brought its own colour, its own hope, its own fear. People were already talking to each other in the street, explaining the Czechoslovak problem in their own way:

- After all, if three million Germans want to be Germans, that's their business. Not ours.

In both camps, the most astonishing alliances were being forged. The secret intentions of governments were discussed at length. Foreign nations were divided into parties. The newspapers reached the height insanity and ignominy. The afternoon press indiscriminately fed all kinds of false news. The plutocrats of *Paris-Soir* and the communists of *Ce Soir* worked together to inform the world.

Then hope returned. An old Englishman flew to Berchtesgaden to see the master of Europe. He brought back peace, the rest was just a matter of procedure. The war party suffered. A second interrupted meeting at Godesberg restored its vitality. The Czechoslovak government issued a mobilisation order in eight languages. People waited, unwilling to believe in the absurd conspiracy of fate. France had had no air force since the Popular Front. No munitions. England would have hesitated for a long time. "This war would have been a crime", the head of the government, M. Daladier, was later to say. Yet some people were breathing blood with obvious pleasure. On Friday evening, with the exception of the newspapers, there was even some vague hope. The next morning, there was no mention of mobilisation in the papers, but during the night, shabby-looking white posters with their intertwined grey flags had been stuck up, and the first people out phoned their friends to find out whether they had number 2 or number 3 on their leaflet, which had been called up. Henri Poulain came to tell me.

We will remember that day when, from early in the morning, we began to see men in the streets holding their little cardboard suitcases in their hands. "Immediately and without delay" is not an empty word for most French people, even when they later proclaim that "if they had known", they would not have been in such a hurry. And I must admit that, in those early days, I had a great deal of sympathy for the brave lads who, drunk on misconceptions and red wine, were heading for the dangers prepared by those who had been fooling them for twenty years.

Everyone noted this supreme brutality of fate, which suddenly confronted men of fifty with the memories of their terrible youth. As the mobilisation system was not the same as in 1914, the men went out into the streets with their booklets, and looked to see if 2 or 3 on their fascicule was really made exactly the same way as 2 or 3 on the poster. I saw some of them come back several times with their booklet in their hand. That's right, they haven't made a mistake. They took one last look, and shrugged their shoulders. What a story! Reserve officers rushed to their tailors, to the shops, to have a braid refreshed or added. There was no need to think about finding an outfit. As the France of the Popular Front had not yet lost all its rights on that day, the tailor I asked for a little

work "immediately and without delay", he replied superbly, before humanising himself:

- Sir, it's Saturday.

On a hot August day in 1914, the old cinema "newsreels" showed us the crowd in old-fashioned canotiers besieging the gates of the Gare de l'Est. The conscripts of 1938 are wearing caps; they have put on their shabbiest clothes, they were told that they would leave them at the mobilisation centre, and God knows when they will find them again, and in what state! The bourgeois themselves seem to me to be dressed in old costumes, which turn this crowd into an immense proletariat, and, before the uniform, already into the great herd. Just now, in Soissons, I will see the station without lights invaded by another herd. Half a thousand lads from the countryside, gathered on foot from the surrounding villages, sweaty, dirty, bellowing revolutionary songs, drunk from riding under the trains. It's a sight I'll never forget. Seeing them clinging to the doors, laughing and crying at the same time, joking without pleasure, running obediently to their incomprehensible fate, you suddenly grasped the meaning of the words: cannon fodder. It was cannon fodder, in front of me, in a great anonymous heap, a great heap of warlike beasts, without understanding, but not without courage, and whose spectacle could fill one a kind of horror and pity. We've seen that again since.

In the meantime, they are there, in the halls and courtyards of Paris, sometimes since morning. Few of them are women. I saw some earlier, in clusters in taxis, accompanying young boys who were a little tense. At the gates of the Gare de l'Est and the Gare du Nord, they disappear. Their men gathered quickly, asking the mobile guards and overworked sergeants for their trains. The booklets did not always indicate the department they had to get to, and sometimes it was just a few villages. The whole human load was piled up in no particular order, with a few women going to towns in the north and east, and doing their best, poor women, not to look out of place. Missing, as a reminder of 1914, are the famous "Men 40 - Horses (long) 8" wagons. We saw some this morning, but for the "dressed" troops. This is not yet the real war. It is only remembered by the brown musette bag ? the felt iron flask, the quarter, which many have so naturally found, and which, moreover, are already filling the windows of hardware shops without much decency.

It's six o'clock. In a little while, night will fall, still warm at the end of September. We'll see nothing of the cities, drowned in darkness, lit up by bluish lamps. In a few days' time, we'll know that the sinister glow of the cities on alert is merely a passive defence exercise, and from the next day onwards, the urban lighting, although reduced, will be more abundant. But we weren't thinking of a drill on Saturday evening. The big overcrowded trains, bursting with shouts and songs, the big trains that brought new crowds to the stations at every stop, were passing through dead countries, blue and black, which were already the countries of the war. On the platforms, unseen, rare crewmen, employees without orders, gave contradictory and useless advice, and disappeared, like ghosts, out of the blue cones of the streetlights. The men climbed in anywhere, collapsed in a corner, gestured to the door and tried to repeat in a hesitant voice some verse of *the Internationale*, which fell into a cold silence.

The beauties of administration could not fail to produce a few errors. There are many villages in France with the same name. As a result of a funny and somewhat ridiculous adventure, I left on Saturday afternoon and only got back on Monday, because two villages in the army zone have the same name and I was initially directed to the wrong one. One isn't far from Belgium, the other in Lorraine, and to get back from one to the other, once the mistake has been recognised, you have to take those miraculous French cross-country lines that don't go much faster than the stagecoaches they replaced. Moreover, the flow of reservists was almost uninterrupted for the first two days. They filled the trains. So I was lucky enough to be able to talk to dozens of them, all Communists, all patriots, all exasperating for the intellect, moving for the heart, and I drew from this forced journey a few more reasons to hate those who have made a people like ours what it is becoming.

While the combatants of 1914 were able to recapture their impressions, we ordinary comrades in the **Kriegsgefahrzustand (53)** {State of War Danger} of 1938 were discovering things we didn't know. We were offered to drink the red wine of the mobilisations, we were shown photographs of women and children. We spoke of the coming peace and promised a speedy return. We encountered that trust between man and man that has always seemed to be the most magnificent gift of humanity.

war. And it wasn't war, no doubt, we won't be ridiculous enough to believe that. But I swear that all those men who were leaving and whom I met, the goodbyes in the stations, the confidences, the sadness, were very different from leaving for war.

So they rushed to ask for information, to complain, to ask questions. They did so with the natural freedom of the French people, who discuss the blow and do not consider it unworthy to speak. They didn't hide from me, who was in an officer's uniform, that they were Communists. Sometimes they did it in strange ways.

— The war is wanted by the fascists and the two hundred families, they told me.

I didn't see any point in arguing. But the same people added, which surprised me:

— And also by the Jews, and by the Americans, who want to sell us stocks. Besides, the Americans are all Jews.

I'm not suggesting that these words are an illuminating explanation of the crisis, but it is surprising that they should have been said to me, and several times, and by these men.

No enthusiasm, as I said, just sadness, but also a seriousness, a gravity, which I think is all the more dangerous to arouse, all the more despicable to deceive.

— If we have to go, we'll go. We have to defend ourselves.

It would have been a waste of time to tell them that, for the moment, nobody was attacking them: it was not unpleasant to rediscover the simple reflex of a man who defends himself, even if he is wrong. They also talked to me about Germany, with more curiosity than hatred. I didn't expect them to be free of certain misconceptions. I found the proletarians' opinion of absolute power amusing:

— In Germany, the people eat sauerkraut, but Hitler and Goering eat chicken.

What struck me was that *they all knew* that Hitler had done a lot for the working class at that time, they all knew that he was a man of the people. One of them had this naïve remark:

— All in all, he deserves a lot of credit.

I think I'll long remember some of the faces I saw on those days and nights. I can still see this metal worker from the north of France, widowed five months ago, with two children. He was wearing a dark blue shirt with white polka dots. He'd already had a lot to drink, he'd left in the morning and was showing me photos of his kids. I remember this Breton peasant who could barely speak French and who hadn't eaten since the morning. All these people are good, and could be great, if we didn't hurt them. Should I be ashamed to admit that a few hours gave me more love for them than I had ever had before?

Carried through the dark countryside, we are tossed about in the night. A long, dark journey, where even the day, in my memory, takes on a nocturnal colour, warm and smoky. Laon at night, Guise in the morning, the empty coaches in the foggy countryside, Nancy at night, the slippery roads, the stations buried in shadow, everything has the same dark appearance for me, striped with blue lights. Twice, a bad joke sounds the alarm and stops the train as it speeds along at a hundred miles an hour. We passed around bottles of red wine, but didn't eat much. Occasionally, a bizarre scene: an old sergeant from the war feels the need to explain in detail how you get out of the trench at the time of the attack, and how it's not as easy as you think to pull a bayonet out of a belly. You have to put your foot into it. The two poor guys listening to him turn a little green and don't dare say anything. I shut him up, as gently as possible.

— I have to explain it to them.

— They'll see it if they have to go!

I think the audience gave me a grateful look. They all show me their booklets and ask me extravagant questions. They have a strange confidence. They hand me the bottle. They ask if I think "like them", i.e. if I'm a communist. I tell them no, they don't care, but I drink with them and they continue to be just as frank. Have I ever travelled so far?

If the lessons had been understood, the mobilisation of September 1938, even if it had only lasted two days, would undoubtedly have been an interesting manoeuvre to avoid the forced disadvantages of abstract forecasts. But was it used properly? It should have taught us about certain tragic shortcomings in the following year, and put the spotlight back on the need for organisation and discipline. On my journey, I passed through a

In front of the station on Sunday morning, thousands of unclothed men were still wandering around. They had wandered all night, attacking cafés and trying to loot the cellars of restaurants.

— Someone tried to throw a marble table at my head," said the owner, frightened not so much by the danger as by the impropriety.

So everything is closed, iron curtains drawn, even the grocery shops.

At the time, moreover, confident in the famous French virtues of improvisation, we weren't worried. The word I heard most often during those days was, of course:

— What a mess!

Oh yes, what a mess! But a mess from which, all in all, we emerged with a disconcerting joy. No one was doing the job they had been appointed to do; everyone was working on a variety of odd jobs. The nuns were in charge of feeding the men, since there was as yet no official organisation. A young mayor, twenty-seven years old and prodigiously active, helped with everything. And we were transporting bundles of gas disinfectors and typewriters with comrades who had not been assigned to such work by any mobilisation order. I never signed more papers in my life than I had no right to sign, not being in any way an officer in the Train, and simply waiting to be directed somewhere. People were stopped on the roads and given vouchers for their cars. In short, the intoxication of absolute power.

All this was done with good-natured lads from Lorraine, whose wives came to see them in the afternoon and brought them bottles and pâtés. Familiarity is perhaps the main strength of armies. There was a rather hard moment on Monday afternoon, before Hitler's speech, when *Havas* posted the most pessimistic news in Nancy, where I had been, and when Sarraut advised Parisians to evacuate. We all thought that was it. But around two in the morning, we reopened a bistro to drink beer with the men who had helped us, Hitler had spoken, an Alsatian had told us what he had said, and we had regained confidence.

They were two charming days; the parish priest offered me mirabelle plums, I tried to teach the officers the fascist songs, and I had chosen, naturally, a driver called Gaxotte, who wore a multicoloured scarf and of superb knickers of horse, and which me appeared of

rather undisciplined temperament. I have to admit that the local fascists had 'spotted' me and exchanged a few passwords with me that immediately conjured up the most fearsome cells.

That Wednesday morning, I found out how Paris had spent it, how it had woken up to the certainty of war. On Monday night we ourselves had seen motorcyclists arriving with orders. We harpooned the motorcyclists: was it the general mobilisation order? No, it was just a few 'individual' reminders from

"Number 6". Life was good! And then we knew nothing, or almost nothing, and for me those pathetic hours on Wednesday were just a chaotic gathering, a long line of cars, and the departure at dawn. The weather was fine, and my conspirators were looking for me a car, not so much to look at me as to be able to enjoy it too, at least for one or two people. My companion was a very friendly "fascist" marshal to whom I secretly passed factional newspapers. The tarpaulin-covered lorries, the "Lorraine coaches" and the delivery cars have all been loaded. The whole village is at the gates to watch the armies of the Republic depart. On some of the vans, a name was repeated: Louis Dix-neuf. It's not the reigning prince, the one whose life a newspaper told us about a few years ago, and who ascended the throne on 4 September 1870. He is a wholesale grocer whose cars have been requisitioned. But we are amused to see, by a charming irony of fate, our column becoming the army of Louis XIX, the last king of France.

It's deep morning. The motorcyclists are pulling up the column, the highway patrols are lining our route, so badly that we get lost. There was little traffic: just a few cars loaded with red quilts and parcels, evacuating the towns. Occasionally, cars marked a D for Deutschland drive along peacefully. How could we believe in war? We're certainly more relaxed and free-spirited here than in Paris. It's cool and sunny, here's Baccarat, here's the Route de Sion, here's Saint-Nicolas-de-Port, here's Saverne. Louis XIX's armies didn't get lost on the way.

In this other little village, this time in Alsace, where I arrived, everything was pitch black, with only three or four blue lights at the crossroads. The locals walk around with their lamps in hand, under a starry sky. For the first few days of this week, the weather has been fine in the fortified regions,

if the weather was bad in Paris. The rain didn't spoil the outdoor bivouacs until a little later.

They don't close the cafés, only the shutters. And we were able to see again what the Spanish war showed us a few months ago: the role played today by French television. The evening of Hitler's speech, the evening when the Munich conference was announced, everyone listened in total silence. This is also how we heard Roosevelt's kind words, or the Pope's moving speech. Soldiers and civilians gathered in the streets, near the shutters, listening to the voices coming out of the boxes. The night is dark as they rise, their words meaning peace or war.

All this gives colour to the week we've lived, with its funny or serious details. It seems like two months since I left Paris, and not four days. At least, in Lorraine and Alsace, we don't hear the news until the evening; at least we avoid the panic of Paris. Everything is far away from us, and even for those who are not locked up in the casemates, even for the civilians in the region, it seems as if a special universe has been created. What makes it not only bearable, but even lovable, is the irony with which everyone accepts the comic events, which have never been lacking in the lives of men gathered in large masses.

It would have been surprising if the Jewish question had not arisen in some form during this mobilisation. I was struck by the fact that, on the coach to Nancy, an excellent lady with the appearance of a frightened peasant made some rather violent comments about Israel. An officer said to me:

— The Jewish communities of Alsace were very kind and immediately came to make themselves available to us. It's true," he added, "that after all, this story is of interest to them.

It is well known that in Alsace there are very old communities which, until recently, got on well with the French, and even gave, for quite a few years, proofs of devotion similar to those that could be given by loyal Kabyle tribes. However, since the peace, Alsace and part of Lorraine have been the chosen people's favourite invasion areas. And Jewish warmongering has borne fruit. Here and there, shops whose owners had made unpleasant remarks were ransacked and Jews were molested. In Nancy, I saw a furrier's shop completely demolished. On the palisade that

The next day, separating it from the street, was written: "La France aux Français! The owner had to be taken to hospital, where, I'm told, he died.

Pursued by Jehovah, when I arrived in Alsace in a car requisitioned by Lieutenant Dreyfus, I was immediately put up with a Mr. Blum. Above my bed, with the portraits of the last four Presidents of the Republic, was a Jewish calendar. Everywhere in the village, the shopkeepers were Jewish: Abraham, Latzarus, Bloch, Jud, Brunschwig, Lévi. Twenty-four hours later, the Jewish military chaplain would turn up and I'd be put in charge of him.

That a contributor to *Je suis partout* should be in charge of organising Jewish worship in a fortified region is certainly one of those things that makes you think that irony is the fourth theological virtue. Moreover, the rabbi seemed a peaceful man. He confided in me that his family had been in Alsace for three centuries, and he refused to go and sleep with the local rabbi. For I learnt that there are rabbis and rabbis, that the soldier was a real one, that the civilian was only a kind of sub-deacon, and that the dignity of a real rabbi forbade him to sleep with the half-rabbi. As Wednesday 4 October was the Feast of the Great Pardon or Yom-Kippur, things had to be made easier for the Jewish soldiers.

— There can't be many of them," said this worthy man without malice.

Naturally, I hastened to help him with his duties. Unfortunately, the military authorities had just requisitioned the synagogue cantor's house and oratory.

— It's a desecration," murmured the rabbi. Has the pulpit been moved?

— Yes, of course.

— You shouldn't have touched it. At least, promise me that no one will sleep in the oratory.

We swore to him. In any case, the oratory could not be occupied straight away, because despite prolonged disinfection, there was still an abominable sweet and perfumed smell, somewhere between urine and Armenian paper, the cause of which all the *goyim* present searched in vain. In any case, the holy place was preserved from the stain of Aryan sleep.

— Do I have a badge? Will anyone recognise me?

I was able to assure him that, even without a badge, he would be recognised.

But the following Sabbath, from the window of the oratory overlooking the synagogue, I could see him, still bearded, still dressed in black, wearing our fortress troop beret adorned with the Star of Solomon...

And then there was the last day, which everyone immediately knew was the last. T.S.F. told of Daladier's return, the joy in Paris, the flowers, the singing. Here too, there was singing in the streets, and in the villages where there was no street lighting, people walked around late at night with electric lamps in their hands. In Bitche, in Haguenau, in almost all of Alsace, the streets were pavoised, and in Strasbourg two streets were named after Daladier and Chamberlain. M. Blum, Mr Lévy had the biggest flags. In short, the armistice.

- For as long as we've seen wars without declarations, why not an armistice without a war?

From the day we arrived, we knew that it was all over. The world had never been so close to war. But Mussolini (to whom we had had no ambassador for a year because of the sanctions) had telephoned London, which had taken the advice of Paris. He offered to mediate and proposed a conference between Hitler, Daladier, Chamberlain and himself. On Wednesday evening, the principle of the conference was decided, the astonishing meeting took place in Munich, the Sudetenland was given to the Germans, and Czechoslovakia accepted. The Muscovites cried out in rage: the war was slipping away from them.

They had announced the general mobilisation of Germany before they knew it, they had cut out everything in Hitler's speeches that gave them a temporarily reassuring appearance. There were some anxious days in Paris. *L'Action française* was fighting for peace at the forefront. *Je suis partout*, which I had had to leave, published an issue blazing with rage and ardour, bringing together all the arguments in favour of peace. The following week, as a supporting document, it published in full, alone in the French press, the report of the English negotiator Lord Runciman, sent to Czechoslovakia, which concluded that it was impossible for Germans and Czechs to live together. By our action, supported however, for once and very precisely, by the action of the government, we made solid enemies.

But for a France with no air force and little diplomatic support (Poland itself had taken over the town of Teschen), the situation was very different,

which it had always demanded from Czechoslovakia), was the truce.

- We're going to have to form the Union des Dérangés pour Rien, we said.

So we christened ourselves, and drank Alsatian wine in honour of the new association. Outside, laughing ghosts approached us, a small jet of light in their hands, uncovering the faces of young girls and illuminating the cobblestones where a light rain was falling. The 1938 war was over.

But they kept us for a fortnight. We were going to those strange places that so many news reports, not to mention films, would begin to publicise from then on, by which I mean the sunken citadels of the Maginot Line. Under a grey sky, the wind blew through the trees, through the clumps of thin grass, across the poor soil. Women and peasants walked through the mud, along the low hills, with the same heavy, quiet step they might take in Champagne or Burgundy. Here and there, however, a knoll rose up, or a dome of grey concrete, like a bollard or a mooring bollard, a little higher, a little wider, not much more: it was the top of a tower, the keep of a buried fortress. And then we came to the tall Mycenaean or National Socialist-style gates that have popularised by film and images. We passed through long corridors, turrets, gleaming white factories and narrow rooms with three tiers of beds. This is where the men lived for a few days, and where they would return a year later.

Then we walked along the muddy hills that form the surface of one of these cities. Evening fell with a cold wind. Great black clouds raced across the sky. As night fell, glimmers of light would appear, some of them immense: the lights under which the architects, engineers and workers on the Siegfried line laboured. I gaze at a curve of distant hills that closes the already dark horizon. That curve is Germany.

We're watching.

We're going to have to leave, and that's not as easy as it sounds.

The proud moth guards, their eyes fixed desolately on clothes, masks, letter trays and "deaf lanterns that

went off in Louis Dix-neuf's vans, hadn't told us, - with a hint of irony:

- Let there be war, they said! It would be too terrible if we had to give all this back. And first of all, we'd lose everything.

We didn't lose everything. But demobilisation without war, as you can imagine, is not provided for in any military regulations. And as soon as Munich was known, people began to think that it was not necessary to exaggerate, and that everyone would be better off at home. The idle strolled through the village streets, and at night people began to open their windows to see the cafés where heroic games of belote were being played. Serious people chatted.

It is true that enthusiasm for peace had sometimes taken on somewhat astonishing proportions. The subscription for Mr Chamberlain's little country house, organised by *Paris-Soir* (and refused by the beneficiary) appeared in the East to be both burlesque and shocking. It was understandable that the border populations, who were the first to be tasted, should have expressed their delight. It was also understandable that common sense should be satisfied. But the flat adulations of the ex-bellucose evening press were a little shocking. These were the same people who would later turn their noses up at Munich.

While we waited for something better, we amused ourselves with the little comical images that life is full of. My friend the rabbi had returned, and he had learned some rather special lessons from Munich.

- All this," he told me, "will end badly for us poor Jews. I've just met two little boys who spoke in Alsatian dialect. They pointed at me and said: "We'll have to cut his neck off.

They tried to console him by swearing that it wasn't going to happen today, and that the pogrom was not a perfect solution. He sighed, clasped his pale hands together, wiped his dingy beard and tried to go and catechise some rare disciple.

As everything happens, we ended up leaving. One rainy morning, which would end in clear, cool hours, Louis XIX's armies left Alsace. On the lorries, the soldiers had written: "Rapide pour Paris.

"The driver had been drinking. They had crowned the cars with flowers, and were ready, no doubt, to parade under the Arc de Triomphe.

— If I can find you a car," one of them said to me with unaffected familiarity, "will you allow me to get in with you?"

I wandered through the car with a [Kriegsgefahrzustandkamerad \(54\)](#). {Friend of the threatened state of war}. Once the round-up was done, here we were, through the light mist of six o'clock, ready to leave. My impertinent friend is a resourceful but nostalgic student:

— I never slept in the camp. I stayed with brave Alsations. They had wonderful spirits. And in the evening, we'd put on the phono, and I'd dance with the girl from the house.

We laughed as we listened to him, and watched the most traditional images being lifted. The evening before, an excellent vet told us about his difficulties:

— I was given the task of assessing the animals in my own village. And do you know how much the state buys a horse for? Two thousand francs, sir! Can you imagine me offering two thousand francs for his horse, according to the official scale, to one of my clients? But he'd resent me for the rest of his life, he'd never come and see me again. That's sawing off the branch you're sitting on. I offered him eight thousand francs.

— You were going far.

Since there's no war, what does it matter? I'll have pleased him, and it won't cost the State anything.

And the good man laughed as he poured himself a glass of Traminer.

Here are the roads of Lorraine, here is Saint-Nicolas where we enter the mighty church, here is Nancy soon. This is the end. The courtyard of the barracks is full of an improbable but joyful tumult, where industrialists come to look for their batches of typewriters, and demobilised soldiers try to find their little cardboard suitcases. The papers I signed the other night are thrown in my face:

— What did you do with the three strings used to clean the revolvers? And the Treasury and Post Office pistols? Where are they now?

Alas! I've never been in charge of it, so I'll have to run and get my illegal signature endorsed by the Train officer, who throws up his arms to the heavens:

— I've lost nine cars! So, you understand, the strings for cleaning revolvers...

He would sign that he had lost Officer Z's ninety-eight pairs of disinfectant boots and hundreds of gas masks. All that will be found, the important thing for us is to leave.

Another evening in Nancy. We are going to see the Place Stanislas, the most beautiful square in France, and undoubtedly one of the most beautiful in the world, along with that of Siena, lit up in a soft grey and blue light under the clear sky. How beautiful it is, in this great empty city, with its deserted cafés, where a few astonished soldiers wander, not knowing whether they are at peace or at war. How beautiful it is to feel that some of them are sad because they didn't have "their" war!

We'll be leaving tomorrow morning with a few images that we'll treasure for a long time to come.

In those trains that ran through the blue-lit stations on the first night of mobilisation, towards Laon, Nancy and Metz, everything was false: the reasons for leaving, the speeches of the men, twenty years of murderous politics, an obscure and detestable future, France bled and ruined, destroyed by the enemy outside if it was defeated, by the enemy inside if it was painfully victorious. Everything was wrong, the ideas, the dangers, the causes, the hopes, the fears. The nationalists left, their hearts clenched, with their fists clenched and the *Internationalists* singing. We had nothing to defend, nothing to conquer. Everything was false, except for one thing: a very simple resolution. They said we were under attack, we had to defend ourselves. We weren't attacking them. But, since they believed it, who would not have seen, in the midst of falsity and lies, the purest light of truth? As Jean Giraudoux so magnificently put it on 11 November 1938, the people had turned a troubled cause into a just one. How can we fail to bear a mortal grudge against those who fooled them, and who, to succeed, had to use not the basest sentiments, but the most just and noble ones?

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Back in Paris, we had what must be described as a strange year. As disaffected pseudo-warriors, some of us found it hard to get back to the uncertain work of peace. Throughout the year, strange events kept us on our toes. On 30 November 1938, the order for a general strike was issued, and failed everywhere with perfect consistency. But there was no peace in foreign policy. At Munich, Mr. Chamberlain had signed an Anglo-German declaration promising prior consultations in the event of conflict, and

vowing not to resort to war again. The Reich Foreign Minister, M. de Ribbentrop, came to Paris to sign a similar Franco-German declaration. People began to hope, non-Aryan ministers were not invited to the official banquet, and economic negotiations were begun with Germany. At the beginning of 1939, it was decided to recognise General Franco's government in Spain, and M. Daladier had the bright idea of sending Marshal Pétain to Spain as ambassador. But on the Italian side, the horizon was becoming blurred: demonstrations were taking place in the Italian Chamber to demand Corsica, Tunisia and Nice! Controversies in the international press inflamed matters: a Roman newspaper, *Le Tevere*, published an anti-French article (topped, it is true, by an anti-Italian epigraph from the *Order*) which hurt Italy's most determined friends. France had recognised the King as Emperor of Ethiopia and sent an ambassador. But passions ran high.

Winter passed. To avenge his race, a young Jew murdered a German diplomat at the embassy. Anti-Semitism, despite the distance of

M. Blum, was gaining strength. A strange decree-law provided for sanctions against those who incited hatred, on racial or religious grounds, against the citizens of France or even its "inhabitants. It created a new social category. They banned the books of Céline, who, superb and furious, had become a kind of prophet, an Ezekiel of macabre buffoonery and filthy verve, about whom our comrade the cartoonist Ralph Soupault spoke with immense admiration, and who dominated those years with his powerful height. But the Jews were no longer called anything but the "Inhabitants".

The worst was yet to come. Suddenly, on the ides of March, its fatal date, Germany invaded the new Czechoslovakia born after Munich. An independent state of Slovakia was created under its protection, Bohemia and Moravia became protectorates, and subcarpathian Ukraine, after a few days of fictitious independence, reverted to Hungary. Munich had only been a respite. Three weeks later, for reasons that remain a mystery, but which I have always believed to be quite profound, Italy annexed Albania. We learnt about this in Savoie, on a light spring day, on the Plateau d'Assy where one of Maurice's brothers had just opened a bookshop under the sign "La Montagne magique". Just about everywhere, people who had been called up for military service were beginning to be recalled and military service extended. From then on, all you had to wait for the date.

Italy and Germany signed an alliance treaty called the Pact of Steel (which Marxists claimed was automatic and would enslave Italy), and Spain joined the German-led Anti-Komintern Pact, which had already united the Reich, Italy, Hungary and Japan against Bolshevism.

Such were the events, with their repercussions on the spirit of the world. Everywhere, the apostles of democracy raised their heads, blamed totalitarian regimes and openly prepared for an ideological war in which France, England and the United States, the "democratic" nations, would have been on one side, and the totalitarians - Germany, Italy, Spain and Japan - on the other. The 1939 war was supposed to begin with the neutrality of these last three countries - and the neutrality of the United States. But Germany's power, and perhaps even more so Italy's mistakes, were nonetheless bearing fruit. Anything that claimed to be based on principles similar to those of fascism seemed suspect. On our return from a short car journey to Holland and Belgium, we learned one evening in Brussels, in the pouring rain, of Rex's electoral defeat: three hundred thousand abstentions, undoubtedly the good people who had come to Rexism for fear of Moscow, and who were now turning away for fear of the devouring fascism. In my opinion, this is the real reason for this failure, more profound than the various errors. Rex seemed to have been no more than a meteor, a disappointing and brief human adventure. Time will tell if that was true.

This is how the period between the two Alerts took on its indecisive colour. So-called reasonable people moved away from the bold movements, abandoned Doriot for the wise P.S.F., or better still, for the triumphant radicalism. Fortunately, even for the indifferent, there remained the movement which, in my opinion, reached its highest peak at that time, namely *Action française*.

We had certainly not forgotten the role played by the A.F., which was always fought against, always violently attacked, even by its own members. We knew its men, its past, its doctrine. But it seems to me that it was in September 1938 that the most astonishing year for it began. In the weeks leading up to Munich, if Maurras was absent, the national press would falter and the best people would be wrong. If he returned, if he wrote,

with him came reason, clarity and hope. We did not forget the efforts of anyone in this struggle for peace, neither those of Mussolini nor those of the French government. But we knew that there were only certain men who could not be suspected of the slightest complacency towards Germany, against which they had always fought, on all fronts: the men of *Action française*. We knew that in this struggle for peace, they had their past, their theories (some might even have said their prejudices) on their side. But they were extraordinarily young, because they were not slaves to their past and their theories. The doctrine did not harden around them, did not become sclerotic: enemies of Germany, they consented to a diplomatic and territorial success for Germany, because this success for her was better than a disaster for us. With their eyes fixed solely on the result, striking relentlessly, the men of *Action française* were thus accomplishing the most sacred task to which they had dedicated their existence: that of the material salvation of the fatherland. And because they were the old adversaries of Germany, the stubborn enemies of Germanism in all its forms, because they were the ones whom this intimacy and stubbornness had caused to be mocked and scorned, we began to listen to them, to worry, to follow them, - we said to ourselves: "Since *they are the ones* who *are* talking like this, reason must be there", we allowed them to save the peace.

They did not rest. Throughout the year, they continued to warn against both pacifist and warmongering illusions, to call for armaments and alliances, and in August 1939, until the last possible second, to fight for this dying peace. Every time we met him, we looked with growing affection at this dry, grey little Provençal, who bore the weight of so much anguish and so much effort. We knew that his childhood had been nourished by tales of war, and that he had witnessed a long and terrible four-year war, and that he did not want to see, a third time, French youth wear itself out in yet another war. This is what gave his prose that year a thrill it had perhaps never had before, a sacred and mysterious anxiety; this is what gave his welcome, when he raised his broad Athenian eyes to the young people he was receiving, something both paternal and worried, as if he had wanted to save them from the growing dangers he saw behind them. In each young man he seemed to see a possible victim, he

He almost stretched out his arms, he cast a sad and hopeful glance. I don't think that for a single day in that threatening year, Charles Maurras had any thought other than that of sparing French youth from war.

If I hadn't been a Maurrasian at that time, I think I would have become one. Maurras had always been right everywhere. The most extraordinary thing, the agreement between the German National Socialists and the Russian Bolsheviks, was that not a month had gone by, since the beginnings of Hitlerism, that he had not announced it. People were beginning to know. People were beginning to know that destiny, in order to follow its ineluctable plan, had found it easier to carry out Jacques Bainville's *Conséquences politiques de la paix* page by page. People as far removed from these two men as possible accepted their ideas, and sometimes even acknowledged their authorship. A few glimmers of light shone through. Correcting an old mistake, the Académie was the first to receive Charles Maurras in the same way it had received Jacques Bainville. In July 1939, after thirteen years of separation, a fair and fine pope, as passionate for peace as Maurras himself, completed this reconciliation of *Action française* and Rome, which had been one of the wishes, before his death, of Pope Pius XI and the blood sisters of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. But if we loved Maurras, it was no longer because he was right, or because we were beginning to know that he was right, it was because he loved us.

I always watched him at the printing works when he came out in the morning, and I continued to meet him at friends' houses, at the Countess Murat's, a little liberated, always full of Moréas and Lamartine, and we teased each other one day, at Pierre Varillon's, over a southern supper, about the anteriority of Provençal and Catalan. He was quoting Mistral to me, about Provence and Catalonia, united 'by the wave that sighs': these are the words he inscribed at the bottom of a beautiful picture of him taken by Pierre Varillon, which he gave to me.

I also met Léon Daudet. Later, jealous listeners will be told that they knew him. Unfortunately, to paint a portrait of the most prodigious memoirist of the beginning of this century, Léon Daudet is precisely what is missing. I loved hearing him talk about his father and his father's friends. I don't think I ever heard him reveal anything about them, perhaps nothing he hadn't already told. The only thing was, he named them. All I needed was a banal phrase to see the character evoked by the magician appear.

- Flaubert came in and said: "Hello, Alphonse.

Léon Daudet didn't even imitate Flaubert's voice; but Flaubert was there, suddenly, with his big Norman moustache. It was like demonology. Tranquil in his opinions, so imperturbable that he didn't even care to share them, Léon Daudet even spoke of his enemies with a kind of magnanimous cordiality. At the dinner table, at home, surrounded by a small number of friends, he would disperse ghosts and clouds with a voice that was sometimes clear and sometimes thundering, without moving, and he would create an opaque and resistant life out of it all. When he said of a politician or a writer :

"He's a bastard," he would form in three words a kind of block of certainty that no one would want to come up against. Then he would let himself be shaken by a great seismic laugh, move on to another subject, and pour his neighbours a drink. When the meal was over, we'd pass the coffee around the table, which he didn't hate linger over. Then we'd carry on talking in the great salon dominated by the portrait of Alphonse Daudet, and I'd hear how one day, in Hugo's house haunted by the spectre, Léon Daudet saw a broom go down by itself, step by step, and upright, along a staircase.

The Spanish war was coming to an end. After the capture of Barcelona, there could be no question of a long resistance, and we learned of the latest events in Madrid, the internal quarrels between the Republicans and the Stalinists. Despite Franco's recognition by the French government, despite the victory, the Marxist press continued its attacks. The last communiqué was issued on 1 April, and they began to call, sometimes with inappropriate insistence, for a victory parade and for German and Italian volunteers to be sent home. Pierre Cousteau and I wanted to go and see the liberated Spain. So we spent a few days in Madrid in May 1939 between two afternoons at the printing works. We soon realised that the famous parade had not taken place simply because Madrid lacked the most basic materials and means of transport. As for the Spaniards, they were delivered, there's no other word for it. French Red Cross ambulances were greeted on the roads, and supplies and clothing were sent to Madrid, *Hermana*, the sister city of all Spanish cities. Crowds of unemployed soldiers roamed the dusty streets. We watched the clearing of the cathedral, where the relics of Saint Isidore, patron saint of the capital, had been buried, and the procession through the streets. Chicote, in his bar, offered us a *combination of drinks*, and we had a good time.

greedily warned that he had obtained a monopoly on refreshments in the parade stands. At the cinema, we watched films about the war, and that Nazi film about the anti-Bolshevist struggle, which Germany was then sending to all its new allies, *The Young Hitler Quex*, which in Madrid was called *Le flecha Quex*. It was strange to hear *the Internationale* in a cinema in Madrid... We also saw a kind of review, not very luxurious, in a theatre in *Zarzuelas*. The purely regional jokes of the "Aragonese comedian" were impenetrable to us, but the theatre was fun to watch. Jacinto Miquelarena told us how he had managed to keep his house:

- My cook," he told us, "went to the Marxist committee to complain that her boss hadn't paid her for years. I was a starver of the people, a vampire, and I had even borrowed money from her. To pay herself back, she asked to turn my house into a hotel. We agreed, out of pity for the poor exploited proletariat. She returned the house to me intact, with the keys and the rental register that I look at from time to time.

On the Castellana, we watched the modest stands being built for the Victory Day celebrations, we also watched the partial parades, beautiful and well-ordered. We plundered the shop windows of booksellers for all the studies on the war they could hold. And we would revisit the sites of our exploits, the *pasarela* next to which a bridge has been built, the trenches of the Cité Universitaire, the Casa del Campo where mines and corpses can still be found, the Architecture and the Casa Velasquez, with signs everywhere indicating the position of the adversaries: *Ellos* (them) and *Nosotros* (us), adorned with the inscription: *Hemos pasado* (we have passed), in response to the famous Republican slogan: *No pasaran* (they shall not pass). In the suburbs, which had been reduced to gigantic landslides, life was returning with the spring, and a brave people was building, making do with the ruins, opening shops between three walls, and breathing.

Je suis partout continued to inspire strong enmity. In July 1939, two members of the advertising staff of major daily newspapers were arrested for treason, followed by three or four Jews. The Moscow press seized on all these events and tried to compromise its opponents. I don't know who was documenting it (there was mention of the former police inspector Bony, who had been broken during the Stavisky affair), but it was very badly done. One morning, while reading

Mr Sampaix in *l'Humanité*, I learned that Pierre Gaxotte and I had been arrested the day before. Henri Benazet, on the Parisian radio station, announced that there had been no searches. I didn't understand why they were daring to make inaccuracies that were so easy to check, and the poor communists must have been robbed. Naturally, we went to court, and a few months later, with the Communist Party dissolved, its leaders in prison or on the run, M. de Kérillis took up the accusation of Hitlerism that his Moscow friends had had to drop because of desertion. I confess that, in July 1939, I didn't attach much importance to these bizarre incidents: it was too silly, and a bit too empty. I simply had to admit that *Je suis partout* was beginning to annoy a lot of people, which, all in all, is not an unpleasant observation.

These incidents did not disturb our personal life, which was always peaceful, in front of the ruined trees in the rue Rataud, in a home that we patiently assembled, never quite finished, never quite painted, never quite built or furnished. One or two books had given us the luxury a small car and our first trips. Bohemia and youth, we hoped, had not yet been exiled from our circles. José, married to our friend from Vendôme, father of my godson Jacques and Catherine, sheltered them in Bourg-la-Reine. Georges and Germaine Blond took them canoeing in the Landes or on foot to Corsica. We all had at least one spiritual shelter for them. And we only accepted as friends those who knew how to preserve a certain affection for bohemia and youth. On the other hand, at the same time as Maurice and I were finishing our *History of the Spanish War*, I was finishing a little novel of technical attempts and images of our turbulent times, *the Seven Colours*. And Thierry Maulnier, anticipating the cramped conditions of the canteens and the packs, locked up the essentials of French poetry in his finest book for July.

We continued to surround ourselves with images of Paris. The Auteuil dairy, Saint-Germain-de-Charonne and the Canal Saint-Martin were always the mysterious focal points of our explorations. I used to take Pierre Daye to Les Halles, Montsouris, La Villette, past the beautiful silent warehouses, on the bridge overlooked by a big clock. One evening, Claude Roy and I would dine with Henri Poulain and his pretty, golden Danish wife, whom we called the little Mermaid, right up against the large window separating the two buildings.

cows at the Auteuil dairy. It was raining, we were coming back from Bagnolet, then we wandered endlessly, drinking milk and fruit cocktails in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, invoking Andersen and Apollinaire. One evening - he had just published a tender, serious and magical book, *La Fable du monde* - I dragged Jules Supervielle to La Villette with Claude Roy. After dinner, under the moonlight, he sat on the thirteenth step of the great bridge, and Claude Roy had him sign a book. These are some of the last images in our pre-war Paris album.

I sometimes find a jumble of memories, which I won't even try to put together skilfully, and which suddenly sum up some event from the past, or foreshadow the future. I know that Pierre Gaxotte and I used to amuse ourselves by claiming that all our politics were directed by the astrology books of Trarieux d'Egmont, who has since died, and who had the good fortune to foresee the atmosphere and the date of Munich: we read his prophecies with a clear conscience. I know that the day after this provisional peace, we organised the most sumptuous of our quasi-monthly banquets, at which Pierre Varillon presented us with a parodic issue of our newspaper on luxury paper. And I know that in July, on the eve of the holidays, it was at the water's edge, in the suburbs, that we bid farewell to peace, in the wet evening, laughing, around a simple and delicious table. I know that before leaving for Spain, Charles Lesca invited us to his beautiful house in Auteuil with M. de Lequerica and José-Antonio's brother, and I know that on another evening I went there to listen to popular *flamenco* and music by Albeniz and de Falla, played on admirably passionate guitars. From time to time, Henri Massis would telephone me; one morning he suggested that we go on foot to the Champs-Élysées, to Montsouris, because he likes to go for walks, with his young, lively hunter's stride, and we would talk about Paris, and Rome, and our friends. I know, in no particular order, because I'm not trying to follow the order of time, that we came back from Belgium in the spring, through chalky, deserted plateaux, dotted with new houses, battered by rain and wind, and that at the top of a hill, next a cross, a simple road sign read:

"Chemin des Dames". And I know that this summer Pierre Varillon published a novel about the period between the wars, called *Le Massacre des Innocents* (*The Massacre of the Innocents*).

We went to the cinema and the theatre, but with a little less taste and a little less enthusiasm. Originality on the screen was beginning to be lacking, in the midst of polished comedies and well-acted, well-regulated dramas. Curiosity about this art form, moreover, had almost completely ceased, it has to be said. It was a long way from 1925, and while the crowds were more than ever going to revel in vulgar films, the intellectuals and artists were in a hurry to forget what cinema could have been, and sometimes still was. No doubt because of a lack of tradition, and a lack of seriousness on the part of critics, any aesthetic of the screen had all but disappeared by then, with those who had been born before cinema never ceasing to understand nothing about it, and newcomers ignoring everything about its short past. The best of these, in this year, is undoubtedly the great, tender and childish picture book of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. In the theatre, it had been a long time since, with a few luminous exceptions, vitality had retreated. All we liked to see were the Pitoëff shows, Jean Giraudoux's annual play, and Jean Anouilh's bitter, ironic ballets.

In the theatres, I met Lucien Dubech, less and less though, because he was ill, and he too disappeared after a few months war. One of his last articles was a magnificent and sensitive eulogy for Georges Pitoëff, from whom he was so far away, but whom he loved very much. Thus fled within a short time of each other, the best theatre animator of the inter-war period, and the best of its critics. With his lively eyes and fine face beneath his white hair, extraordinarily well-suited to lace jabot and eighteenth-century clothes, he was sometimes quite harsh in his jibes. A critic of *Candide* and *Action Française*, he loved the theatre, and even more so poetry. I didn't always agree with him, but it was reading him that taught me two essential truths: that theatre is first and foremost style, and that it's not Mr Baty's spotlights. From Louis-le-Grand onwards, we read him, he guided us, sent us to see Pitoëff's shows and Jean Giraudoux's *Siegfried*. He was a man irritated by modern life, by silliness, by mediocrity, a thousand miles above the silly, pretentious, old-fashioned rabble that makes up the majority of so-called drama critics. He had written some beautiful verses:

*My spring has come and gone, now it's a quiet summer,
I no longer have to choose my gods or my loves...*

It's sad to think that we will no longer hear his mocking, hoarse voice, interrupted by terrible coughing fits, in the corridors during the intermissions. He taught us a lot.

The book I had written on Corneille after the *Rive gauche* lectures had earned me articles full of warmth from him, from Léon Daudet, from Robert Kemp, and also, from a few artists, often curious letters. I only saw Claudel once, at a rehearsal of *L'Échange* at the Pitoëffs' house. He had once written to thank me for a few pages: *"Today the playwright Paul Claudel is dead and buried after a rather limpid career! But the posthumous character who succeeded him still has enough solidarity with a bare shell..."*. My work," he told me on another occasion, *"passes to the people, the minds and the hearts for whom it was intended"*. But then he was to write me a very lively letter about Corneille, quite amusing at times, and not without interest for the understanding of his work (although in my opinion, I dare to write it in spite of him, Corneille quite often evokes a seventeenth-century Claudel).

It is said that Corneille," he wrote to me, "is a master of heroism, and this is true more ways than one! I had already leafed through Schlumberger's book, which he did not hesitate to call Plaisir à Corneille, which seemed to me a real admission of vampirism! And now here again is a man who has immersed himself in this suffocating paper, who has read and digested it all, and who is still alive! And the most curious thing is that he has turned his adventure into an amusing, diverse and suggestive account, full of ideas and horizons that would almost make you want to set foot in this world of pensum! But that's not possible. As far as I'm concerned, Pertharite will remain dead among corpses and Theodore will remain a virgin.

For I must confess that I abominate Corneille. Swallowing him is one of my worst school memories. I was still able to swallow Horace and Cinna with my nose plugged, but Polyeucte literally made me nauseous. That's probably where I got the horror of the alexandrine that I've retained to this day.

I am astonished by your assertion that Corneille is the greatest of the Christian poets. Certainly he applied his sinister talent for turning everything into pensum to religious texts. But what do you make of his entire body of work, which is the very negation of Christianity, and in which not a single ray of the Gospel penetrates? For Polyeucte is nothing other than a proud-

You can't face Hell with tirades and idiotic rodomontades! All the rest is pride, exaggeration, pionnery, ignorance of human nature, cynicism and contempt for the most elementary truths of morality. Little children are made to memorise a play written in the style of the Tour de Nesle, in which they learn that insults can only be washed away in the blood of the offender. Mothers slit their children's throats, and brothers slaughter each other without any kind of difficulty. And all this is not just a ridiculous taste of schoolboy attitude and development. But there are real lessons in immorality, like this one, which I borrow from that masterpiece, Cinna:

All the crimes of State that we commit for the crown
Heaven absolves us of them even though it gives
them to us:
And in the sacred place where his favour has
placed him (?) The past becomes just and the
future permitted.
If you can do it, you can't be guilty:
he has done or is doing, he is inviolable.

Nice morals! This is the morality of this great Christian, a pupil of the Jesuits, and the morality that for two or three centuries has been forced down the throats of defenceless young souls, at the same time instilling in them a taste for fakery, attitude and jactance. But this is even better than the icy gallantry in which Racine was to distinguish himself. One of these days I'll say what I think of our great classical art and of the education that, to the misfortune of successive generations, is based on it. No, Corneille is not a poet. Racine is, I salute him, but I don't love him.

Forgive me for this outburst of indignation, I've long had it in for that horrible pack alexandrines I was force-fed in my youth, that conventional or, better still, cadaverous theatre, the taste for which they try to maintain by dint of teachers and millions of dollars ! (55)" {10 July 1938}

This superb pamphlet took nothing away from my admiration for Corneille, and nothing either, of course, from my admiration for Claudel, who at the time, oblivious to his extraordinary dramas and cosmic poetry, was devoting himself to patient and admirable symbolic commentaries on the sacred books, ending his life with pure meditation on the Cross. But there were still others who wrote to me, whose letters I found on a trip to Paris: "I don't think I've ever read Corneille," René Clair told me, "other than in an edition stolen from my lycée and which is still in my library. Its stained cover reminds me of those ugly black desks so perfectly polished by

*It was hard to imagine that the planks that made them up had once been carved from a fresh tree trunk. And yet, if you cut a penknife through the layer of ink and grime that covered them, you could see the white wood and its living veins. And he liked to find behind "the solemn old troublemaker of our childhood" an "Elizabethan playwright full of passion and boldness". I met him at the Théâtre-Français, where Lucien Rebatet and I had gone to see *Chapeau de paille d'Italie*, which he had once made into an exquisite film. It had been a long time since I'd spoken to him, since school: we talked about the times we loved, silent films, he told us about Walt Disney and *Snow White*, which he announced as a marvel. He always seemed a little worried to me, seeing his art threatened by merchants and easy temptations, and I was worried in my turn at the memory of his delicate and pure work, which could so easily be corrupted by a world of money and vulgarity. We sometimes caught glimpses of the men who had given colour to our youth.*

Finally, I can now bring together the last images of Georges Pitoëff. We knew he had been seriously ill for months, lying down, immobilised by his heart. Yet he had reappeared, as tenacious as ever. We saw him, light, timid, melancholy, full of secrets, in Chekhov's *Seagull*, sad and delicate. And we also saw him, and this is our last memory, in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, a crushing role in which he was watched with terror, pale, good and defeated, perched on a platform facing the fools and the numbers, delivering an interminable speech, a demand for man alone. Two or three times, we thought he was going to die on stage, like Molière: he would stop talking, in front of the terrified audience, catch his breath. But no, he went all the way, for nearly two weeks, before being forced to give up. He contented himself with re-staging *La Dame aux camélias* for Ludmilla, using the exquisite sets we had seen in Versailles in 1932.

We came to talk to him in his dressing room in June 1939, after the Ibsen play. Exhausted, still smiling, yet a little bitter, more so than he had ever seemed to me, that was the last time I saw him. It was well known that he had been very fond of the Front Populaire, and moreover could not complain too much about Jean Zay. But he spoke to me with genuine disgust about this

It was a time when stagehands ruled the theatres, refusing to raise the curtain at five to nine

— We've lived through some completely crazy years," he kept telling me in his cracked, moving voice.

He shrugged his shoulders and explained that he had now taken on his son Sacha as stagehand. A lot of illusions had obviously been shattered around him, inside him. But he had not been born, despite appearances, for discouragement alone. His eyes still shone as brightly as ever when he talked about the theatre. He promised to put on *Le Soulier de satin*, - we won't see it. I remember that he also spoke at length about a play written by his last granddaughter, who was eleven. It was a real play, which he'd had typed up: it was over a hundred pages long, he said.

— I'll play it on a Thursday," he laughs, "for the children's friends. They spend all their time drawing models and making sets. I'll be staging Aniouta's play in the sets designed by the children.

We won't see that either. This is his last dream, this is my last memory of him. He is pure and graceful.

Georges Pitoëff disappeared in the early days of the war, dying in Geneva in mid-September 1939. He had come to Paris in 1919, and spent the entire inter-war period there. He departed with his voice from beyond the grave, his step always a little ghostly, his astonishing sets, his genius, just as a world of concrete and steel was rising to replace the illusions that were so dear to him. Killed by the war, no doubt, which his poor, worn-out heart could not withstand. He was a wonderful man. I'm not just thinking of his art, his originality, everything that will forever mark him in the history of theatre in this century, his concept of the set. He left his mark on his time. But I am also thinking of himself, of his absolute devotion to his art, of his poverty, of his perpetual worries (he never had a moment's peace and assurance), of his nobility. I am also thinking of what he offered to a whole generation of young people, of the role he played in our pre-war years. I think of his friendship. Farewell, dear Georges! Here comes a youth that will not know what you were. We will try to tell them. But for my part, I cannot separate your memory from that of so many beautiful years, of the court of Louis-le-Grand and the deep morning, of the study where we were given invitations *for Hamlet*, of our discussions, of the balls at the École where you came with Ludmilla, of the narrow boxes where you welcomed us, on the stage of the

Arts, or under the roofs of the Mathurins. For so many years you represented the restless, foggy spirit of the post-war period, and in recent months, however beautiful some of your shows have been, it has sometimes seemed to us that some chord had broken between you and your time: for you were perhaps the only poet, the greatest in any case, of despair and illusions, of misty nostalgia, in which your exiled accent resounded like a funeral dirge. All this was our life, and the world in which you lived, in this long armistice, is disappearing at the same time as you and our youth, with your Russian and Scandinavian dramas, your big blue curtains, your Shakespearean fairytales, golden and desperate. *Good night, sweet prince*, as we say at the end of this *Hamlet*, which will never again have any other accent for us than yours. Your tender and restless memory remains with us.

*
* *

... And the last month was approaching.

We had gone to see the last film of our pre-war years, which took us back to the cinema of our childhood, to the Redskins, the cowboys, the generous bandits, with the added experience of twenty years, the attention to form, the beautiful desert landscapes, and to finish off with an epic chase of gripping rhythm. It was John Ford's *The Stagecoach*, a delightful work of art. As we had once adopted *Paradise Road*, we will perhaps adopt in our memory this *ride*, which we then had to talk about almost every day of our holidays. They have indeed taken on a somewhat unusual aspect, less dramatic to be sure than that stagecoach of sixty years ago, threatened by the Indians, but sufficiently picturesque to allow us to make indulgent comparisons. It is with pleasure, today, that we watch our pre-war years come to an end on the main roads, through impossible paths, stony deserts and forded rivers, in a charming and bohemian rhythm, which in our eyes gives these fifteen years their true meaning.

At the end of May, we got a few friends together (it was an old project) to celebrate our friend Maurice Dérot, who had been promoted to hospital doctor, with a more or less Arabic dinner, sitting on the floor after drinking *arira*, pea soup with eggs, around a very low table made of two

There were kebabs, lamb *mechoui* eaten with the fingers, couscous and pastries. In the hope of finding some *gazelle horns*, we had gone to the Foire de Paris the day before. There was no *cabr- zel*, but we were given leaflets for camping caravans. And that's where all the trouble started.

"I'm not saying that this phrase, written in sublime French, was our main reason for setting off for Spain in a caravan, but it's certain that we couldn't remain insensitive - to the poetry it exudes. And the experience of travelling by caravan in the summer of 1939 was enough of a joy for us to be able to recommend it enthusiastically, like the "motorists" in the advertising *slogan*, to all those who will want to follow in our footsteps after the war.

We can even give them some practical advice. For more than ten years now, the English have been *caravanning*, i.e. hooking up a trailer of varying size behind their car and taking it out on the open road. The trend was beginning to spread to France, and at the Foire de Paris in May, a number of trailers were exhibited, generally at such respectable prices (from 20,000 to 80,000 francs) that only a privileged few would even consider buying them. However, you'd have to have never dreamt of being a bohemian as a child not to be tempted. For those who are tempted, we recommend browsing through the advertising pages of the *Touring-Club* magazine or the *Camping* magazine. They'll come across lots of advertisements, and spend two or three weeks reading leaflets or visiting trailers of all sizes in the suburbs. Let's face it, a new caravan is generally very expensive. But it's rare that builders don't have a second-hand caravan for sale, which is much more affordable, and you have to ask them because they don't show it willingly (56). {Some houses even have a rental service, but we found it expensive and impractical. So choose your caravan: the first thing to consider is the weight. With a small car, if it's solid and of good quality, you can easily carry 400 to 450 kilos. You'll be able to travel at 70 or 80 kilometres an hour on the plains. We had a car for a year. It has travelled all over Spain, often on mediocre roads, without incident, and as cheerful on the way back as it was on the way out. It was a small two-seater caravan. You can easily sleep in a car whose front seats fold down, with an air mattress. You can even have an extra tent. Now we have to admit that

our second-hand caravan, as often happens in such cases, has behaved very badly. So have your carefully checked, and if you want to attempt an expedition, have any weak parts replaced. And if you still want some advice, here are some essentials: 1°Most caravans are equipped with butane gas. That's not a bad idea, but you should also take stoves with you to cook in the open air, especially if the caravan is small. Petrol stoves, because that's the fuel 's most readily available everywhere. It should be added that petrol stove is really satisfactory; 2°Our caravan included an icebox. In Europe, you can find ice everywhere. It's absolutely necessary; *'t be afraid of comfort*. Don't let yourself be influenced by campers on foot, by bike or by canoe. You never have enough washing and cooking utensils. It all weighs nothing. And there's never any water in the rivers. Take water buckets and canvas tanks with you. Take folders, folding tables, folding armchairs, because weigh very little. Assume that you *never* live in a caravan, which is just a mobile home with an icebox, toilet, wardrobe and bed. }

So we left at six o'clock in the evening on Thursday 20 July, gloriously greeted as they passed by Raoul Audibert at the Porte d'Orléans and by José Lupin and Pierre Cousteau in Bourg-la-Reine. Henri Massis had told us about Dr Funck, the Reich Minister for Economic Affairs, who had met a French businessman in Switzerland:

- Want to go on holiday now? Take it in peace. But be back on 25 August.

We had to make the most of it quickly. We'd only had our caravan since the morning, despite many pleas and promises. It was freshly painted, cream on the outside, sky blue on the inside, and I began to pull it along with the circumspection of a beginner. The Gometz-le-Châtel hill, which as Chartres pilgrims we had found hard and long, seemed frightening to our crew: we were to see more of it later. Evening fell slowly, and we were as exhausted as you are when you leave for a holiday, especially when the departure coupled with a move. But we had a new set of cookware that we were very proud of, all sorts of instruments that we'd been shopping for, total inexperience, we were repeating to ourselves the sacred slogan about caravanning and humming the musical motif from *La Chevauchée fantastique*. From time to time, we turned round to see if the caravan was still following us: it wasn't giving up. The first stage was short: before Chartres, immediately after the Gué-de-Longroi,

we stopped in a field, and began our first meal by candlelight.

The trip across France was uneventful. It rained, it was cool, we stopped on farm tracks, at the side of the road, then in the Landes under the wet pine trees. A bit of fine evening dawned in Saint Jean-de-Luz, in the field of a remote path where little Basque boys came to drive the cows and the galloping horse that inevitably surround the camper in English cartoons. We hadn't gone very fast, and we thought we'd cross the border on Monday morning.

However accustomed we are to false news, we do sometimes fall for it. That day, we were peacefully surrounded by our cows, when one of us who had gone to town came back with *the Dépêche de Toulouse*.

— We can't leave. We don't know what's happening in Spain. Queipo de Llano is on the run. Yaguë is in prison. And the border is hermetically sealed.

As this astonishing news was signed by the "Hendaye correspondent", I admit that I was shaken: leaving aside the misadventures of the generals (57) {Of course, Queipo de Llano was not "on the run", and General Yaguë, far from being in prison, had been appointed minister}, how could we suppose that in Hendaye they didn't know whether the border was closed or not? Saint Thomas (first of the name) being our master, we nevertheless decided to go and see, leaving the caravan in the care of the cows.

— The border is closed? French customs officers and gendarmes tell us. First news! If you believe all the stuff in the papers... Humiliated, we returned, hung up the caravan and set off again. We
We lost a lot of time, and as the Spanish customs were closed between one and four o'clock, we had to have lunch at the border and wait. This allowed us to contemplate a truly extraordinary spectacle, proof of the power of the press: two hundred people, armed with binoculars and kodaks, crowded in front of the International Bridge to watch for the smoke of the coming Spanish war. And one of us, who wanted to return to French territory for a moment, *ran* across the bridge and was immediately photographed as the first refugee to escape the cursed land at his peril. It's true that we were even more stunned when we saw him return to hell, having made a peaceful telephone call.

We had lunch at the border crossing, then, with the caravan hastily visited in the pouring rain, we followed the roads of the green Basque country, recognised Irun, still ruined by the fires of the *dinamiteros*, and deserted San Sebastian, which has lost its wartime liveliness and has not regained that of peace. Chicotte himself was transported to Madrid, where Pierre Cousteau and I had seen him in May. The only new thing was that prisoners were building small fortifications in the mountains. We filled our buckets with water, saw our first sights, made our first purchases, our holidays, our adventures really began, and we finally stopped, as evening fell, at the entrance to Tolosa, on an esplanade overlooking the torrent, anxious in the rain to find, one day soon, at last, sunshine and warmth.

To do this, we had to cross our first mountains, the high passes leading to Castilla, where our carriage performed perfectly well. It's suddenly hot, we do our shopping in Vitoria under an already relentless sun, and we learn about our first supply problems in Spain. We also worked out the unchanging vocabulary we would need, looking for the *carniceria* (58) {Butcher's shop.}, the *panaderia* (59) {Bakery.}, and the essential, necessary *fabrica de hielo* (60). {Ice cream factory } This ice cream factory, which is just a cool, welcoming bar, is quite a long way away, behind the new church currently under construction. Later on, we'll get to know all the different ways of saying it, and we'll learn that sometimes ice isn't called hielo, but *nieve*, like snow, and *pan le pa*. In this way, we'll expand our vocabulary with clever dialectal forms, and we'll soon learn not to pronounce the *s* in Andalusia and simply say *Buena* for good evening. In the blue guidebook to our trip to Italy, we had discovered two years earlier that Sardinia is said to speak a dialect mixed with Tuscan, Castilian and Catalan. Sardinian is therefore more or less the language we speak on our travels, and we must state emphatically that it is sufficient to make ourselves understood, and even to engage in the most elevated conversations, throughout the Mediterranean. Sardinian is the language of our personal passwords, our holiday memories, our slogans and our cries: let's hope, however, that these memories are not written in an impenetrable Sardinian language.

It's Saint James's Day, the patron saint of Spain. A bronze medal with a tricolour ribbon is being sold in the streets of Vitoria: it's the

commemorative medal of the *Alzamiento* (61) {Uprising, revolt, insurrection}, of the national revolution of 18 July. For our journey, we put the French and Spanish flags in our car. Sometimes, along the roads, people greet us with outstretched arms. But we had to be recognised by our extraordinary crew (it is infinitely probable that no caravan had come to Spain before us), which began to provoke gatherings of soldiers and children, perched on the carriage, sticking their noses to the windows, in an inordinate curiosity, even before Tolosa. This curiosity was not without its drawbacks: in Burgos, it was while climbing onto the carriage that the kids broke the bar used to lower the support crutches, and we found our house nosing over. That was our first accident, almost on the very first day.

It's no mean feat to find a garage, especially on a Sunday, and like most Spanish garages, this one is militarised. We strike up a friendly conversation with the soldiers, they fix our steering wheel and the next day, as it's broken again as soon as we get into the caravan, they go and take a steering wheel off an old car (that's how they salvage things on all the roads in Spain) and allow us to continue our journey. We'll have spent a few hours in this courtyard that's part garage, part barracks, we'll have camped, despite everything, in some wasteland full of scrap metal and broken bricks at the entrance to the city, but we'll also have seen Burgos again, the grey, flower-filled cathedral and the sculpted palaces of the little abandoned streets.

It's hardly surprising that memories of the war sometimes leave people's nerves on edge. We had just had a Grand Café with a friendly soldier who spoke a little French, and who had guided us through the garages. At the same lively time as the *paseo* on the Espolon, at around nine o'clock in the evening, we suddenly heard a very clear sound of gunfire. Immediately, the crowd stopped, the men pushed the women into the doors, moved towards the square where the sinister noise was coming from, and ran back. It was just a lorry engine misfiring. But for five minutes these people, many of them soldiers used to fire, clearly thought it was something else. And I won't forget the white face of terror of the woman who came towards us clutching the arm of man who was with her, screaming like a madwoman:

— What's up? What's going on? As if thinking:

— The war starts all over again!

Then we left the old capital, one of the cities of Spain that remains dearest to my heart, and crossed Aranda de Duero to reach the most deserted heights of Castile. We stopped on an absolutely deserted plateau, when the sun hadn't yet set. It smells of thyme and is battered by a fresh wind. But however deserted it may be, no shelter will ever remain so for long on our journey to Spain. Warned by an invisible tom-tom, here come two children at once: they don't leave us for the whole meal, petrified with amazement, not even eating the fruit or bread we hand them. And there's a woman, and some harvesters, and some old men in carts who stop and come, baying in admiration, to ask us what we're doing here. After dinner, as it was clear, we thought we could go and sleep a little further away, but we nearly broke our caravan in a ditch. But once we were settled in, under a full moon, with our backs against the millstones, what a beautiful night it was in this peaceful, cold, fragrant Castile, what peace and quiet next to this sleeping village! As we were driving all day, it was perhaps the nights that I remember best on this journey. I think of them today, as I correct these lines for the last time, and look back on my nights of concrete and low vaults: fresh, starry, fan-filled nights, under a marvellous sky crossed by the Milky Way in white powder, total rest and calm, temporary houses set up like a camp, close to each other, entrusted to friendly destiny, and the whole universe around us forgotten. It's our youth again, by our side, alive and free, with nothing to worry about but our wagons, a little fire, a little water, and the endless road ahead of us. The next day, a woman from Fresno de Fuente comes to sell us milk, eggs and a *conejo* (62). {Rabbit, hare}. To make us understand what this animal is, she moves her lips and makes two large rabbit ears with two fingers. We thought we didn't need this help, so we just took the milk and eggs and left on the cool morning.

We have no intention of stopping in Madrid. The bread, the wine, the meat, the *fabrica de hielo*, we know everything we need to buy. We'll have dinner under the trees, a little late in fact. But war is everywhere. It is in the royal gardens of the Casa del Campo, near Madrid's Cité Universitaire, which we visited last year.

the trenches. Men and women passed by, collecting wood and scrap metal. In the distance, from quarter of an hour to quarter of an hour, the explosions of mines or grenades being detonated. The atmosphere is heavy and sad in these beautiful deserted alleys, in front of the half-invisible city, next to the bullet-holed walls. No, we won't stay here long, we can't wait to leave the woods, the trenches that have not been filled in, the sounds of war. And we wander through the pitiful suburbs of Carabanchel, leagues of ruins, where not a single house remains intact, where as soon as there are three walls, a brave little people has come back to open a shop, cut hair or sell watermelons. And we do our shopping, while a curious crowd swarms around the caravan. A painter guides us, who stayed in Madrid throughout the war. He's unemployed now. And we realise how difficult it is, in certain regions, to get supplies. We won't find the beer we used to drink in Burgos here; we'll only replant in Andalusia. Potatoes? we ask for them in this strictly empty grocery shop, where an old woman replies with unquestionable dignity:

— Unusual.

The main problem in Spain is transport. With no trains or lorries, the regions have little communication between them: here bread is sold freely, elsewhere you need a card, and there you can't find any meat after eight in the morning. We regret not having bought the *conejo* from the long-eared peasant woman, and we give up trying to find those foods that are the staple diet of the camper, pasta or rice. Then we set off again, eternal wanderers, and in the evening we camp in a field below the road to Toledo, near the village of Olios del Rey.

That's how we talk to everyone, that's how we get closer to life, the daily bread, the worries, the difficulties, the welcome wanderers. I'm now convinced that the caravan is indeed the best way to wander through a country, four or five thousand kilometres of plateaux, mountains, plains and towns, to see people you never see in hotels or travel agencies, to invent a little Spanish-French jargon, and to get to know a little of the real life of a people. As we bumped into each other, we spoke to reds and whites, workers and villagers, we talked about peace and war, always with the same friendly feelings towards each other.

A little before Toledo, in Olios del Rey, Suzanne went to wash at the women's wash-house, with the village women, a scarf over her head, and a whole cloud of laughing peasant women surrounded our caravan with loud cries of joy and the most beautiful adjectives in the Castilian language :

— *Bonita! Preciosa! Graciosa !* (63) {Beautiful! Magnificent ! Gracious !}

After spending the day in the dreary imperial city in 38-degree heat, we stopped in the evening just outside the village of Sansena. After an hour, we had about fifty people in a respectful circle around us. One of the young men spoke a little French. He introduced us to one of his sixteen-year-old comrades who, at thirteen, had been locked up with the heroic defenders of the Alcazar. And a local woman also came to tell us that she had been decorated for having lived through the seventy-two days of the siege. We talked with them until midnight, in our two equally approximate languages. They knew more about France and its various movements, *Action Française* in particular, than you might think. They reminisced about the siege and wanted to give us a few copies of the mimeographed newspaper *El Alcazar*, which the mayor of Toledo had already given me. We drank coffee under the moonlight. It was an evening full of charm and friendship.

Of course, all these people were curious: they had never seen a caravan, and our camp certainly seemed extraordinary to them. But they never got in our way. And God knows if the crowd of soldiers who surrounded us in Andujar, while one of us was looking for ice, positively prevented us from breathing! To be perfectly frank, we only felt uncomfortable once: not far from Córdoba, on the edge of the front line, near the village of El Carpio, which used to be red, where cat-like boys prowled at night, and it was clear that they needed a lot of discipline. I'm sure they had no ill intentions, but they were terribly talkative and noisy.

Spain's roads are uneven, to say the least. Because of this, it didn't take us long to realise that our journey would soon be one of wandering Jews, with no time to rest. We would stop for a day or two in the towns we wanted to visit, but we would probably have to give up spending a week in some poetic bay of the Mediterranean, as we had planned.

naive intention at the outset. Once we reached Gibraltar, we'd probably have just enough time to get back. The main routes in the north are good. But after Toledo, we made the imprudence of taking a certain "secondary" road, which leads to Ciudad Real and Valdepeñas and where, from "pothole" to "pothole", it is impossible to go faster than twenty kilometres an hour, for a distance of one hundred and fifty kilometres in the dust and in 40 degree heat in the shade. You can imagine how exhausting a journey like that can be, and I remember with pleasure, today, at 27 degrees below zero, a certain day that was literally crushed by the sun, when, after wandering around Ciudad Real looking for a *panaderia* we couldn't find and a *fabrica de hielo* blessed by heaven, we collapsed to sleep after lunch in an olive grove with no shade. In Valdepeñas, we had to tidy up until after midnight, the caravan, clothes and crockery covered in a thick, indelible red dust that had crept in through all the gaps. Fortunately, for fifteen sous a litre, we had found a wonderful rosé wine that would have raised the dead.

Valdepeñas had another merit in our eyes: it was a fairly abundant market, where we could buy meat, fruit, watermelons, that wonderful wine and alcarazas to keep the water cool. A Spaniard who spoke French guided us. We spoke to a young boy who told us how he had deserted the Red Army in the final days. The country had remained in Republican hands right up to the end, and no one hid the fact.

Some naïve French people, intoxicated by the press, imagine in good faith that they are not very well received in Spain or that, all sympathy aside, the poverty of the people embitters them and makes them unlovable. This ignores one of the most beautiful and important qualities of the Spanish people: their magnificent, extraordinary courtesy. I have seen French peasants who were kind and generous. I don't think I've come across such continual ingenuity to please anywhere else but in Spain. We will long remember the stop we made after the Despeñapedras passes, in a very wild place where there was a farm inhabited by two old good people. We asked them if we could stop for a couple of hours. They

kept discreetly to one side, appearing only to do us a favour. We offered them coffee, as coffee is a rare commodity in Spain.

— I haven't had a better one," says the old man, "since the Cuban War in 1898.

But not wanting to be outdone, they brought us a basket of apples and eggs, apologising for giving so little. And when we left, they accompanied us with the old phrase of Spanish politeness:

— *Esta su casa* is your home.

Rarely have I seen anything as delightful as these old people escaped from a tale by Alphonse Daudet. That's what makes a trip to Spain in these conditions, with its unexpected encounters, its contacts with peasants and poor people, so exciting and moving. We come back full of an even greater friendship for this courteous, proud and great people, who, after such a tragic war, have lost none of the noblest qualities that have made their history so beautiful and their welcome so gracious.

And so time passed for the bohemians. July was drawing to a close. It was hot during the day, under a sky that had been immutably pure since the Basque country, and cool at night. At every step along the roads, we came across the carcasses of abandoned cars: without wheels, headlights or engines, everything useful had been removed. It's a strange sight, these blind cars overturned in the ditch. Before the French border, there are hundreds of them, gathered in the fields: they are the cars of the Reds at the time of their retreat. We were always late, we always camped too late, we always had dinner at night, and every time we swore we wouldn't do it again the next day, and we started arguing at about half past six in the evening at the stopping places. Campers in caravans can't cross hedges and ditches, they need hard ground, and in order to find the necessary conditions, they almost always have to get close to villages, adopt a wheat field as in Valdepeñas, an airfield as in Cordoba, an esplanade, almost a public square. Let's lose our illusions about the possibility of "stopping wherever we feel like it". We also had to stock up on water, and in the south all we could find to light our way were sticky tallow candles, with their strange, leaning shapes, which were immediately melted down. We

We ate meat three or four times a week, we almost always managed to find bread (the bread of the Spanish war was white, the bread of the peace was black and mixed with bran, which was excellent), we drank perfect wine wherever we went, and our almost unchanging meal consisted of rice and tomatoes in the morning and potatoes cooked in herb soup in the evening. And we always had an hour or two of tedious quarrels with our petrol stove, known in Sardinian as *Piccione*, which means Pigeon, which took a gentle obstinacy not to work. When the Spaniards wanted us to look at something, they insisted on touching each other's eyes with their fingers. The terrified children would rush to their mother's skirts when our caravan appeared, shouting: "*Un tanco, mama!* (A tank!)" And we queued for long stretches in remote villages, with horses, donkeys and old women carrying jars and buckets, by the public fountains, at midday and in the evening. And here and there we bought quickly broken alcarazas, green melons, watermelons and peaches for a few pennies. It was all free, delicious and picturesque.

Slowly, in first gear, under the oppressive sun, followed by our heavy shell, we passed through the gorges and passes: Somosierra is almost fifteen hundred metres high, and there is a steep road leading to Granada through the Sierra Nevada. A trip to Spain is pretty much all mountain roads. Yet we were never betrayed by our machine. And then we saw the cities. We left the caravan in a garage and roamed freely, and as we're not fanatics, we even stayed in hotels in Seville and Barcelona. In Granada, we were content to camp two nights in a row at the entrance to the city, like Boabdil bidding farewell to the kingdom more.

On the last day of July, we were in Cordoba, the treasure of Andalusia. The three precious cities are still beautiful. The Great Mosque, with its countless columns, is still a unique marvel, in the middle of which a gilded, embroidered church has been cut out like a knife. The narrow, clean streets with the most graceful patios in Spain, the wrought-iron gates, the gardens full of fountains, mosaics and shade, are as beautiful as ever. And above dusty Granada, with its gypsies and overcrowded districts, there are still the most enchanting places of all, the Alhambra and the gardens of the Generalitat. The day we were there, a whole swarm of little Arabs

were visiting the glorious memories of their ancestors under the guidance of young Phalangists: they must have been truly suggestive for Moroccans, these memories of Arab grandeur. But in the end, that's only a matter for the Spaniards, and it was curious and moving for us to see those turbans and robes pass through the courtyard of the Lions, amid the wonderful scent of roses, myrtles and jasmines, in the midst of the earthly paradises built by men most skilled in the pleasures of life, rest and lazy nobility, most adept at building miraculous shelters for human voluptuousness with mosaics, palm trees, cypresses and fountains. The other was monotonous and pure, sometimes akin to the lowest Gregorian, sometimes akin to the Arabian melody, a single, bewitching line, the true, only *profound song*.

There weren't many foreign tourists yet to contemplate these unique wonders of the world. What a mistake! Without even mentioning our strange ways of travelling, how can we fail to realise that Spain is beautiful, that it is peaceful, that life there is inexpensive and that it is even the only foreign country where a Frenchman, so disadvantaged by the exchange rate, can go. All the more so because, while there are supply issues for us wanderers, they are much less of an issue for people who live in a permanent place and know the customs, and not at all for hotels, which are well supplied. Along the paths, under a superb sky, we saw one of the most exciting and beautiful lands that has ever existed come to life again.

— And what about France? How is France judged? How are the French received? Did you really have no problems?

Let's be honest: in Cordoba, we bought various groceries from a shopkeeper who didn't seem to have much regard for foreigners. But he was polite. He became downright unpleasant when we asked him for four packets of macaroni. It didn't take much intuition to realise that, in the eyes of this worthy man, foreigners capable of buying four packets of macaroni (a rare commodity in Spain) could only be... Italians.

Apart from that, we travelled from Irun to Gibraltar and from Gibraltar to Le Perthus with the French and Spanish flags in our car. When we were asked :

— Italian?

We replied:

— French.

And the faces lit up. The return of the French to Spain, quite apart from any question of friendship, meant the return of peace, the establishment of order, the first appearance of foreigners. And it has to be said that the Spanish have a natural sympathy for France. There are places where it's hard to find bread, where you need a map. But if you asked for some in a boulangerie, they'd say:

— *Una Francesita!*

And immediately they found bread for us. We never passed through a town without meeting someone who looked after us, showed us the shops and discussed prices to our advantage. The only time the *guardia civil* asked us for our papers in a camp was in the moonlight, after the village of San Enrique in a terrible wind, on the southern coast. We spoke kindly, explained who we were, and the extraordinary sight of three or four civil guards in boiled leather hats shouting enthusiastically in that deserted cove at the stroke of midnight was a sight to behold:

— *Arriba Francia!*

But we weren't going for a walk to study our two countries, we were going for a walk because Spain was beautiful, and peaceful, and was coming back to life after a hard war. On Wednesday 2 August, at seven o'clock in the evening, after Seville, we bought water from the water merchant at Dos Hermanas, who had barrels pulled by a horse, for two cents a ten-litre; on 3 August, after Jerez, we had lunch under a palm tree, and in the afternoon we saw the navy *parade* through Cadiz. And we found neither bread, nor meat, nor red wine. But we remembered the imaginary phrase:

"Don't they have any bread? Let them eat brioche!" and at the stroke of midnight, in La Chinclana, in a field, we had a dinner in the style of the Roman orgies for courtesans of the Second Empire, with brioche, a huge lobster for ten pesetas, and bottles of Jerez.

When the poachers came in the moonlight to offer us *conejos* (64) {rabbits}, this time we bought them. A little later, we bought some more water from the water merchant: but this one had jars on his donkey, that was in Murcia. And change was scarce, and we were given stamps instead of pennies. And we camped at Torre del Mar, in the south, next to a ruined tower that was leaning dangerously. And I remember, like an unassailable treasure, a scorching midday on a steep road, where we drank beer in the car. And as we passed through the villages, people watched in amazement as our strange carriage drove by, singing at the top of their voices the song of the Falange and the silliest songs of our youth. And in Andalusia, the kids would sell the jasmine flowers that women put in their hair for two pennies.

Our aim was to reach Gibraltar. There were a few difficulties with customs, but the kindness of the Spaniards and their willingness to help kept them to a minimum. For a long time I had wanted to get to know this mysterious city, which I had passed many times, this steep rock on the Moroccan sea which, from the inside, is a heap of houses in the middle of which *Main Street* passes, a French provincial street. But in this street, the shops are almost all Jewish or Hindu, the population speaks Spanish, the currency is English, and superb *policemen* circulate with a sovereign air. At the border, an English officer would take ten steps, stop, raise his knees high, stomp on the spot, turn round and leave again, a luxurious automaton of English power. When we left, as Spain is a village where friends are always found by chance, we met at customs the Spanish press attaché in Paris, Antonio Zuloaga, who had given us every facility for our travels with inexhaustible complacency, and who brought us news from Europe.

Gibraltar was a very busy place at the time. Naturally, we did not visit any military installations. But you don't have to walk around for long to discover in this rock the very emblem of English pride. There are three beaches in Gibraltar: one is quite popular, the other is reserved for the average population and off-limits to Her Majesty's soldiers. As for the third, the most beautiful, the widest and the best situated, you can only enter it with the Governor's permission, and it is reserved for officers and civil servants of the Crown. We were not yet soldiers of Her Majesty. England transported to

Gibraltar, with its Hindus, their silks and cottons, and the caste system.

The day before, we had camped outside the town, under the eucalyptus trees, in Spanish territory. We made scented fires with the leaves of the trees, to ward off the only mosquitoes that had bothered us on our journey. All night long, a spotlight followed the contours of the rock. Every five minutes, a more powerful searchlight sweeps across the bay of Algeciras. Rarely have we had the impression of such insolence. On a beautiful night, we looked up at the high, hard rock rising above walls and fields. We have not forgotten this impression of audacity and strength, which was reinforced by the visit to the small town, so Spanish in appearance, suddenly crossed by a few haughty, superbly dressed soldiers. The beautiful city, forever unknowable, here a Moorish village, here a nonchalant and rich colonial city, with its gardens and avenues, and still a teeming and popular port, and a powerful warehouse, and a warrior fortress. A city without water, where the sloping platforms overlooking Morocco lead the rain to the cisterns. A foggy city, still a little drowned in the warm fogs of the channel. And before us, above the clouds and the sea, the snowy Atlas. It is a very strange sight, at the tip of Spain, this fragment of Empire where the English, without modification, without influence from the surrounding country, without watermelons, without wines (we drink bad Bordeaux), have transported their bathrooms, their tea, their whisky, their porridge, their bottled sauces and their cannons.

Then we set off again, on roads that had become bad again. We broke a bolt, lost our oil, soldiers travelled twenty kilometres to find us some, repaired our accident with a piece of wood (and they still wanted to offer us cigars and buy us a drink), we reached Malaga by buying oil every ten leagues. The caravan lost the axle nuts before entering the city (on a Sunday, of course), and we followed the terrible road to Motril under the burning sun, a road worn out by lorries and war beyond all imagination. All around us, a little later, would be the astonishing desolation of the countryside. I don't think the most frightening sight in Spain is destroyed Sagonte, or the nightmare visions of Carabanchel. It's the gardens of Murcia. Imagine, for hours and hours, stone enclosures or hedges surrounding bare, deserted land, monumental gates leading to

empty expanses, plains divided into small steppes. Three years abandonment, three years of Marxist domination have turned this land, one of the most beautiful and fertile in Spain, into this extraordinary desert, where you can see, as if on an enormous cadastral map, what were once the gardens and fertile fields, but between the empty property lines there is *exactly nothing, nothing left*. It's one of the most striking sights in the world.

We finally broke the hitch on our caravan, two hundred metres before the village of Aguadulce, fifteen kilometres before Almeria. We had to drag it as best we could to the nearest field. It's too late to think about getting it repaired. The next day, I'll bring a *mecanico* from the city, because, although we've made enormous progress in our ability to describe car parts in Spanish, I feel completely unable to explain, without showing anything (and we can't drag the trailer any more) what a trailer and its hitch are, and what you need to take with you to make a weld.

In the meantime, we went to buy wine at an inn for *Don Quixote*, full of huge wineskins, old rabbit skins and earthen jars. When we sat down to eat, a little worried about our future as gypsies three thousand kilometres from Paris, the little boys from the inn came to see us. They are delightful, bold, and we gibber on. They had lived through the years of misery under Red domination.

— We were hungry, they told us. We weren't getting any food. So we would go and ask the international brigades who were camped here. The foreigners always gave us food.

They may have said that to please us, but we send a friendly thought to the brave Communist lads in Paris and elsewhere, who were moved by the little starving Spanish children. We have now entered red country. Almeria is the town that was bombed by the Germans when twenty sailors from the *Deutschland* were killed. The *mecanico* tells us about the terror of the peaceful inhabitants, far from the front, when the shells began to rain down, the traces of which can still be seen in the harbour. It must have been a charming town before the war, cool under its palm trees, with its beach where we strike up a conversation with a convinced Phalangist, and where I almost get taken to the

I'm not wearing a swimming costume that covers my torso, an indecency that is strictly forbidden. *Austeridad!* is Spain's new motto. When we returned to the garage where we had finished repairing our latest accident, we found a huge *teniente-coronel* who, accompanied by a carpenter, was taking the measurements of our crew, so that he could have a caravan built for himself, to take out on the roads with the coronella. Stifling a violent desire to laugh, we show him the beauties of ours, open the icebox, explain the advantages and disadvantages (without dwelling too much on the disadvantages) and recite the jargon phrase that we have used a hundred times to show how to lower the table to put cushions on it to make the bed:

— *Se abaja la mesa y se hace la cama...* (65) {The table is lowered and the bed is made}.

We even sang it, to the tune of *The Big Bad Wolf*.

We then set off again, camping in the desert, after Rioja, near a farm where people still come to talk to us about misery and war. We had lunch in Puerto Lumbreras, in the shelter of a hostelry that was once famous, a beautiful *parador* (66) {Relais.} now closed, and in the evening, a few kilometres before Elche, near Alicante, we set up our fugitive homes in a camp guarded by a small hovel. Nor will I ever forget the woman, old before her time, who came to speak to us in French. She had no fire, no light in this house left to her by charity, under the pretext of looking after the fields. Her eldest son was in a concentration camp. Her grandson had just died. She had a little boy, Vicente, and a sick little girl, Maria. And this woman who had nothing in the world, absolute nothingness, welcomed us into this field that was not hers, as if on the threshold of an estate, offered us her help, sent her little one to pick figs that she presented to us, beautifully, on broad fig leaves. We had to beg her to accept something for the children the next day. These children fed on bread and figs. They kissed us, and we had tears in our eyes.

This Spain of 1939 was slowly rising from its ruins and its grief. How could we believe that it was ready for senseless adventures? We looked around us, accepting with admirable dignity the misery, the peasant misery, the most unknown in France. And yet, the government was fighting against this misery in a very beautiful way:

There were distributions everywhere, the *Auxilio Social* was everywhere, and, near Malaga, we had seen a delightful camp of happy boys in the open air. We thought of the Falange, which, after being admired, was beginning to be shunned in France because some of its leaders were too Germanophile. No doubt we admired more than ever the fighters from Navarre, the red berets who had returned to their villages. But Navarre, a people of smallholders, knew hard work and poverty - not the dreadful proletarian misery of the suburbs or countryside of the South. The Falange is right to want to bring humanity, life and joy back to so many unfortunate people. Our only regret, as we encountered unemployment and sorrow here and there, was that its resources, despite its admirable efforts, were not yet sufficient, due to poverty, and that Europe was not collaborating in the recovery of this great people. Our hope was that the Falange would understand the need to bring help, fraternity and *hermandad* to all, to reconcile the lost. This is the Christian wish of the leader of Spain. I would give a great deal today to know that our peasant from Elche is not suffering from the cold in her house and that Vicente and Maria are being looked after.

As far as we were concerned, we were going back up along the sea, through rocky landscapes, the sugar canes of Andalusia, abandoned orchards, orange trees gone wild. It was untouched Valencia, Sagonte in ruins. The images became more bitter.

Among the ruins of war, the sadness of Toledo and even Carabanchel is less than that of the small towns of the Levant: Nules, where we hear mass in a gutted church, Burriana not far from us, annihilated, almost disappeared from the face of the earth, bombed from the outside, burnt from the inside by the anarchists; Sagonte, the city of illustrious sieges, reduced to ashes under its high Roman and medieval *castillo*. The bridges are cut, and we descend into the ravines and rios. We leap across the barely covered trenches. Between Barcelona and the French border, there isn't a bridge, even two metres long over a small stream, that hasn't been mined by the Reds in their retreat. The most astonishing landscape, however, is Tortosa. Between two completely demolished banks, in a gigantic scree of ruined houses, flows the Ebro at its widest. A boat bridge has been built, and two or three hundred people, throughout the day, enjoy the free spectacle of watching the cars go by. We've offered them a choice bonus. Undulating,

zigzagging, the caravan moved forward, and the Spanish soldiers laughingly helped us push it up the slope. A superb spectacle that would have delighted the directors of American silent films, in the days of Rio Jim and *The Caravan to the West* (67). {Except at certain clearly defined points, such as the Ebro crossing and after Barcelona, the road to the East is newly maintained, newly repaired and generally in good condition}.

These were the last days. We stopped in Barcelona, which (whereas Seville and Valencia had seemed deserted by the summer and the war) is still just as noisy, just as wonderfully lively, with its crowds on the *Ramblas* chatting until six in the morning. Only the Barrio Chino isn't what it used to be, with all the ill-famed clubs closed down or blown up by bombs and the bad boys on the run. As *austeridad* can't have its last word too quickly, there are still one or two slightly dodgy cafés, countless doctors' surgeries, etc., in the area.

"We had lunch at Sitges, a charming beach, but where the hustle and bustle had not yet returned. We'd had lunch in Sitges, a charming beach, but where the hustle and bustle hadn't yet returned, and spent the afternoon in Badalona, a popular beach. And that would be the end. We still had to ford a river (the ones we'd crossed so far had no water). As in *La Chevauchée fantastique*, our caravan made its way through the narrow streets of the villages, where we had to get out of the car, chock the wheels with stones to enable it to set off again, climbing 45-degree slopes, and finally crossing a superb *rio*, in a great gush of waves. Our journey ended at the small square in Figueras where my Catalan friend Jaume Miravittles, now in exile, had once played, at the Col du Perthus, where we would reach the beach of our childhood for a few days.

And so the ride came to an end. For a month, under the Spanish sky, we had followed the Pilgrim's Way to Santiago, the milky way that once led pilgrims. All around us, European fever was rising. From time to time we glanced at a newspaper, which told us that the situation was still tense in Danzig. But we would inevitably return to the Spanish sky, to our non-stop march, to our meals in the ditches, to our confrontation with the courageous and graceful little people. Nothing marred our last days of peace. Nothing prevented us from amassing the richest images of Spain and of ourselves, as if this journey united in a single block of sunshine and pleasure so many things past: first of all, our childhood, our memories older than ourselves.

Our student pranks, our friendships, our curiosity about our time, our bohemian life, our first trips, all summed up in a few days along dry, winding roads, in a few marvellous nights. A fine bohemian journey, at the very end of our youth, on the eve of war, a fine living symbol of everything we had loved...

We returned to Paris via the Rhone valley, mooring our house on wheels to the lamppost in the rue Rataud where we used to return to school. I didn't spend long there. At midnight the next day, Lucien Rebatet, perhaps moved by some secret sadism, phoned me from *Action Française*. He told me that fascicule 3 holders were being recalled, as in 1938, and wanted to know if that was the number of mine. *L'Action française* fought desperately right up to the last day against the tragic adventure that was about to involve, for the second time in twenty-five years, a generation of young Frenchmen. Others, who were further away from us, joined in vain in the supreme effort. On 1st September, *Je suis partout*, deprived of three quarters of its staff, appeared with the headline:

"*Vive la France! Down with war!*" A few hours later, Poland was invaded and general mobilisation decreed.

Our pre-war days were over.

6 February 1940 (An VII)

I am now writing these last lines under a low, grey Alsatian sky, at the beginning of the sixth month of the war. Here are many images gathered in front of me, like in those albums where we look for the slightly faded traces of holidays and travels. They remind me of fifteen years of youth, already long gone, buried as we bury some of the witnesses to our existence, from time to time, at the turn of a newspaper column. For other readers, it's not for me to say whether they make sense.

"Our pre-war period was not everyone's pre-war period, I am well aware of that. It was first and foremost that of a small group of friends, sometimes distant from the time when they lived, but I imagine that through the details of their individual existence, they managed to preserve some fairly common goods. I'm not making any confidences here, as I don't really feel like it: perhaps I'd rather talk about my companions than about myself. But by necessity, these companions have passed through a universe and a time that belonged to others. They discovered Paris at the same time as the enchantments of silent cinema, the vitality of the theatre, the purity of poetry and the charm of anarchism. Little by little, they moved towards a planet shimmering with the possibility of war, towards the exasperation of nationalism, towards the oblivion of ivory towers and the preoccupation with pure art. It was an adventure greater than our own, and the very adventure of contemporary history: we experienced it too.

Our schools, our magazines, our homes, our travels, our pleasures, were but the singular appearances, it seems to me, by which our era designated itself to us. Describing them in all their particularity already gives me the impression of directing an excavation. Whatever the future holds, it will no longer look the same to us or to anyone else. Spain at war, the holy exaltation of the triumphal year, is a thing of the past. The nonchalant life of a student in Paris, through certain cafés, certain restaurants, certain cinemas, certain theatres, all transformed or disappeared today, is a thing of the past. The ephemeral costumes, so difficult to reconstruct from memory, the fashionable songs, the berets of the

American navy, Hawaiian guitars, batik or thick woollen ties, the tunes of Mireille, fairytale novels, West Indian dances, pure poetry, all that, jumbled together, is a thing of the past. And theatre will no longer be the same for us, since from now on we will no longer read Lucien Dubech's article on a performance by Georges Pitoëff, and since they rushed back to the land of images and ghosts in the early days of the war.

We are still close enough to this past for many witnesses to recognise it, and for newcomers to follow it with their fingers. We may be able to hear each other, at least for a few moments. The students of the pre-war period did not all do the same work, but they were students like us, they read the same books, they went to see the same shows. Later, they didn't go on the same trips as us, but they at least wanted the same experiences, and Italy, Spain and Germany were part of everyone's daily life. They didn't all look for traces of Péguy on the road to Chartres, but Péguy was never forgotten. And they ran the fields, the rivers, the snow, the main roads, the sea, on foot, by bike, in a canoe, with the same thirst for fresh air that they had in the last four or five years before the war. For some of them, at least, they were also able to preserve the most precious assets of their age: fantasy, irony, bohemianism and a carefree attitude to tomorrow. The threatened world in which they were born, on the eve of the other war, the threatened world in which they lived, on the eve of the new one, did not encourage them to embrace bourgeois virtues. This is undoubtedly the essential line, the one that sometimes punished those who held different opinions. That's what we called among ourselves the fascist spirit. Because we didn't want to be the gladiators the bourgeoisie and conservatism, and we loved the freedom of our lives.

At times, we were able to add to this shared universe, to gain a personal knowledge of it that was more vivid than the knowledge our peers of the same age had. The others were fascinated by Spain at war, but we saw Spain at war. Others applauded René Clair's films. The rest of us loved Georges and Ludmilla Pitoëff from afar, but we took Georges and Ludmilla to the École thurnes and over the rooftops. Compared to the readers of Défense de l'Occident, we have the advantage having learned from Henri Massis the

On the way to the Auteuil dairy, and on those of the Introduction to French Poetry, that of being Thierry Maulnier's journalism and study comrades for fifteen years. And sometimes, as we read the harsh, gilded articles in l'Action française, we could remember that the day before we had heard the dazzling substance of them from the mouth of Charles Maurras himself. This, we hope, is what will allow our images to be understood by everyone as fairly convenient symbols.

Many of the witnesses to our pre-war days have already disappeared. We are contemporaries of a historic Paris, dominated by the Trocadero with its two towers, and several years ago a young man said to me, with a hint of respect: "Ah, you knew silent films? We are the contemporaries of events that are now frozen, embalmed for future textbooks; we have long since read in the newspapers, as only contemporaries can, about the death of Clemenceau, death of Joffre, the assassination of the King of the Serbs, the death of the King of the Belgians, the death of Briand; we have buried the other war and the post-war period. And now we are already taking with us beyond human sight some of those who were our friends, our teachers, our hosts, the providers of our pleasures or our anxieties, who gave our era its irreplaceable colour. Those who love the theatre later will not know what it was like to live at the same time as Georges Pitoëff. Those who love life at all will not know what it was like to wait for permission from the gods war.

Between Spain and the war, I only spent two days in Paris, at the end of August 1939, when our pre-war years came to an end. It wasn't enough time to gather the last images of our youth. And yet, in the evening, through Paris which was already beginning to turn off its lights, on the black Seine, in front of the black Louvre, I walked with Henri Massis, as we had done so many times before, to the printing works of Action Française. Peace was not yet completely lost. Censorship had not even been established, and Maurras, every day, tried with extraordinary courage to ward off the latest threats. A young graduate of the Ecole Normale Supérieure (I sometimes met him in our neighbourhood, this young man with an agrégation in philosophy, married, father of two babies, and who looked like a young Bonaparte, but very blond), Pierre Boutang, wrote an extraordinary "Revue de la Presse", full of anger and vigour, with an absolutely prodigious movement of life. We found him in the rue du Jour, at the time when the

starts unloading the lorries at Les Halles, with Lucien Rebatet still in a tempestuous mood. We waited for Maurras. He arrived around midnight and seemed weary, worried too about what he foresaw, but still full of his indomitable hope. We said our goodbyes in the small, dimly lit entrance courtyard, in front of the iron gates of the printing house and the beautiful Renaissance staircase. He looked at the young people around him with a kind of pathetic gaze. He spoke to his father about Jean Massis, and whispered to me in a muffled voice: "I have nothing to tell you that you don't know. Then I saw the man of our time who best grasped, penetrated and carried the destiny of his homeland, bent over a little under the weight of the machines, the smell of lead and fumes, until the deep morning.

The living and the dead of our pre-war days are dominated by him: we were lucky enough to get close to him, to meet him in our youth, with his grey-eyed gaze, his fair and hard thinking, and his burning passion for his country and for the youth of his country. At the same time, those of us who are still here, who are about to leave for this war that we detest with all our might, that we have tried prevent as best we could, in the midst of a press that is either sold out or stupid, we are considering our future. We are well aware that we are, in spite of everything, the next generation. But it seems a long time ago today that we were shining with the glory of the great red fascism, with the songs, the parades, the conquest of power, José Antonio, the virile youth, the nation. When would all this return? When would so many rough and youthful provinces be able to come together in the universe? In any case, we had been too familiar with the vices of the world that was now disappearing to regret it; we knew that, whatever the fate, our task would be, in all circumstances, to recreate that national and bold climate in which our homeland would have to live, in its turn, to astonish the world. The milestones we had set would later show the way to others, and to ourselves, we were sure. But after what? And how long?

At last, our bags are packed. Before going to this quiet Alsatian village, I didn't pack any expensive books, any great thoughts or any firm convictions. All I have in me are the images that I'm completing today in this album, against a backdrop of alternating snow and thaw: images of our friendships, our youth, our bohemian lifestyle, the books we read, the moving shadows on the stage or on the grey screen, everything.

which for me today is neither melancholy nor discouraging, - for it is first and foremost a comfort. The forms we have loved can dissolve in cold air, and we know full well that some of them will never appear again on this mortal earth: a thin friendly ghost in nocturnal Paris, a magician in his scenery of shadows and lights, these are our own irreparable possessions. But friendships and charms are not defeated by failures, they are not affected by annihilation. We will find their fraternal consequences in peace, on the roads to Chartres or Spain, in the temporary homes where we will recognise each other one day.

So, in these albums, you may find the pleasure you sometimes get from leafing through the pictures of festivities in a holiday hotel, festivities in which you did not take part, but in which you did. And we will be able to breathe in the memory and the fragrance of what was for a long time a threatened peace - but it was peace.

In the army, September 1939-May 1940.

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1 Be wise, O my sorrow, and be more quiet; You were longing for evening, it's coming, here it is...
BAUDELAIRE (*son-in-law of General Aupick*).

2 In principle, you can sit the competitive entrance exam after a year's preparation: the Première Supérieure class is called the *Khâgne* (a 'sçavante' spelling going back to Leconte de Lisle's graphic quirks), and this is what was known as being accepted as a K₁. This is quite rare, and was not the practice at Louis-le-Grand, where the Première Supérieure class was preceded by a 'Première Vétérans' class called *hypokhâgne* (HK). Students entered the competitive entrance examination in the second year only as K₂, but it was accepted that the École was prepared in three years, and that most students passed as K₃. Teaching was, in fact, based on this principle, and the Khâgne class was thus made up of old and new students, with the new ones at the back of the room, and fairly evenly ranked at least at the beginning, and the last ones in the compositions. The promotions were clear-cut, and although we lived on very good terms with each other, we actually formed closed circles of hypokhâgneux, K₂ or K₃. There were even a few K₄, respectable ancestors of all, who were either unlucky or excessively scrupulous, and who didn't want to take part because they weren't sure of themselves, and because you're only allowed to take the competitive entrance exam three times. We completely ignored the candidates for Normale Sciences, who didn't live with us at all and whose class was called *Gnoulf*. As far as our relations with the administration were concerned, we had an elected head who was president of our class and had the title of *sekh de khâgne*.

3 Of course, boarders were obliged in principle to attend classes on pain of punishment. But absences were never recorded in the notebooks, and everyone turned a blind eye. Everyone knew that those who were absent had managed to isolate themselves in some study and that they were working there. In the large khâgne class (which was too small, however, because extra chairs and a wooden plank called *pons Sublicius* had to be placed between the tables), were even two small angled thurnes behind the pulpit, reserved for acoustic reasons, where we often worked in twos or threes. Even when he heard a noise, a shuffling chair or a cough, a teacher would never allow himself to go and have a look, and he simply smiled discreetly.

4 It was said that "it (because we were standing on the gallery of the courtyard) and in the two small cupboards on either side, six good and handsome khâgneux (*tès d'exô tès thournès te kai mikroîn ekaterothi thalamoîn sphodr'eirgasanto hex khagnaioi kaloi kagathoi*), - and one other (*kai tis allos*), worked hard. This other, neither beautiful nor good, was a Hebrew who didn't know Greek, and whom we kept somewhat apart from the group made up of Maurice Bardèche, Thierry Maulnier, José Lupin, Jean Martin, Paul Auroousseau and myself.

5 I remember talking to Maurice Bardèche for ten minutes about Hippodamos of Miletus, who designed the streets of Piraeus for Pericles. That's as far as my knowledge goes, but you can embroider.

6 I remember that one day when we had 'explained' aloud, while he was obviously thinking about something else, nearly four acts of *L'Illusion comique*, which was then on the undergraduate syllabus, the Inspector General arrived, as the third hour was about to ring. André Bellessort glared at him, the other one made himself as small as possible, and the explanation of texts continued. Regaining his audacity, the poor inspector tried to raise his voice, to give his opinion on some particularly confusing sentence.

— What do you think?" he asked our teacher kindly.

— I think Corneille is babbling," replied André Bellessort in his bass voice.

Please continue.

7 For the benefit of posterity, I'd like to remind you that their names, apart from the one that signs these lines, are those of Jacques Talagrand, who is now called Thierry Maulnier, José Lupin, Pierre Frémy, more briefly Antonin Fabre, our tutor, who must be a headmaster somewhere, Fred Sémach, Jean Martin, Paul Gadenne and Roger Vailland. When Roger

Vailland, under the name of Robert François, wrote some perhaps ironic reports for *Paris-Soir*, and I recognise *Fulgur*.

8 The best lesson of this kind was given to us by a philosophy student, an Albanian by the already Italian name of Peppo, whom we had led to believe that he had just been sentenced to death in his country and that he had to defend himself. He went straight to the general supervisor, who was stunned. But with an Albanian, you never know? Peppo, who had believed his sentence for twenty-four hours, went out for eight days to 'defend himself' with his consul. In this way, this ingenious Balkan used the innumerable pranks that were played on him, and he wasn't going to stop there.

9 At that time, there were two licence certificate sessions, one in March and the other in June. The March session was later abolished and replaced by an October session. Students preparing for Normale Supérieure generally prepare two or three bachelor' certificates at the same time in order to save time. Almost all of us did this, at least in the second year, and our teachers chose the classical authors from among those on the licence programme. (There is no authors' programme for the competitive examination at the École).

10 It was a great event when Thierry Maulnier, José Lupin and two or three others decided one fine Thursday to walk around Paris (38 km 5). I prepared sandwiches for them in the back of the French class and, not wishing to take part in this performance, I went to wait for them at the Porte d'Orléans at around five in the afternoon. For I have to say that they had progressed at a youthful pace, formally inadvisable to all keen walkers.

11 To this picture of the khâgne of 1925, we will add, for the benefit of today's readers, a few names that the author did not mention in this book written in 1940, but which may be of interest today. In hypokhâgne, our classmate was Lucien Paye, an excellent student and the class prize-winner, who later became Minister of Education and ambassador. The following year, in khâgne, we were joined by Paul Guth, Henri Queffélec and Georges Pompidou, all of whom went on to careers in politics and literature.

12 First of all, I remember, we performed a little act by Mérimée called *L'Amour africain*, which left us quite surprised for a while. This rather heavy pochade was set up as a parody, but we hadn't been warned, and we were worried to see the actors playing so badly. It was only at the end, at the great massacre where streams of red ribbon represented blood, that our candid souls were reassured.

13 Twenty-seventh out of 28. In those years, 28 humanities candidates were admitted out of approximately 350 candidates, 20 science candidates, and a surplus of girls.

14 Joining me at the École were Maurice Bardèche, Thierry Maulnier, Jean Beaufret and a few others. Let's add, once again, a few names that the author omits, those of the writer Claude Jamet and Simon Neil in our class, and those of Jean Bérard, Maurice Gaït, Pierre Uri, Jacques Soustelle and René Brouillet in the following year's class.

15 The infirmary was then run by M^{lle} Tannery, from the family of Descartes' publisher, and known as the Virgin. She was charming and very popular at the School, and the rooms in the infirmary, which were more comfortable than the others, were open to the tired or the whimsical who wanted to stay there.

16 The new buildings of the École normale (Lettres section) had not been built when this sentence was written. They now stand where the ravine used to be, overlooking the rue Rataud.

17 It is frightening to think that in *Men of Good Will*, Jules Romaines describes the secretary-general discreetly going into the rooms when a pupil is not up by eight o'clock.

18 That is to say, the examinations that Sorbonne students take, under the same conditions: licence certificates, diplôme d'études supérieures, agrégation. Before the school reform of 1902, the school had kind of autonomy, private lessons and its own teachers. Subsequently, it became no more than a boarding school for scholarship holders, with no private lessons, at least in the arts, and no other facilities.

professors than those at the Sorbonne. If you failed your bachelor's degree, you were 'suspended' until you passed (I almost was, despite the three certificates I had when I entered, having failed my philology certificate twice and only saving myself by re-establishing the October examination session that year).

19 But if by chance we went down to the refectory a quarter of an hour after the bell, all we found were tureens of cold, stinking liquid. Today, I'm told, percolators have been installed to keep lunches going until ten o'clock.

20 I must confess that I only 'did' the gas burner once, in the company of Thierry Maulnier and José Lupin, who didn't belong to the École, but slept there that night.

21 Pupils go by the successive names of *conscripts*, *squares* and *cubes*. Former students are known as *archicubes*, and the school's official song formally states the following:

*Our school is a greenhouse
where the cubes are the fruit
and the squares, their good
friends, are the spring flower.
The conscripts are the
manure whose soil must be
fertilized.*

22 We used to say "le dîner", "le réfectoire" and "l'économe": all three, in Normalien slang, are called "le pot", and "le pot" is the 150 francs a month that each student receives as pocket money from . Military preparation is called *bonvouist*.

23 There is some debate about the origin of this term, some seeing it as an abbreviation of the Voltairean *talapoint*, Buddhist priest, the others a subtle apocope for those who go to Mass.

24 It's painful to see the hideous apparatus of so-called charity at the Cité Universitaire or in women's restaurants, when you see what ordinary shopkeepers do who don't care about their patent of philanthropy.

25 If you have a degree and want to sit the agrégation, you have to write a short dissertation of between one and two hundred pages on a subject of your own choosing. In one year, the work is not overwhelming.

26 This year is also the year when you have to do a teaching placement at a lycée, which of listening to a class for three weeks and teaching it for a fortnight. I did an internship at Janson and I really enjoyed this unique contact with university life.

27 There is a Vendôme in Chantilly that looks like it.

28 There was also a rest home in Normandy, called "le Vieux-Pressoir", which Mr Lazard made available to the school's students at .

29 One day, through someone who knew me there, I sent an article to *L'Intransigeant* in which I recounted the visit the Pitoëffs had made to the École. The article appeared during the 1929 holidays, and I sent in two or three more after that. Fernand Divoire, who was then editor-in-chief of *L'Intransigeant*, asked me if I wanted to join the paper completely. I mentioned my studies, the five-week teaching placement I was due to complete shortly, and even my military training. He offered me to come every morning and learn the trade of journalism, and I accepted, assuming that it was better to do it at a time when I had no need of it and when I could experiment in complete freedom. It lasted a month, and now seems quite absurd. To begin with, I was sent to interview the President of the Society for the Protection of Animals, and they seemed scandalised because I had written - which was the truth - that this excellent lady had a painting above her mantelpiece depicting a hunt. I visited the Houseware Exhibition and wrote little papers about the Galette des Rois and the destruction of the Jewish quarter. All this seemed to me singularly empty, and I very bored. I never saw a marble

I learnt nothing, apart from the mysterious instructions which, it seems, turn the most innocuous article into a pamphlet absolutely contrary to the laws of advertising, - and after January 1930, as the time for my internship had come, the experiment was not continued. Such were my beginnings in 'great journalism'. It only goes to show the freedom we enjoyed at the school.

³⁰ In January 1931, José Lupin stayed at the Cité Universitaire, where I often went to see him. Having failed agrégation for the first time in July 1931, I lived in the Cité myself from October 1931 to July 1932. José Lupin was doing his military service at Saint-Cloud, and we saw him almost as often. Thierry Maulnier was a second lieutenant in the provinces. Maurice Bardèche was finishing his fourth year at the École, and naturally I continued to spend my days in our thurne, as if nothing had changed, except that I slept at the Cité and sometimes ate there. Raoul Audibert stayed at la Cité at the same time as me.

³¹ A bus every quarter of an hour is useless, and on top of that it stops at eight o'clock in the evening. So it's always empty. The Porte d'Orléans, where communications are more convenient, is ten minutes away. We shouldn't be surprised if students prefer to stay in the Latin Quarter.

³² Later, following a trial for no good reason, he signed his name Jean-Pierre Maxence.

³³ Raoul Audibert was in fact the first of us to frequent the house. In April 1930, a short-lived magazine was founded by the Rediers, *Contacts*, which disappeared prematurely. Raoul Audibert wrote for it and also published a collection of three short stories, *Montagnes*, that year, before writing a charming book: *Midi, rue Soufflot*.

³⁴ He expresses his bad temper on this subject in his *Diary*.

³⁵ At the start of the 1931 academic year, I took over as drama critic, and Maurice as film critic. Book criticism was taken over by a friend of Maxence's, François Retailliau, who signed Augustin Fransque.

³⁶ The cover of this new series was now unchanging, sober and linear, instead of the touching little antlers that were the rule. It was designed by a charming anarchist, Pierre Pinsart.

³⁷ At the end of rue Lecourbe, I lived with my sister. Maurice Bardèche became my brother-in-law. Our friend from the last days of the École also stayed for a while in our camp, and friends from the past and the present often shared our table. It was still a bit like student life, and Maurice stayed on in Paris to start a thesis on the formation of the art of the novel in Balzac.

³⁸ As well as being editorial secretary, I was drama critic. Film criticism was shared between Paul Brach, editor of Proust's correspondence, and Maurice Bardèche. Thierry Maulnier was a regular contributor to the *Jeunesses* section of *Le Monde*, where Claude Popelin probably wrote the first French article on José-Antonio Primo de Rivera and the *Spanish Falange*.

³⁹ *L'Enfant de la nuit* on Vaugirard (1934) and *Le Marchand d'oiseaux* on Cité universitaire (1936).

⁴⁰ The collection of Méliès negatives was purchased in 1935 by the Musée historique des *Motions* Pictures in Los ," he wrote.

⁴¹ The expression comes from Alain Laubreaux, who has published a lively book on this burlesque era.

⁴² *Theatre animators* (Corréa, publisher).

⁴³ We know that in 1943 Robert Brasillach split from the *Je suis partout* team and that from that date on he had a falling out with most of the editors mentioned in this fragment, with the exception of Georges Blond and Henri Poulain.

⁴⁴ We know that in June 1940, the police under Mr Mandel, then Minister of the Interior, invented an absurd "plot against State security against *Je suis partout*. Charles Lesca and Alain

Laubreaux were arrested and released on 28 June at the instigation of Marshal Pétain. Naturally, the case was dismissed. Robert Brasillach had been recalled from the Lorraine front, detained for three days at the police station, and had returned to his post by the last train through the bombardments. Subsequently, contributors to the newspaper, Robert Brasillach, Pierre Cousteau, Robert Andriveau, Jacques Perret and Claude Roy, were imprisoned in Germany, and Georges Blond for five months in England (Editor's note).

[45](#) It was published in June 1939 (Plon éditeur).

[46](#) Safe-conduct, pass.

[47](#) Press officer.

[48](#) Lieutenant-colonel.

[49](#) The story of these *Hundred Hours with Hitler* appeared in the *Revue Universelle*.

[50](#) The Nuremberg Congress or Reich Congress (in German *Reichsparteitag*) was the annual gathering of the NSDAP (National Socialist Party) held in Germany from 1923 to 1938. Since Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933, it has been held every year at the Reichsparteitagsgelände, a gigantic complex built by Albert Speer in Nuremberg. It serves as an instrument of National Socialist propaganda. The film-maker Leni Riefenstahl used it to produce *Triumph of the Will*.

[51](#) Hitler Youth.

[52](#) Let's not be too hasty to talk about cheating. In the middle of the war, citizens of a country at peace, 75 per cent Germans from the Tyrol were asked choose between Italy and Germany, and chose move to Germany.

[53](#) Danger of war.

[54](#) Comrade of the threat of a state of war.

[55](#) 10 July 1938.

[56](#) Some houses even have a rental service, but we found it expensive and impractical. So choose your caravan: the first thing to consider is weight. With a small car, if it's solid and of good quality, you can easily haul around 400 to 450 kilos. You'll be able to travel at 70 or 80 kilometres an hour on the plains. We had a car for a year. It has travelled all over Spain, often on mediocre roads, without incident, and as cheerful on the way back as it was on the way out. It was a small two-seater caravan. You can easily sleep in a car whose front seats fold down, with an air mattress. You can even have an extra tent.

Now, we have to admit that our second-hand caravan, as often happens in these cases, behaved very badly. So have your carefully checked, and if you want to attempt a shipment, have any weak parts replaced.

And if you'd like a few more tips, here are some of the essentials:

1° Most caravans are equipped with butane gas. This is not a bad idea, but you also need to take stoves with you to cook outdoors, especially if the caravan is small. Petrol stoves, because that's the fuel that's most readily available everywhere. And *no* petrol stove is really satisfactory;

2° Our caravan had an icebox. In Europe, you can find ice everywhere. It's absolutely essential;

3° *Don't be afraid of comfort*. Don't let yourself be influenced by campers on foot, by bike or by canoe. You can never have enough washing and cooking utensils. It all weighs nothing. And there's never water in the rivers. Take water buckets and canvas tanks with you. Take folders, folding tables, folding armchairs, because they weigh very little. Assume that you *never* live in a caravan, which is just a mobile home with an icebox, toilet, wardrobe and bed.

[57](#) Of course, Queipo de Llano was not "on the run", and General Yaguë, far from being in prison, had been appointed minister.

- [58](#) Butcher's shop.
- [59](#) Bakery.
- [60](#) Ice factory.
- [61](#) Uprising, revolt, insurrection.
- [62](#) Rabbit, hare.
- [63](#) Beautiful! Magnificent! Graceful!
- [64](#) Rabbits.
- [65](#) The table is lowered and the bed is made.
- [66](#) Relay.
- [67](#) Except at certain specific points, such as the Ebro crossing and after Barcelona, the eastern route is newly maintained, newly repaired and generally in good condition.

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