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ANARCHISM
AND
LITERATURE
IN
FRANCE,
1870-1900

by

ALI NEMATOLLAHY

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Comparative literature in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The
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April 25, 2001
Date

Imir Kuyor'
Chair of examining committee

April 25, 2001
Date

William Collier
Executive Officer

Jonathan Brenkman

Francesca Sautman FS

Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Introduction.....	1
Chapter I	Anarchist Aesthetics: Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Jean Grave and Fernand Pelloutier, Max Stirner.....	23
Chapter II	Anarchism and the Symbolist movement.....	81
Chapter III	Jules Vallès: <i>Instantanéisme</i> and Anarchism.....	142
Chapter IV	Two Anarcho-individualists: Georges Darien and Hugues Rebell.....	170
Chapter V	Aesthetes and Anarchists: Maurice Barrès, Zo d'Axa, Laurent Tailhade.....	249
	Bibliography.....	293

INTRODUCTION

Anarchism is a rejection of all authority, and as such it can be found in various moments of history, from Zeno and the Stoics to Thomas Müntzer and the peasant revolt in Germany in the fifteenth century. The Anabaptists are indeed often claimed as the precursors of the anarchist movement, and anarchists maintain that their philosophy is so deeply rooted in the human spirit that anarchist struggles against authority have existed in all times and places. But anarchism, strictly speaking, is a product of the nineteenth century. It was born from the clash of agricultural and artisanal cultures with modern industry. Its most vital moments were thus played out in countries that rushed towards industrialization at a late moment, where the communitarian traditions of rural economy and the individualism of artisanal cultures collided with the atomization and the alienation of the modern world, as in France during the second half of the nineteenth century and in Italy and Spain in the first half of the twentieth (an account that explains the relative weakness of the anarchist movement in England).

While in Italy and Spain anarchism was primarily a rural phenomenon with its communitarian aspects in the forefront, in France it was predominantly urban, particular to the artisanal classes of large cities, such as Lyons, Marseilles and Paris. Proudhon, whom Kropotkin called the "father of anarchism," was himself an apprentice printer, a trade that was to produce many anarchists in the nineteenth century, and lived most of his adult life in Paris and Lyons. The rise of modern capitalism was a direct threat to the

class of artisans: it made obsolete the practice of their craft, a source of pride and dignity that was learned during long years of apprenticeship, and replaced it with manual labor.

But the extent of the popularity of the anarchist movement in France during the last two decades of the nineteenth century cannot only be explained by the appeal it had to the threatened artisanal classes of Paris and other cities. Indeed, what surprises the historian studying this period today is a certain separation between the intellectuals of the movement and working-class culture, as well as the appeal that anarchism exercised for writers and artists. In other words, for a brief period that was to reach its greatest intensity in the years 1890-94, anarchism was not only a political movement specific to the working classes, but a cultural phenomenon which played a major role in the art and literature of the *fin de siècle*. Daniel Guérin was sorry to see that in this period "l'anarchisme s'isole du mouvement ouvrier," thus risking to become a utopian yearning, the desperate revolt and dramatic gestures of a few dreamers condemned to failure. He thus judges that the period in question "apparaît aujourd'hui comme une déviation épisodique et stérilisante de l'anarchisme. Il fait figure de vieillesse."¹

I do not want to go as far as to claim that the anarchism of the *fin de siècle* appealed to the writers because it had lost its basis in the working class. As we shall see in the course of this dissertation, many of the writers were genuinely moved by the concrete, social dimensions of the movement, while others were

¹ Daniel Guérin, *L'Anarchisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965) 86, 7.

primarily interested in the individualist aspects of anarchism, finding a parallel between their own aesthetic practice and the absolute freedom envisioned by anarchist theorists. The Symbolist movement (as well as its beginnings in Decadence) was crucial in opening anarchism to cultural and literary trends. It was the first movement to proclaim the autonomy of poetry as a legitimate field of human activity, and with it, the autonomy of the poet as a privileged figure (the Romantics had not gone so far in demanding an absolute liberty for the poet). In his essay on Baudelaire in the *Essais de Psychologie contemporaine* (1883), Bourget had already linked anarchism and decadence:

Si l'énergie des cellules devient indépendante, les organismes qui composent l'organisme total cessent pareillement de subordonner leur énergie à l'énergie totale, et l'anarchie qui s'établit constitue la décadence de l'ensemble. L'organisme social n'échappe pas à cette loi... Une même loi gouverne le développement et la décadence de cet autre organisme qui est le langage. Un style de décadence est celui où l'unité du livre se décompose pour laisser la place à l'indépendance de la phrase, et la phrase pour laisser la place à l'indépendance du mot. Les exemples foisonnent dans la littérature actuelle qui corroborent cette hypothèse et justifient cette analogie.²

It is curious to see these lines echoed so closely in Nietzsche's *The Case of Wagner*, written five years after Bourget's book:

For the present I merely dwell on the question of style.--What is the sign of every literary decadence? That life no longer dwells in the whole. The word becomes sovereign and leaps out of the sentence, the sentence reaches out and obscures the meaning of the page, the page gains life at the expense of the whole - the whole is no longer a whole. But this is the simile of every style of decadence: every time, the anarchy of atoms, disgregation of the will, "freedom of the individual," to use moral terms...³

The liberation of the word and the liberation of the individual are, according to both Nietzsche and Bourget, the product of a decadent

² Paul Bourget, *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, vol. 1 (Paris: Plon, 1926) 20.

³ Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*,

and anarchistic society. More importantly, their comparison reveals a certain contiguity between the word and the act, between writing and praxis. The anarchist desire to breach the gap between art and life corresponded to the Symbolist attempt to create a total work of art, to reunite dream and reality, and to restore language to its magical, non-alienated state. It was only logical for the Symbolist writers who proclaimed the liberation of the verse to find a kin in the works of the anarchists. This did not always entail adopting the anarchists' theories on aesthetics and literature. In fact, it rarely did so. Most of the time, it was the political thought of anarchists that appealed to the *littérateurs*. As we will see, they tended to be drawn to the more radical, individualist strains of anarchism and the anarchists themselves kept a distance from Symbolism and Decadence and favored socially responsible forms of Naturalism and Realism.

But in the last instance, the aesthetic of anarchist writers reflects the pluralism of the different currents of anarchist thought. The communitarian branch (Proudhon) tends to celebrate the spontaneous art of the people: Proudhon finds an aesthetic model in the building of cathedrals in the Middle Ages or the singing of the church choir. His ideas in this regard anticipate very closely Wagner's notion of the work of art as a quasi-religious festival bringing the community together. It is difficult to discern a common aesthetic in the individualist strand, other than an affirmation of individual singularity and vitality in the face of the deadened sensibility of a worn-out culture (the themes of "decadence" and

trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967) 170.

"exhaustion" are repeatedly found in the works of Proudhon and Kropotkin).

In the early 1890's, anarchism provided a framework for the writers of the Symbolist generation to affirm an art of the Unique individual, in contradistinction to Naturalism, which had come to be understood as the art of the masses. In his essay "Le Roman anarchiste," Georges Darien identified Naturalism as socialist literature, and opposed to it an anarchist art, an art of singularity, of revolt, of the individual.⁴ In his preface to Jean Grave's *La Société mourante et l'anarchie* (1892), Octave Mirbeau similarly wrote: "L'Anarchie est la reconquête de l'individu, dans un sens normal et harmonique." In his early anarcho-individualist phase, Adolphe Retté insisted on art as the privilege of the few, and antithetical to the demands of *le peuple*. Remy de Gourmont similarly proclaimed the right of the elite to devote themselves to art and literature, and saw anarchism as the ideal form of social organization that could ensure the supremacy of these privileged few through the absence of any form of government.

One of the most remarkable proponents of aristo-anarchism of the *fin de siècle* is the writer Hugues Rebell, whose work has so far resisted all attempts at classification. He remains one of the eccentric figures of the period, difficult to place within any specific literary or political camp, despite the fact that Charles Maurras said of him that "La politique de M.Hugues Rebell est parfaite," and through whom, as one historian has recently claimed,

⁴ Georges Darien, "Le Roman anarchiste," *L'Endehors*, n.23, 8 October 1891 and n.24, 22 October 1891.

Maurras wholly appropriated the Nietzschean aristocratism that became the basis of the ideology of the *Action Française*.⁵ Rebell violently attacked anarchism in an article entitled "Menus propos sur les nouvelles utopies," where he insisted that the goal of life is not the happiness of individuals, but "la réalisation d'une oeuvre de beauté, et cette oeuvre consiste en une lutte éternelle que viennent seulement interrompre parfois des assoupissements ou des sommeils."⁶

But Rebell's unrestrained individualism brought him closer to the anarchists whom he could not tolerate. In Chapter 4, I attempt to articulate the principles of his aristo-anarchism, and distinguish it from the thought of Darien, another extremist individualist who is often conjoined to the right wing Nietzscheans and anarchists.

Maurice Barrès occupied a privileged position in the bewildering political world of the *fin de siècle*. For a time, in the early 1890's, he managed to reconcile extremely opposite political and literary tendencies. He influenced thinkers as diverse as Fernand Pelloutier, the founder of anarcho-syndicalism in France, and Charles Maurras.⁷ Under the umbrella of the exaltation of the individual against a philistine society, Barrès managed to gather a very unlikely constellation of writers and thinkers, many of them anarchists. According to Jacques Julliard, "il s'agit, est-il besoin

⁵ Victor Nguyen, *Aux Origines de l'Action française. Intelligence et politique vers 1900* (Paris: Fayard, 1991) 802.

⁶ Hugues Rebell, "Menus propos sur les nouvelles utopies," *La Plume*, n.118, 15 March 1894.

⁷ Jacques Julliard claims in his *Fernand Pelloutier et les origines du syndicalisme d'action directe* (Paris: Seuil, 1971) 93, that Barrès had invited Pelloutier as contributor to *La Cocarde*; "Si éphémère qu'elle ait été, l'influence du barrésisme sur Pelloutier n'est pas

de le dire, d'une influence philosophique et littéraire [that Barrès exerted on Pelloutier], mais nullement politique." I think it is more accurate to say that with Barrès, as well as the political movement to which he adhered, Boulangism, traditional distinctions between politics and aesthetics were blurred, a subject I will explore in the last chapter. To imagine the full range of the consequences engendered by this confusion, however, is beyond the scope of my dissertation. Boulangism was the first political movement that made indistinct the familiar divisions between Right and Left. It mobilized almost the entirety of the Blanquists, and rallied many anarchists to the cause of the general on the white horse. Zeev Sternheel has shown the key role occupied by Barrès in unifying the revolutionary ideology of Boulangism with anti-Semitism.

In this regard, the position of the older generation of anarchists was definitively retrograde. Traces of anti-Semitism can be found in Proudhon and Bakunin, though it did not occupy a central place in their thought. By the late 1880's, a number of rank-and-file anarchists did rally to Boulangism, yet the intellectuals of the movement kept their distance from the General. We must not thus exaggerate the influence of a vacillating fraction of the extreme left on the anarchist movement as a whole (as Sternheel has done).

It was rather the conservative Right that underwent a profound transformation with the advent of Boulangism. For the first time in European history, the conservative Right directly appealed to the "masses," the workers and the lower classes by using a radical

niable."

rhetoric and a populist language.⁸ The Right perceived and exploited the remnants of Jacobin (and Romantic) nationalism that was part of the popular imagery and was now in decline, and used its negative aspects to its own advantage. The ascendancy of the Jew, they claimed, is a direct result of the dispossession of the worker.

The Left initially underestimated the power of this discourse, dismissing it as the "socialism of the imbecile." But by the early 1890's it had become clear that anti-Semitism could play a determinant role in politics, a fact that was confirmed during the Dreyfus Affair. Yet anarchists were slow to catch up, and it was only the lone voice of Bernard Lazare in the early 90's that denounced the influence of anti-Semitism among workers and attempted to uproot it through systematic education (with the group *L'Art Social*, which I discuss in chapters 1-2). The Dreyfus Affair, by reformulating the situation in terms of authority vs. individualism, army vs. society, and patriotism vs. anti-patriotism, pushed back the murky tide of Boulangism and its aftermath. It was evident which side anarchists were to take in this debate.

For a full understanding of the role of anarchism in the culture of the *fin de siècle* one must refer to the anarchist and Symbolist press of the period. The law of July 29, 1881, abolished administrative restrictions and the repressive press laws of the Second Empire that were still in place. It was no longer necessary to post a cash deposit in order to found a periodical, and writers and editors could not be sued for libel (only the director was now

⁸ William Irvine, *The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1898) 16-17.

held responsible). The anarchist press grew significantly during the next decade, reaching a fairly large audience. With the problems inherent in the work of anarchist organization, the press was the only forum where a relative coherence could be achieved and an outline given to a community reluctant to organize into any kind of unity.

It was not until 1885 that *Le Révolté*, the official organ of anarchism in France, began its publication in Paris. *Le Révolté* was founded in Geneva as early as 1879, under the editorship of Kropotkin and Jean Grave. After 1887, it began including a literary supplement, a measure of the mutual interest that was developing between anarchists and the world of literature. In the same year it changed its title to *La Révolte*. It is thanks to the untiring efforts of Jean Grave, its editor, that the journal reached a circulation of 8,000 by 1889, an impressive number for the period. Referring to Grave's role as partisan of "pure doctrine," anarchists had jokingly given him the nickname of "le pape de la rue Mouffetard," (where the offices of *La Révolte* were located). Grave's name and life were fused inextricably with that of *La Révolte*; he represented the official doctrine of anarchism that he often, as we will have occasion to see more than once in the course of this study, was pressed to defend and define in the pages of his journal. Besides its weekly paper, Grave's journal also published books for purposes of propaganda and instruction (after 1894, *La Révolte* changed its title to *Les Temps Nouveaux*, but continued to appear under the same format): in addition to sociological works by Kropotkin and Grave, we find books by Octave Mirbeau and even Diderot

among the authors published by Grave. The importance given to literature as a form of education and propaganda can be found in Grave's addition of a literary supplement to *La Révolte* after 1889.

At the other extreme of the anarchist press was Émile Pouget's *Le Père Peinard*. Grave's *La Révolte* had a respectable and official allure, written in the cold language of theory, its offices located in the shadow of the Sorbonne in the Left Bank. By contrast, *Le Père Peinard* was situated in Montmartre and was written in argot, the everyday language of workers and the Parisian *faubourgs*. Its cover was illustrated, its language playful and imaginative; regular drawings by Ibels, Maximilien Luce, Pissaro and Willette appeared in its pages (*La Révolte* featured no illustrations). *La Révolte* and *Le Père Peinard* had a circulation of 10,000 copies a week, with a readership that must have reached at least five times the hard copies, as the oral tradition was still much alive among the working classes. The list of anarchist periodicals compiled by Jean Maitron reveals about 170 journals and newspapers from the period studied here (before 1900). Among these we can cite *Le Ça Ira* and *Le Libertaire*, and others with such colorful and popular titles as *L'Affamé* (published in Marseilles), *Le Bandit du Nord* (from Roubaix), and *Le Glaneur anarchiste* (Paris), as well as journals run by the *littérateurs*, such as the ephemeral *La Revue Rouge*, directed by Laurent Tailhade, Zo D'Axa and Henry Bauer, declaring themselves in the first editorial as "Libertaires en art,... libertaires en sociologie, libertaires en science."⁹

⁹ Jean Maitron, *Le Mouvement anarchiste en France*, vol. 2 (Paris: Maspero, 1975) 260.

Symbolism also benefited from the new, lenient press laws. More than all the previous literary movements in the nineteenth century, Symbolism's medium of propagation was the *petites revues*. In the mid 1880's, Remy de Gourmont counted more than a hundred Symbolist and Decadent periodicals.¹⁰ Guy Michaud places the birth of the movement and the articulation of its doctrine in 1885 concurrent with the birth of the *petites revues*, which propagated the principles of the new School to the public.¹¹ But it was not until 1889 that the vogue for anarchism would explode in the Symbolist press. One of the most important of these journals, *La Revue Blanche*, simultaneously defended the cause of Symbolism and anarchism. It published articles by and about Bakunin, Stirner, Kropotkin and Proudhon, while *La Révolte* and *Le Père Peinard* regularly recommended this journal to their readers. *La Revue Blanche* was primarily a literary journal, born under the double influence of Mallarmé and Barrès in 1889, and its anarchist sympathies were a sign of the times.¹² Though more playful in its politics, *La Plume* also published many anarchist sympathizers (chiefly Adolphe Retté), and even featured a special issue on anarchism in May 1893. Though the editor of *L'Ermitage*, Henri Mazel, was a royalist, the journal could not help but be pulled into the

¹⁰ Quoted in Ernest Raynaud, *La Mêlée Symboliste*, vol. 1 (Paris: Renaissance du Livre, 1920) 49. Raynaud claims that the number is greatly understated.

¹¹ Guy Michaud, *Le Message poétique du symbolisme*, vol. 2 (Paris: Nizet, 1947) 313-314.

¹² See Olivier Barrot and Pascal Ory, *La Revue Blanche* (Paris: Union Générales des Éditions (10/18), 1989) 11.

anarchist fray: a poll of artists and writers asked them: "Quelle est la meilleure condition du Bien social, une organisation spontanée et libre, ou bien une organisation disciplinée et méthodique? Vers laquelle de ces conceptions doivent aller les préférences des artistes?"¹³ The question is clearly posed in an anarchist framework, i.e., freedom vs. constraint. Like *L'Ermitage*, the more respectable *Mercure de France* would have preferred to keep a distance from the more radical aspects of politics, but anarchism left its mark on the pages of the journal in the first half of the 1890's.

The two most radical organs of literary anarchism were Zo d'Axa's *L'Endehors* and Francis Vielé-Griffin's *Les Entretiens Politiques et Littéraires*.¹⁴ The writers who contributed to these journals were more or less the same, but the tone of each was decidedly different. *L'Endehors* went "beyond" anarchism, as Jean Maitron once remarked, in its violent nihilism and affirmation of the singular individual. *Les Entretiens* regularly published the works of Proudhon, Stirner, Bakunin, Elisée Reclus, and for a time during 1892, it became more of a political organ than literary. Paul Adam's famous and scandalous eulogy of Ravachol appeared in pages of *Les Entretiens*, which also published Bernard Lazare's history of anti-Semitism, while Mallarmé's defense of free verse would appear in the same pages. In the early 1890's, the radical chic of anarchism had so penetrated the cultural circles that, in Gustave Kahn's words, for

¹³ In *Ermitage*, n.7, July 1893, 1.

¹⁴ The history of these two journals is discussed in Chapters 2 and 5.

the general public, "les occultistes, les symbolistes, les anarchistes étaient... une masse en marche. Pour ce même public... nous fûmes d'un bloc, des anarchistes; on le crut de tous, sans nuance, avec une égale fermeté."¹⁵ The cause of the free verse and that of anarchism were freely equated. Jules Simon denounced free verse as unpatriotic and anarchistic. Jean Paulhan recalled that "De la grande lutte pour le vers libre, qui occupe les années 90, la foule et le parlement de la troisième république n'aperçurent que l'un des effets: les attentats anarchistes."¹⁶

The widespread interest in anarchism came to a halt with the *procès des Trente*. The government seized the occasion of Vaillant's bomb thrown in the Chamber of Deputies in 1893, and passed the laws that came to be known as the *lois scélérates*, once again instituting the repressive press laws of the Second Empire, extending culpability to incitement to violence by writing, and even apologizing for acts of terrorism after the fact (as had done Paul Adam, Octave Mirbeau and Pierre Quillard). Next, the government launched a campaign of terror and, under the banner of "association de malfaiteurs," attempted to arrest and prosecute anyone who had been in any way associated with anarchism. These were the trials known as the *procès des Trente* that began on 6 August 1894.

Already in the first months of 1894, every anarchist journal was shut down and the editors and the writers were either arrested or had to flee into exile. *Le Père Peinard* ceased publication in

¹⁵ Gustave Kahn, *Symbolistes et décadents* (Paris: Vanier, 1902) 59.

¹⁶ Jean Paulhan's introduction in Félix Fénéon, *Oeuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948) 16.

February, *La Révolte* in March 1894. This was followed by a wave of police terror upon anarchists and artists alike and after thousands of searches and arrests, 426 people were arraigned for terror and conspiracy. The mood among the writers quickly changed to one of fear of arrest and exile. *La Revue Blanche* refrained from commenting on the affair and anarchist debates vanished from the literary press. For the *procès des Trente* itself, police rounded up a number of writers and intellectuals along with rank-and-file anarchist criminals. Among the better known writers were: Félix Fénéon, the editor of *La Revue Indépendante* and later of *La Revue Blanche*; the Symbolist writer Adolphe Retté; the painter Maximilien Luce; Jean Grave; and Sébastien Faure. Five of the accused fled into exile before the trial: Paul Reclus (the brother of Elisée), Emile Pouget, Louis Duprat, Constant Martin and Alexandre Cohen. The writers who chose to stay behind and face their judges were put on the bench together with a number of anarchist criminals such as Ortiz, Chericotti and others, who were part of the illegalist faction, which at times intersected with the world of crime to the point where it was difficult to tell where the ideology ended and the self-interest began (I will discuss the illegalists in chapter 4). In reality, the world of these criminals was not so far removed from that of the intellectuals. Ortiz was a close friend of Charles Malato, with whom he edited the anarchist review *La Révolution Cosmopolite*. The extent of the fascination these adventurers exercised over the imagination of the writers of this generation can be glimpsed at in the following quote from Maurice Barrès:

L'amour de la lutte, le goût du danger sont si fort enfoncés dans

l'homme qu'il faut bien lui tenir compte de cet appétit dans les nécessités sociales... Mais comment supprimer chez certains hommes l'attrait du hasard, dont l'enjeu est leur sang. Ortiz, le condamné du dernier procès des Trente, a fait à Fénéon cette singulière confession, qu'il n'avait choisi le métier de Voleur, non par amour du lucre, mais par goût des aventures, des dangers.¹⁷

In the last chapter, I will examine the aesthete's fascination with anarchism, which I believe, was part of the fetishization of the *bas-fonds* of urban life, a phenomenon that had far-reaching consequences.

The *procès des Trente* completed the break between the intellectuals and the rank-and-file members of the anarchist movement. Anarchism had itself already begun its gradual shift towards syndicalism before the repression and arrests of the year 1894. As early as 1890, Kropotkin, who had been a decade earlier one of the principal proponents of the methods of propaganda by the deed, began doubting the efficacy of terrorist means. In an article in *La Révolte* that year he warned anarchists against "l'illusion que l'on peut vaincre les coalitions d'exploiteurs avec quelques livres d'explosibles."¹⁸ He encouraged the militants to penetrate the milieu of workers, educate and organize them, so that one day they can stand together and march towards the revolution.

Anarchists were against workers' unions if these had as their aim the increase of salary, less hours of work or other reformist measures that entailed the work of negotiation with the bosses (as the socialists envisioned the unions at this time). They were in any case against all *political* forms of action, and at this point

¹⁷ Quoted in Auriant, *Darien et l'inhumaine comédie* (Brussels: Ambassade du Livre, n.d. (1961?)) 103.

¹⁸ Pierre Kropotkine, "Les Grèves," *La Révolte*, n.3, 27 Sept.-3 oct. 1890.

envisioned unions as centers of instruction, discussion and agitation. It was through the tireless efforts of Fernand Pelloutier, the theorist of anarcho-syndicalism, that anarchists infiltrated the *bourses du travail*, managed to get control of the Fédération Nationale des Syndicats and announced the "General Strike" as the ultimate means of revolution. The concept had its many enemies in the unions, namely Blanquists as well as Marxists who envisioned revolution as the work of conspiratorial, secret groups who would have to "lead" the masses. By contrast, Pelloutier saw a spontaneous strike of the class of producers (at the right moment) that would paralyze the repressive apparatuses of the state.¹⁹

One of the net results of the wave of massive repressions of 1894 was the completion of the shift of anarchists towards syndicalism, their interest changing from cultural to economic factors. The emphasis on individualism had no room in the new doctrine, and most writers had no patience for the slow and painstaking work of the organization of workers. Even though the writers and intellectuals were acquitted in the *procès des Trente*, the trials marked the dawn of a new era for writers. Most of them had been scared to meet the fate of the exiles, have to pay enormous fines or face imprisonment. Paul Adam, Octave Mirbeau, and other outspoken figures kept a profound silence. Subsequently, many of them turned away from anarchism: Adam moved towards militarism (which was always present in his writings); Retté, after his period

¹⁹ Jacques Julliard's *Fernand Pelloutier et les origines du syndicalisme d'action directe* (Paris: Seuil, 1971) is an excellent presentation of Pelloutier's ideas and the rise of anarcho-syndicalism.

of *naturisme*, to Catholicism (a conversion he recounted in his souvenirs, *Du Diable au Dieu*); Laurent Tailhade to a bitter cynicism; and Camille Mauclair to nationalism.

These conversions seem to confirm Mauclair's judgment in his souvenirs that snobs and dandies adopted anarchism as a fashionable style, and would return to the world of the salons after attending an anarchist meeting with the *compagnons*. This was indeed a charge made towards the Symbolist generation by academic criticism. "On veut dire," protested Bernard Lazare,

Que nos idées, nos théories ou nos doctrines, sont des doctrines, des théories et des idées d'apparat, que nous les affichons par attitude, qu'elles remplacent pour nous le gilet rouge des romantiques, en un mot que nous les professons pour étonner le bourgeois et qu'en dernière analyse nous sommes des farceurs sans conviction.²⁰

If this were the case, continues Lazare, if we were nothing but dilettantes and aesthetes in search of rare sensations, why are we then systematically harassed by the police, charged and prosecuted, imprisoned and sent into exile? Indeed, the list of those who "converted" away from anarchism shows well that they were minor figures of the Symbolist generation. It is perhaps more instructive to examine the list of the writers who did not run at the first sign of the storm gathering on the horizon: Octave Mirbeau, who remained an anarchist until his death in 1917; Lazare himself (who died a premature death in 1903); Félix Fénéon (d.1944); Georges Darien, who was, if anything, more and more radicalized over the years (d.1921); and the American poets Francis Vielé-Griffin and Stuart Merrill (d. respectively, 1937 and 1915).

²⁰ Bernard Lazare, "Anarchie et littérature," *Literary Supplement of La Révolte*, n.24, 24 Feb. 1894.

The individualist tendencies within the anarchist movement did live on in the illegalist strand, but became increasingly marginal and finally disappeared with the arrest of the famous *Bande à Bonnot* in 1913. Libertad's journal *L'Anarchie* was the principal organ of illegalism between 1905 and 1914: it advocated not only immediate pillage and the doctrine of *reprise individuelle*, but sexual liberation and the subversion of every form of bourgeois morality. The extreme individualism of the illegalist movement lived on even after 1913 in the journal *L'Action d'art* which linked illegalism and aesthetics, was read by the young André Breton and thus extended the influence of this obscure branch into the Surrealist movement. Céline also had an interest in this period, as Yves Pagès has demonstrated recently.²¹ But these are subterranean currents and anarchism never again enjoyed the role of the cultural regenerator that it had played for the generation of 1890.

The previous studies on anarchism and literature, namely those of Pierre Aubery and Jacques Monférier, took anarchism as a given, monolithic category, part of the current of left-wing, emancipatory philosophies of the nineteenth century which conceived of history as a progression towards a definite and most likely revolutionary end.²²

A few quotations thus sufficed to link anarchism with Symbolism, as in the revolutionary fever raging in Paris before and after May 1968

²¹ Yves Pagès, *Les Fictions du politique chez L.-F.Céline* (Paris: Seuil, 1994).

²² Pierre Aubéry, "L'Anarchisme des littérateurs au temps du symbolisme," *Pour une lecture ouvrière de la littérature* (Paris: Les Éditions Syndicalistes, 1969; and Jacques Monférier, "Symbolisme et anarchie," *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France*, 65:2, Apr.-June 1965, 233-238.

the term "anarchism" required no justification. Richard Sonn's *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin de Siècle France* makes an attempt to formulate anarchism as a more complex and fluid philosophy, but goes no further than the familiar notion of *Les extrêmes se touchent*. When I undertook this project, my conception of anarchism went no further than these. In the course of my research, however, a very different picture emerged. First, I recognized that no two writers of the period examined here had a similar understanding of anarchism. As opposed to Marxism, anarchism stems not only from the writings of several very different thinkers (Proudhon, Bakunin, Stirner, and Kropotkin), but also contains a radical rejection of authority, of masters, leaders and movements. Furthermore, a number of significant historical works have contributed to a much more profound and nuanced understanding of the extremist politics of the *fin de siècle*. While I am critical of François Richard's work on right-wing anarchism and Zeev Sternhell's analysis of the confluence of anarchism with the extremist positions on the right of the political landscape in France around 1890, certain elements of their work can nonetheless be retained and constructively used.²³ Sternhell's analysis of Boulangism as the first movement in modern history that confounded the traditional and clearly demarked notions of Left and Right, and rallied the working-class to extreme right-wing politics, is particularly relevant to

²³ François Richard, *L'Anarchisme de droite dans la littérature contemporaine* (Paris: PUF, 1988); and Zeev Sternhell, *La Droite révolutionnaire. Les Origines françaises du fascisme, 1885-1914* (Paris: Seuil, 1978) as well as his *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français* (Paris: Fayard, 1972).

this study. This phenomenon must be understood in the constellation of a number of other trends of the last quarter of the nineteenth century: the disappearance of the Romantic concept of *le peuple* and the end of the traditional notion of Revolution after the repression of the Paris Commune; and the demise of the *homme de lettres* and the birth of the modern writer, hurling the poet in the midst of the marketplace and forever liquidating his independence vis-à-vis the bourgeoisie.²⁴ The sociology of literature underwent a profound transformation during the first decades of the Third Republic. The technological breakthroughs in publishing and the invention of new, cheaply produced types of paper allowed Charpentier and eventually other publishers to offer books for 1 franc after 1870 (they would have cost 3.50 francs in the 1830's, without counting the rate of inflation). The secularization of the education system under the Third Republic gave birth to a new, mass readership. The sensational press fed and accentuated the public's taste for the melodramatic and the sentimental. Far from benefiting writers, the rise of a mass public had further undermined the economic basis of the *littérateurs*. Even though the phenomenal success of Zola allowed him a comfortable existence, all the other Naturalist writers were forced to maintain daytime jobs in order to eke out a living. The market for poetry had suffered even more, a factor which, I believe, had a great deal to do with the radicalization of the Symbolists (Remy de Gourmont had to work in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Fénéon

²⁴ This phenomenon had already begun in the 1830's and was completed with the Naturalist generation. See below, Chapter 1, as well as Alain Viala, *La Naissance de l'écrivain* (Paris: Les Éditions de

in the Ministère de la Guerre, and Huysmans in the Ministry of the Interior).

All these currents led the writers of the *fin de siècle* to articulate the links between aesthetic and politics in ways that are strikingly relevant today.

A word on a number of glaring omissions left in this dissertation. The cases of Octave Mirbeau and Félix Fénéon are significant: both writers were committed anarchists and celebrated personalities of the period studied here. An extensive body of criticism already exists on their work as well as the role played by anarchism in their development. These include Joan Ungersma Halperin's *Félix Fénéon, Aesthete and Anarchist in Fin de Siècle Paris*, and the numerous books and articles written on Mirbeau by Pierre Michel and Jean-François Nivet, whose tremendous efforts have contributed greatly to our appreciation of the author of *Sébastien Roch*, and to a more profound understanding of the literature of the *fin de siècle* in general. I did not want to add to the large corpus of their work, but rather chose figures who have been so far neglected in order to demonstrate the extensive role anarchism played in the culture of the period. I also chose to omit the case of Louise Michel. This fascinating personality was not merely one of the most charismatic and popular figures in anarchist circles: she captivated workers and enchanted (and terrified) the bourgeoisie. Her many novels, however, did not correspond to the framework of anarchist aesthetics as I conceived and developed it in this dissertation. Unfortunately, no systematic examination of her vast

Minuit, 1985).

literary output exists so far. It is long overdue.

I was probably not the first graduate student to have the bad luck of seeing the appearance of a similar study while at work on his or her dissertation. *Littérature et anarchie*, an anthology of essays edited by Alain Pessin and Patrice Terrone was published in 1998 and considers the same period examined here, though the ground covered and the authors examined are not the same.²⁵ Because of its essayistic style, it suffers from the same shortcomings of earlier studies: it conceives of anarchism either as an unproblematically monolithic, left-wing ideology, or as a dichotomy of extremes of Right and Left. In fact, as this study shows, for the writers of the Symbolist generation, anarchism was a fluid and unstable constellation of theories, which could be applied to figures as disparate as the Comte de Gobineau, Barbey d'Aurevilly or to Bernard Lazare, a writer committed to revolution and the cause of the workers.

²⁵ *Littérature et anarchie*, ed. Alain Pessin and Patrice Terrone (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1998). I thank Professor Przybos for bringing this volume, and countless others, to my attention.

Chapter 1

ANARCHIST AESTHETICS

Is there a unified, coherent theory of art posited by anarchist thinkers? Anarchism is a philosophy that stresses singularity and makes fragmentation and pluralism its principal feature; it demands individual initiative and thought. An "anarchist" is not one who refers to the writings of sacred texts, quoting, approving, taking them as models. He is encouraged to develop his own, create, invent, live. "I never heard it said," writes Kropotkin in his memoirs,

'Bakunin says so,' or 'Bakunin thinks so,' as if it settled the question. His writings and sayings were not regarded as laws... In all such matters, in which intellect is the supreme judge, everyone in discussion used his own arguments. Their general drift and tenor might have been suggested by Bakunin... at any rate, in each individual the arguments retained their own individual character.¹

While individualism holds a significant position in anarchist thought, we must also recognize that it constitutes but one branch of an otherwise Protean philosophy. By overemphasizing this particular tendency at

¹ Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (New York: Grove Press, 1968) 289.

the expense of others, the critic and the historian risk falling into a solipsism that at times characterizes their object of study (as in the case of Stirner). In an essay entitled "L'Ile de la liberté" (reprinted later as "L'Anarchie"), Marcel Schwob parodied the excessive emphasis placed on individualist anarchism and its consequences, prevalent among his fellow writers in the 1890's. He presented a group of anthropologists coming across an unknown tribe in a distant island, "L'île des Eleuthéromanes." The people of this island had once been ruled by aristocratic masters, then by democratic institutions, and for some time now "ils sont possédés... d'une certaine manie libre qui les porte à vivre chacun à leur guise."² They led unfettered lives for a time, but then hatred and resentment developed among them, some seducing and influencing others for their own opportunistic ends. So they (it is unclear who the leaders of this libertarian community were, given that they had done away with all forms of authority) began to remove the ears of their children at birth in order to circumvent the possibility of being manipulated by others. But a number of shrewd individuals still managed to exert their influence through visual means and gestures, and thus continued to

² Marcel Schwob, "L'Ile de la liberté," *Echo de Paris*, n.14 August 1892, reprinted as "L'Anarchie," *Spicilège* (Paris: Au Sans Pareil, 1920) 156.

exercise authority over others. As a remedy to this new ill, the community decided to blind the children at birth. In this way they live solitary lives, wandering around deaf and blind, doing as they wish; "ils permettent les vols, les assauts de jeunes filles et les meurtres, et ils ne reconnaissent aucune solidarité." Each carries an explosive weapon in order to protect himself against aggressors. In this society of all against all, Schwob continues, a curious custom has developed of late: eating one's own excrement. The individual organism, freed of all external influence and stimulus, turns inward and withers, feeding on itself and its own waste, slowly perishing like a starved plant.

But Schwob's parody does not paint a just portrait of anarchism; it gives at best an exaggerated picture of its more excessive tendencies, without a real engagement with its ideas. Far from circling around their own solipsistic thoughts, the theorists of anarchism did indeed engage and build on each other's ideas (as well as that of their critics), while keeping their own individual particularities. In what follows, I will present the aesthetic theories of anarchist theorists--Proudhon, Stirner, Kropotkin and Bakunin, as well as the second generation of anarchist thinkers, Jean Grave and Fernand Pelloutier, and suggest the outline of the ways in which their theories were appropriated by writers in nineteenth

century France.

* * *

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865) was born in a family of peasant origins in Besançon. His father had been an artisan, turning later in life to brewery, a profession that seemed to have brought him a very small income. The family lived most of the time in poverty. Pierre-Joseph spent a good deal of his childhood herding cows and received very little education. He was entirely self-taught, and his writing is full of the eccentricities of thought of an autodidact. His mother embodied the typical virtues of a peasant mother, tending the house and her family with affectionate austerity and independence of character. Proudhon was proud of his origins, and to the end of his life he continued to see the ideal family as the self-governing peasant or artisanal household, with the morals and virtues that it represented. Though he lived in Paris, "his moral and political outlook remained that of a puritanical young man from the provinces, shocked and horrified by the luxury, extravagance, decadence and corruption of the metropolis."³ On the woman question his

³ James Joll, *The Anarchists* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1964) 61.

ideas were decidedly retrograde: he believed the woman's place to be at home, looking after the family. The man who had written that "Dieu est le mal" also said that the image of a woman in prayer is sublime and insisted on giving his daughters a Christian upbringing. His anarchism was at once divided between the dream of traditional families collected in clusters of autonomous, federated communities and the unknown shape of the world of the anarchist utopia. But more often than not, his ideas inclined towards the former, and he opposed the economic self-reliance, the independent spirit and the austere virtues of the artisanal and agrarian communities to modern societies based on the authority of the centralized state.

Centralization is indeed one of the key concepts in the thought of Proudhon. According to the author of *Qu'est-ce que la propriété?*, present society is based on the regime of centralized political power, which must be destroyed and replaced by independent, decentralized communities. Proudhon's anti-urbanism (and the systems of production and distribution that the life of cities entail) was to persist among a good number of anarchists, who believed in the simple, frugal existence of a village community. Proudhon's stern morality, his Puritanism and anti-urbanism have consequences, I believe, for his theories of art and literature that I will explore below. I don't think it was

an accident that his major work on art, *Du Principe de l'art et de sa destination sociale* (1865) began as an essay on Courbet, another Franc-Comtois who, though he lived mostly in Paris, kept his roots in the province of his origin (for instance, in his refusal to lose his accent) and used it as subject matter and inspiration for many of his paintings.

Courbet and Proudhon had been close friends since 1848.

The painter agreed with the theories of the "father of anarchism," shared his love of the common people and savored reading his work. He asked Proudhon to write a four-page essay as a way of introduction for his painting *Le Retour de la conférence*, which had been refused by the Salon and was instead going to be exhibited in England. As was usual with Proudhon, the essay quickly grew into a 400-page book, dealing with the history of art from the Egyptian period to the nineteenth century. From the beginning, Proudhon sets himself the task of studying art from the point of view of a layman and not a specialist. As opposed to other faculties of thought, what he calls the "aesthetic faculty" is inherent to humans. After deep reflection and analysis, claims Proudhon, everyone can and has the right to judge art according to his own taste.⁴ The fact that art has become a

⁴ P.-J. Proudhon, *Du Principe de l'art et de sa destination sociale* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1865) 12-13. Hereafter, references to this work will be placed in parentheses in the

specialty is a problem that must be examined historically.²⁹

For, "Chose certaine, depuis que l'art est devenu une profession, une espèce d'industrie, une spécialité dans la société... il a constamment tourné le dos à sa tradition" (9).

Proudhon thus favors periods in history where art was popular, rooted in the life of the people, their joys and sufferings, their daily struggles, their aspirations and ideals. Ancient Egypt, Proudhon asserts, was a culture that could barely distinguish itself from nature. Its art was primarily allegorical. The limited forms in which it appeared was not due to the incapacity of mastering form, but to a voluntary immobilism. Its mission was religious and social. But being rooted in communal forms, Egyptian art transcended its own limitations. It was in Greece, particularly after Alexander, that art began to gradually split apart from life. The sensuality of forms became something in itself, for itself. Until Alexander, Greek art remained rooted in the life-world of the Greeks, reflected their aspirations and their dreams of beauty. With the arrival of the philosophers and the skeptics, the unified life-world of the Greeks cracked open, and so did their art.

The whole nation became artist and dilettante, Proudhon claims! (60). Greek art had represented the ideals of the

text.

community; with the disappearance of the cohesiveness of the communal world, the beautiful forms gave way to idolatry: beauty came to be appreciated for its own sake. Dialectically reacting on the life-world, the same art now became the agent of the further dissolution of society. Once the expression of liberty, art now became tyrannical.

The idolatry and sensuality of Greek art gave way to the reaction of Christianity, and its highest achievement in art in the Middle Ages. Like early Greek art, medieval art was rooted in the social needs of the collectivity. In the Middle Ages, genius was not an isolated phenomenon; it was embodied by the entire community. It did not think in the solitary egoism of an isolated individual. It was collective, anonymous. Art was once again the authentic expression of the people. The entire community participated in the building of the Gothic cathedrals, monuments that Proudhon compares to great poems. The public was not a passive recipient of art but an active agent who participated in its construction. The cathedral was the embodiment of a collective aesthetic activity that benefited the entire community and not only the elite. Is this collective art superior to the work of one genius? Proudhon has to constantly grapple with this question. "Pour moi, je l'avoue... je trouve autant d'art dans le *Dies irae*, le *Lauda sion*, que dans les plus belles odes d'Horace" (71).

The Renaissance restored once again the sensuality of forms. The saints and angels of Renaissance art are other-worldly, they have lost the concreteness of their predecessors in the Middle Ages. The Renaissance may have produced a great many men of genius, but its art is decidedly inferior to that of the medieval era. Proudhon always values the popular over the singular, the creativity of the multitudes over the genius of the individual. There is always a tension between the individual and the community in the thought of anarchist theorists, a tension that points to a more general contradiction in anarchism. At times, the spontaneity and creativity of the people is valued over and above the individual; at other times, it is the originality and imagination of the unique individual that is celebrated.

In his analysis of the Renaissance, Proudhon stresses the primacy of the community over the individual. Renaissance art is not rooted in the collectivity, and is therefore inferior to the works produced in the Middle Ages. Worse yet, the Renaissance renews the Greek cult of beauty for its own sake. It could not but end in idolatry. Proudhon reserves some of his harshest evaluations for the Renaissance, "un art vampire tombé sur l'Europe en même temps que la syphilis, qui ne disparaîtra qu'avec lui" (79).

For Proudhon, the Renaissance is not merely a regression from the Middle Ages, but a permanent tendency in

art (already manifest in Greece, though kept in check by the relatively circumscribed world of Antiquity), emerging at moments of social disintegration in history. It is *decadent*, individual. It turns its back on everyday life. It idolizes form and sensuality. And it is the precursor of art for art's sake in the nineteenth century.

But all is not lost. For there is another principle, another tendency that counters the decadence of Renaissance art and can redirect art to its proper course. It is the Reformation, where art rehumanized itself once again. With Shakespeare, literature became once again popular, dealing with the life of the popular classes (Proudhon seems not to have been familiar with all of Shakespeare's works). Rembrandt likewise finds his inspiration in the everyday world of the people around him. "L'art qui, dans un fossoyeur, dans un chiffonier, sait trouver un moyen esthétique et en faire surgir un idéal, est dix fois plus puissant que celui qui a besoin des têtes olympiennes" (90).

Rembrandt's work is part of the same thread that leads to the work of Courbet, who has rejected the fantasies of the Romantic school in favor of the concrete life of his time. Art must live and breathe in reality. But both the dominant schools of the first half of the nineteenth century -- Classicism and Romanticism -- have turned their back on the ordinary lives of their time, turning instead toward the

past as their source of inspiration. Divorced from life,³³
"une nouvelle décadence commençait" (104). In this sense,
Proudhon does not distinguish between these two hostile
camps and sees the battle between them as mere opportunism,
a rivalry for seats in the *Académie*. The schools of Ingres,
Vernet, David and Delacroix mindlessly copy a past, he
complains, which has no particular relevance for the
present. Proudhon conceives of art and literature in terms
of what they say rather than how they say it, in terms of
content rather than form. Furthermore, art must always be
based on the life of the people, a prescription that tends
to become dogmatic, so literal that it traps art in the
limited sphere of the artist's personal experience (a point
he had in common with Champfleury and Duranty⁵). He cannot
see the significance of, for instance, the historical novel.
He comes to the conclusion that "tout tableau d'histoire,
représentant une action dont l'artiste n'a pas été témoin,
dont il n'est même pas contemporain, et que la masse de son
public ignore, est une fantasmagorie, et, au point de vue de
la haute mission de l'art, un non-sens"! (112-3).

For Proudhon, the separation of art from life in the
nineteenth century has more alarming consequences. At the

⁵ In his *Le Réalisme* (Paris: 1855), Champfleury quoted Proudhon approvingly in his analysis of Courbet's *L'Enterrement à Ornans*, calling the painter "un émeutier dans l'art."

base of Romanticism and art for art's sake, he perceives a³⁴ fact that he considers very dangerous: the isolation of the artist, his solitude, his lack of principles. Art must live in reality; the artist must be in tune with his public. "Ce qui fait les miracles de la poésie et de l'art est la faculté idéaliste, non d'un individu, mais d'une collectivité" (123). With the detachment of the artist from his public comes his specialization. In *Les Majorats littéraires*⁶ Proudhon examines the consequences of the artist as mercenary, a professional who must fend for himself in the marketplace.

As early as 1847, a group of economists and writers had been formed in Paris, demanding that writers and poets have the rights of ownership over the products of their own work.⁷ Their organ, *Le Travail intellectuel*, was distributed in large numbers among politicians and members of the Conseil d'État and wielded a great deal of influence.

The rise of the serial novel during the July Monarchy had made immense fortunes for the writers who were in demand (such as Dumas and Sue), sweeping them into the world of the

⁶ P.-J. Proudhon, *Les Majorats Littéraires* in *Oeuvres complètes* vol. 16 (Paris: A. Lacroix, Verboeckhoven & Co., 1863).

⁷ Albert Cassagne, *La Théorie de l'art pour l'art en France chez les derniers romantiques et les premiers réalistes* (Paris: Champ Vallon, 1997) 59; and Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Idiot de la famille*, vol. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1972) 202-5.

market. Already in the 1840's some thinkers had noticed that with the increasing commercialization of the novel, writing had become a profession like any other, where the poet, like the bourgeois, seeks to enrich himself with the product of his work.⁸ Far from protesting against this commercialization, a number of writers demanded their share of the wealth produced by their work. In his book on Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin writes: "On a calculé que les droits de Lamartine, de 1838 à 1851, se montaient à 5 millions de francs."⁹ For *L'Histoire des Girondins* alone he had received 600,000 francs. His interest in the matter is thus perfectly understandable. It is in response to Lamartine's proposal in the writer's Congress of 1858 that Proudhon wrote *Les Majorats littéraires*. Lamartine had suggested perpetual returns on a book, royalties for the writer on the occasion of every reprint. It is essentially the modern law of copyrights, which did not yet exist. As a result of the influence of the journal *Le Travail intellectuel*, as well as the pressure exerted by writers themselves, the decree of 28-30 March 1852 had declared

⁸ Balzac had addressed this problem as early as 1839, calling for the creation of a "surface commerciale" that would ensure the writer's income from various editions of his work. See P.-A. Perrod, "Balzac 'avocat' de la propriété littéraire," *L'Année Balzacienne* 1963, 269-296.

⁹ Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire. Un poète lyrique à l'apogée du capitalisme* (Paris: Payot, 1979) 47.

illegal the reproduction of texts without the authorization of the author, but the author's rights were still limited and he was not the recipient of income from secondary editions. Proudhon, for his part, violently denounced the influence of what he called "mercenarisme" on the literature of his time. He saw that such a law would lead to the creation of an aristocracy of writers and *hommes de lettres*, distancing them even more from the people. For the *hommes de lettres* he reserved particular contempt, calling them "mercenary-artists." He invited them to join the crowd, to express its aspirations, its dreams of beauty, otherwise, "Arrière! Nous n'avons pas besoin de vous!" (373).

Proudhon's aesthetic theories are based on the social function of art. Art is not autonomous. It has a specific function. The goal of society is to establish the rule of justice -- a word that becomes a veritable fetish in the thought of Proudhon -- and art must be subordinated to this category. It thus appears that Proudhon's aesthetic theory is a moralist and didactic one. Does his demand that art represent the lower classes, the working classes, the ordinary and the everyday, lay the foundations of what was to become social realism? What would he have thought of Naturalism (he died in 1865)? I think that the bodily aspects and transgressions of Naturalism (Zola had claimed

that he was interested in the lower half of the body) would have revolted Proudhon's puritanical sensibility. He favored a more uplifting and sublime art, one that is rooted in the exigencies of the life of the community and its *ideals* (which he relates to justice), giving concrete shape to its dreams and aspirations. Realism, he demanded, must not be a passive reproduction of reality. For this reason, it must be mediated through and subordinated to the category of Justice. Not only must the artist accurately portray the life of his time, but he must be able to mediate it through the higher category of justice.

The specificity of the artist's link to his social milieu derives from Proudhon's ideas on decentralization and federalism. The artist in the countryside is obviously closer to the people than the cosmopolitan, urban artist. Courbet would not have been what he was had he been from Paris. Similarly, in studying the history of art and literature, Proudhon always favors those who were rooted in the popular life of their times: the troubadour poets who wandered the provinces (representing the decentralized art of the countryside, rich in oral tradition and local autonomy), Rabelais, Molière or la Fontaine.¹⁰ With the

¹⁰ The origins of the *littérature régionale* can, in this regard, be traced to the federalist theories of Proudhon: it was with a reading of the author of *Du Principe Fédératif* that Mistral "consolidated his thought." Claude Duchet, ed. *Manuel d'histoire littéraire de la France. De 1848 à 1913.*

advent of François I, literature became increasingly dominated by the court, cut off from its popular roots and subjected to the bureaucratic spirit of the court system. It became the expression of absolutism, culminating in the creation of the Académie Française.

Proudhon rejects art as the specialized activity of the few. He notes in his *Carnets*: "Une fois que les artistes, les bohèmes et les dandys auront été mis au ban de la société, tout le monde se mettra à la tâche et fera 'de l'art pour soi', par plaisir ou par obligation."¹¹ He sees no essential difference between art and work and demands a common form of organization that would encompass the two. "L'homme est travailleur, c'est-à-dire créateur et poète."¹² Courbet exemplifies the rejection of art as a specialized activity: he refuses the economic subsistence offered the artist by the marketplace¹³ (which supports and reinforces the specialization and isolation of the artist), he

vol. 5 (Paris: Les Éditions Sociales, 1977) 275.

¹¹ Quoted in André Reszler, *L'Esthétique anarchiste* (Paris: PUF, 1973) 20.

¹² P.-J. Proudhon, *Système des contradictions économiques ou Philosophie de la misère*, vol. 2 (Paris: C. Marpon et E. Flammarion, 1896) 364.

¹³ In his *Realism and Social Vision in Courbet and Proudhon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), James Henry Rubin studies Courbet's finances and his rejection of the market (by turning to the system of patronage) as a result of the influence of Proudhon.

reincarnates once again, after the Reformation, the popular in art. Art must once again, according to this theory, realign itself with the people in order to rejuvenate itself and overcome its *decadence* -- a word that constantly recurs in Proudhon's writing on aesthetics.

But there is also a parallel, more elusive line of argument to be found in Proudhon. Art can be renewed by its reintegration into the life of the community, or it can entirely abandon its own history and *leap into the unknown*.

It is a religious (one may say Jansenist) form of reasoning, often found in an anarchism that rejects everything worldly, *this-worldly*, and demands a complete destruction of everything known to man in order to build anew its own dream world.¹⁴ At times Proudhon despairs to find the course of art and literature so hopelessly derailed that there is no point in continuing any further:

"Encourager la littérature d'aujourd'hui, c'est vouloir ressusciter un mort." The art of today must be destroyed, forgotten, wiped out. Of the *Smala* of Vernet in the Louvre he writes in his characteristically vociferous language:

"Je demande que cette toile soit enlevée, ratissée, dégraissée, puis vendue comme filasse au chiffonnier"!
(162). At other times, it is the aesthetic faculty itself

¹⁴ We'll find this element more forcefully articulated by Bakunin.

that is threatened: "Il est incontestable que l'affaiblissement de la plus délicate des facultés de notre âme, la faculté esthétique... serait un signe certain que notre espèce commence à vieillir, qu'elle *s'incline vers le tombeau* [orig. emphasis] et ne fait plus guère chose que filer son linceul" (167). Nothing but the revolution can redeem the art and literature of our times. Yet there is no way to know the shape of things to come. The feverish days of February 1848 could furnish just such a promise, vague as it may have been: "Je sens [un art nouveau], je le devine, tout incapable que je suis d'en fournir le moindre exemplaire."

Proudhon's theories seem to have interested the writers of the nineteenth century in bits and pieces, isolated from the rest of his work. We can find, in the work of many writers, fragments taken almost haphazardly from his oeuvres. It would probably have pleased him, as it accords with the unsystematic and paradoxical thought of this eccentric figure. Suzanne Bernard, for instance, reports Rimbaud's avid reading of Proudhon.¹⁵ In *Les Soeurs de la charité*, she claims that "la Muse verte et la Justice ardente" is derived from Proudhon's conception of justice. Yet Rimbaud, like the Symbolist writers of the 1890's, would have found Proudhon's dictum that art be in the service of

¹⁵ Arthur Rimbaud, *Oeuvres* (Paris: Garnier, 1960) 404.

justice simply inadmissible. Rimbaud uses the word *justice* in passing, perhaps as a marker for Proudhon, but in no way could the concept imply its full Proudhonian sense. Immanent in humanity, the dominant faculty of the human soul, to which all others are subordinated (including the aesthetic), justice takes on aspects of the religious and the divine in Proudhon's thought.¹⁶

Nor does Jules Vallès, friend and admirer of the "father of anarchism," seem to have been familiar with many of Proudhon's works. He did not know *Du Principe de l'art* nor any of his aesthetic ideas. As I will show in Chapter 3, Vallès was primarily inspired by the anti-authoritarianism and the critique of Jacobinism found in the *Confessions d'un révolutionnaire* (1849), or the ironic *Manuel du spéculateur à la bourse* (1853) which closely recalls his own *L'Argent* (1863). Proudhon's aesthetic theories played no significant part in Vallès' ideas about art and literature. As we will have occasion to see more than once, it was the political ideas of the anarchists that appealed to many writers, which they could translate into their aesthetic practice. The didactic and moralistic aspects of Proudhon's writings were eschewed in favor of certain fragments of his thought: the necessity of the

¹⁶ Henri de Lubac, *The Unmarxian Socialist. A Study of Proudhon* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1948) 277, 279.

reintegration of art into life; the artist's need of a public which would invest his/her work with an urgent significance; the concept of the art of the unknown, an art that makes *tabula rasa* of tradition and the past, taking a leap into the future (a conception more forcefully articulated by Bakunin). It is in these ways that Proudhon appealed to the writers of the Symbolist generation.

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No two men could have been further apart in their background and upbringing than Bakunin and Proudhon. Born in a provincial aristocratic family in Russia in 1814, Michael Bakunin grew up in the gentle and even indulgent atmosphere of the Russian country house.¹⁷ His childhood reading consisted of novels of adventure, which enflamed the imagination of the child, carrying him to unknown lands and fabulous voyages. As a youth he found further stimulation in the work of the German Romantic writers, and in particular the fantastic tales of Jean Paul Richter and E.T.A. Hoffman. As his biographer Kaminski once observed, Bakunin's ideas underwent little change in the entire course

¹⁷ This short sketch is based on the two standard biographies of Bakunin: H.E.Kaminski, *Michel Bakounine: la vie d'un révolutionnaire* (Paris: Aubier, 1938); and E.H.Carr, *Michael Bakunin* (New York: Vintage, 1961).

of his life; throughout his evolution and engagement with various systems of thought their substance remained almost the same. The sensibility he found in the work of the German Romantics reinforced what was already present in his character. Years later, writing his confession to the Tsar, he acknowledged:

Il y eut toujours, dans ma nature, un défaut capital: l'amour du fantastique, des aventures extraordinaires et inouïes, des entreprises ouvrant au regard des *horizons illimités* et dont personne ne peut prévoir l'aboutissement. Dans une existence ordinaire et calme, j'étouffais, je me sentais mal à mon aise. Les hommes recherchent ordinairement la tranquillité et la considèrent comme le bien suprême; pour ma part, elle me mettait au désespoir; mon âme était dans une agitation perpétuelle, exigeant de l'action, du mouvement et de la vie. J'aurais dû naître quelque part dans les forêts américaines, parmi les colons du Far West, là où la civilisation en est encore à ses débuts et où toute existence n'est qu'une lutte incessante contre des hommes sauvages et contre la nature vierge, et non pas dans une société bourgeoise organisée.¹⁸

The literature of the fantastic blurred the lines between dream and reality, known and unknown, a shadowy realm where the possible and the impossible merge together. Bakunin affirmed years later: "I want to be the man of the *impossible*." And his friend Richard Wagner observed that "with this man of boundless activity everything rested upon

¹⁸ Michel Bakounine, *Confession* (Paris: Éditions Rieder, 1932) 171-2.

the most *impossible* hypotheses."¹⁹

Bakunin never wrote a treatise on art or aesthetics, and his ideas on the subject must be gathered from the totality of his writings, and from the reports of his friends and contemporaries. He expected the work of art to hint at the impossible, at the fantastic shape of things to come. Bakunin was always hostile towards revolutionary art, propagandist art, art with a revolutionary message. It is in the great art works of the past -- in their singularity and their insubordination to the *possible* logic of their time -- that he sees the potential of bridging the chasm between past and future. By temperament, music appealed to him more than literature and art, perhaps because of its greatest degree of abstraction. In Dresden, he attended a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony directed by Wagner in 1848. At the end of the concert, in Wagner's own words, "he walked unhesitatingly up to me in the orchestra, and said in a loud voice, that if all the music that had ever been written were lost in the expected world-conflagration, we must pledge ourselves to rescue this symphony, even at the peril of our lives."²⁰ Bakunin exercised a particular fascination on Wagner at this time.

¹⁹ Richard Wagner, *My Life* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1936) 471.

²⁰ Wagner, *My Life*, 466.

"The undersized and under-nourished Wagner was impressed by the colossal stature, the boundless physical energy, and the reckless courage of the Russian; and though... he could not go as far as Bakunin in the way of anarchy, he was spellbound by his tirades."²¹ Wagner's *Art and Revolution* (1849) bears the signs of this enchantment with the apostle of revolution and remained a classic of anarchist literature for many years. Its first translation into French was published by Jean Grave's *Les Temps Nouveaux* in 1895, and Kropotkin and Max Nettlau included it in the list of anarchist inspired books they recommended to the readers of Grave's journal. According to Jacques Barzun, Siegfried, at least in its first version, is a "life portrait of Bakunin."²²

Despite their close friendship and their long discussions about aesthetics, it appeared to Wagner that Bakunin had little interest in his projects for the future of art and the renewal of European civilization. Present art is constructed out of elements of actual reality, of our existing society, and according to Wagner, Bakunin "refused to admit that out of the needs of the evil present all laws for the future would have to be evolved, and that these,

²¹ Ernest Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner. 1848-1860*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) 50.

²² Jacques Barzun, *Darwin, Marx, Wagner. Critique of a Heritage* (New York: Anchor Books, 1958) 263.

moreover, must be molded upon quite different ideas of social culture."²³ Bakunin's revolutionary aim was accordingly *the total destruction of the world*. During the upheaval in Bohemia in 1849, he wrote to the Tsar:

Mon intention était de démolir tous les châteaux, de brûler, dans toute la Bohême, les dossiers de tous les procès administratifs, judiciaires, ou publics, les chartes et les titres seigneuriaux et d'annuler toutes les hypothèques... Bref, la révolution que je projetais était horrible et sans précédent, bien qu'elle fût tournée plutôt contre les choses que contre les hommes. En effet, elle eût à un tel point bouleversé les choses, elle se serait à un tel point insinuée dans le sang et dans la vie du peuple, que le gouvernement autrichien, même s'il avait vaincu la révolution, n'aurait jamais pu réussir à la déraciner, car il lui eût été impossible de choisir une tactique, de rassembler, voire même de retrouver les restes de l'ancien régime à jamais détruit.²⁴

The Art Work of the future cannot be imagined yet, it cannot be based on the forms of experience available in the present reality. *Destruam et aedificabo*, had written Proudhon. In his *Reaction in Germany* Bakunin would write: "The passion for destruction is also a creative passion." Is art possible in the existing society? Must everything be destroyed before the advent of an authentic art? We find at work once again the religious sensibility of anarchism, rejecting the world in its entirety in favor of the paradise to come.

²³ Wagner, *My Life*, 470-71.

²⁴ Bakounine, *Confession*, 208.

As André Reszler has remarked, Bakunin neglected art for action: it is not by words that he creates, it is by life, by action and revolt. It is not the artist or the work of art that can transform society. He impatiently brushed aside Wagner's theories for the renewal of civilization. "I never gathered that he set much store by my acquaintance," wrote the composer of *Lohengrin*; what he looked for were not men of culture and intelligence, but "men of reckless energy."²⁵ The German revolutionary Weitling's lack of an "intellectual culture" did not bother Bakunin, for his "savage fanaticism" was more than enough to compensate for his cultural shortcomings. Bakunin invested classical and Christian myths with a new, revolutionary content. Satan thus becomes "the eternal rebel, the first freethinker and the emancipator of worlds."²⁶ He accordingly imbues the myth of revolt with a new fantasmagoria. He is present at every revolution, organizing, ordering and fighting in a dream-like frenzy. He thus recalls the days of February 1848 in Paris:

Je ne saurais vous rendre un compte exact de ce mois passé à Paris, car ce fut un mois de griserie pour l'âme. Non seulement j'étais comme grisé, mais tous l'étaient: les uns de peur folle, les

²⁵ Wagner, *My Life*, 467.

²⁶ Michael Bakunin, *God and the State* (New York: Dover, 1970) 10. I reproduce the English or French spelling of Bakunin's name according to the reference. This image of the satan can also be found in Hugo's *La Fin de Satan*.

autres de folle extase, d'espoirs insensés. Je me levais à quatre ou à cinq heures du matin, je me couchais à deux heures, restant sur pieds toute la journée, allant à toutes les assemblées, réunions, clubs, cortèges, promenades ou démonstrations; en un mot, j'aspirais par tous mes sens et par tous mes pores l'ivresse de l'atmosphère révolutionnaire. C'était une fête sans commencement et sans fin... Il semblait que l'univers entier fût renversé; l'incroyable était devenu l'habituel, l'impossible possible, et le possible et l'habituel insensés.²⁷

The revolution of the mature man thus merges with the Romanticism of his youth, past with present, fantasy with reality. Bakunin adds the element of the *ecstatic* to the revolution, and in this sense he must be distinguished not only from Marx (in the light of whom he is usually studied), but from the other powerful revolutionary tradition of the nineteenth century, Blanquism. By way of the teachings of Buonarrotti, one of the associates of Graachus Babeuf in the affair of the Conspiracy of the Twelve in 1796, Blanquism continued the conspiratorial methods of the late Jacobin leader: the organization of a small group of professional revolutionaries into secret cells, who would plot strategic methods and seize the opportune moment, raiding key positions such as army barracks and the City Hall. They would then establish a Jacobin dictatorship on the model of *l'an II* of the Great Revolution. The Blanquists were solemn revolutionaries, devoted sternly to the cause, who saw the

²⁷ Bakounine, *Confession*, 102-3.

revolution as the necessary means to the establishment of the Jacobin dictatorship. They shared with Marxists the idea of the revolution as a stage in the struggle of the working class, quickly, if violently, accomplished, and swiftly concluded. If Bakunin risks emptying revolution from its serious, political and *practical* claims and goals, he does invest it with the element of the *ecstatic*, a fantasmagoria in which time stands still, and the possible and the impossible merge together in order to restore an authenticity lost to experience. This conception of revolution was once again taken up by Surrealists and later the Situationists in the twentieth century, which shows its greater field of influence to be cultural rather than political.²⁸

What is the relation of the work of art to such a conception of revolution, of life? The revolutionary upheavals realized by the great masterworks of music, and particularly the Ninth Symphony, seem to have transcended, in Bakunin's eyes, the limitation facing art in the existing

²⁸ In his essay on Surrealism, Walter Benjamin writes: "Since Bakunin, Europe has lacked a radical concept of freedom. The Surrealists have one... But are they successful in welding this experience of freedom to the other revolutionary experience that we have to acknowledge because it has been ours, the constructive, dictatorial side of revolution? In short, have they bound revolt to revolution? [...] To win the energies of intoxication for the revolution - this is the project about which Surrealism circles in all its books and enterprises." Walter Benjamin, *Reflections* (New York: Schocken, 1986) 189.

society. By combining elements available in the present reality, the great work of art succeeds in synthesizing, according to his friend Adolph Reichel, "le songe de la destruction universelle et le souvenir du paradis perdu."²⁹ Limited by the conditions of its own production, the great work of art can nonetheless overcome these restrictions by organizing elements derived from actual society into something more, something *impossible*, thus transcending the reality from which it stems and point to the yet unfathomable future. "Everything will pass," said Bakunin while lying in his deathbed, "and the world will perish, but the Ninth Symphony will remain."³⁰

We begin to notice the contours of a contradiction: the same man who would dismiss art and literature in favor of action and life sees in the masterpiece of Beethoven the only hope for the future of humanity, the only sign of life, a glimmer of things to come. In his later years, he foresaw with alarm the rise of a caste of scientists and *savants* as the priests of a new absolutist technocracy, and fixed his hopes on art to counter this tendency. "Science cannot go outside the sphere of abstractions. In this respect it is

²⁹ Quoted in Reszler, 35.

³⁰ E.H.Carr, *Michael Bakunin*, 506.

infinitely inferior to art."³¹ For "Life is wholly fugitive and temporary, but also wholly palpitating with reality and individuality, sensibility, suffering, joys, aspiration, needs, and passions." While science, in the hands of a government of scientists, can stifle life and reduce it to abstractions, art is "as it were the return of abstraction to life; science, on the contrary, is the perpetual immolation of life, fugitive, temporary, but real, on the altar of eternal abstractions."³² And Bakunin calls for art to take part in "the *revolt of life against science*, or rather the *government of science*," by approximating life's lost plenitude, for in itself, by itself, art does not have the power to bring about a new world.

Like Proudhon, Bakunin reserves a harsh judgment for Romanticism. For Proudhon, Romanticism was particularly dangerous in its creation of a cult of genius and the worship of the Great Man. Bakunin takes up this criticism, and pushes it further: Romanticism had introduced a nefarious form of individualism in history, a phenomenon that was parallel and congruous with the rapid development of bourgeois materialism in the first part of the nineteenth century. According to Bakunin, the individualism of the Romantics is different from the one envisioned by the

³¹ Bakunin, *God and the State*, 56.

³² Bakunin, *God and the State*, 57.

anarchists: the former is nothing but the corollary of the bourgeois principle in politics, "cette tendance... qui pousse l'individu à conquérir et à établir son propre bien-être, sa prospérité, son bonheur malgré tout le monde, au détriment et sur le dos de tout le monde." It is the negation of solidarity and social bonds. In *God and the State*, Bakunin further criticizes the Romantics for taking refuge in their "tender, delicate, distinguished souls, aspiring to heaven, and living on earth as if in spite of themselves."³³ They abandoned the masses, showing only horror and contempt for the life of their times (Bakunin speaks with contempt about Hugo's politics). Had Bakunin lost the enthusiasm of his early years for the work of the German Romantics, or did he distinguish between two tendencies in Romanticism? It is hard to say, particularly from the cursory nature of his remarks on art and literature.

The writers of the *fin de siècle* were above all fascinated by Bakunin as a revolutionary and a man of action. An article by a certain Debagori-Mobrievitch, who had visited the apostle of revolution during his final days in Locarno, was published in *La Revue Blanche* in 1895. He described Bakunin in almost mystical terms, finding the body of the old warrior broken after years of struggle, but the

³³ Bakunin, *God and the State*, 56.

flame had not waned a bit in his spirit. Several translations of Bakunin's works appeared in the journals during the 1890's -- not only anarchist, but also literary and Symbolist reviews, namely *La Revue Blanche*, *La Plume*, and *La Révolte*, among others. In Chapter 3, I will analyze the rise of the "literature of life," or *spontanéisme*, in the work of Bakunin's contemporary Jules Vallès. Through a fragmented realism, Vallès succeeds in approximating reality without recourse to the methods of Realism or Naturalism, or an overtly "political" or "social" literature.

The first generation of anarchist thinkers (Proudhon, Bakunin, Stirner and even to a lesser degree Kropotkin) was indeed very suspicious of "political art." Even Proudhon, with his insistence that the work be subordinated to justice, refused to make of art a tool of propaganda.³⁴ It was not until later figures such as Jean Grave and Fernand Pelloutier, whose thought betrays a preference for art as a tool of the movement, a form of propaganda, that elements of this current surface. Here I think we can speak of a *routinization* or *reification* of anarchist aesthetics, though we see an authentic reemergence of it again in the work of the Surrealists, the Situationists, or the "Happenings" of the 1960's, as André Reszler has argued in his *L'Ésthetique*

³⁴ George Woodcock, *Proudhon* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1987) 258.

anarchiste.

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Another aristocrat turned anarchist, Prince Kropotkin spent his youth in the palaces of the Tsar in Saint Petersburg. Kropotkin took up Bakunin's vision of art in the society of the future, with his cult of the unknown and the Dionysiac, of the fantasmagoria of revolution. He identified anarchism with adventure, as opposed to the reification of life in the existing society. For him, art and literature can provide a vision of this adventure at the present time. Like Proudhon, he admired the wandering bards who went around Russia singing folklore as well as epic songs in the festivals of the peasants. This decentralized art, "bearing the signs of local life and local character," was stamped out in Russia at the end of the Middle Ages by the Orthodox Church, which considered legends and folklore as Pagan and attempted to replace them by a Christian mythology. Kropotkin agreed with Proudhon that after the Middle Ages art was separated from life and limited to a particular sphere, reserved for an elite. Like Proudhon as well as his friend and contemporary Tolstoy (in *What is Art?*), Kropotkin deplored the fact that art has become a specialized activity. "Art has become too artificial," he

protested, "because, being chiefly for the rich, it has too much specialized its ways of expression." He concurred with Tolstoy that there is a need for an art that be accessible to everyone without compromising its aesthetic qualities. The Bible was just such a work, and it has not yet been surpassed.

Kropotkin was the first thinker to articulate the question of the commitment of the artist in modern terms.

In *Paroles d'un révolté* (1886) he wrote:

Vous, poètes, peintres, sculpteurs, musiciens, si vous avez compris votre vraie mission et les intérêts de l'art lui-même, venez donc mettre votre plume, votre pinceau, votre burin au service de la révolution. Racontez-nous dans votre style imagé ou dans vos tableaux saisissants les luttes titaniques des peuples contre leurs oppresseurs; enflammez les jeunes coeurs de ce beau souffle révolutionnaire qui inspirait nos ancêtres... Montrez au peuple ce que la vie actuelle a de laid, et faites-nous toucher du doigt les causes de cette laideur; dites-nous ce qu'une vie rationnelle aurait été, si elle ne se heurtait à chaque pas contre les inepties et les ignominies de l'ordre social actuel.³⁵

Following Proudhon, Kropotkin saw contemporary art as the product of a late society in decline, an art that would perish with the decadent society that engendered it. He definitely favored realism in modern art and literature, a realism that would be subordinated to what he called the *Ideal* (close to Proudhon's conception of justice). Realism

³⁵ Pierre Kropotkine, *Paroles d'un révolté* (Paris: Flammarion, 1886) 67.

must not dwell "mainly upon the lowest instincts of man, as it was understood by some French writers."³⁶ The reference obviously targets Zola and the Naturalists, of whom Kropotkin was indeed quite critical. He saw the work of the author of *Germinal* as a "step backwards from the realism of Balzac." He criticized Zola and Naturalism for reducing realism to a "mere anatomy of society," whereas "it had to have a higher background: the realistic description; [and] the realistic description has to be subservient to an idealistic aim."³⁷ Like Proudhon before him, Kropotkin resorts to the dubious categories of "decadence" and "degenerate art" in his criticism of Zola. He condemned Naturalists for excessively dwelling on degeneracy and abjection at the expense of all other aspects of life. Gogol and the Russian realists, he claimed, did not need to go to such extremes and could work through a realism that describes yet is at once subject to higher, idealistic aims. For "the truthfulness of Gogol to reality is almost ethnographical, without ever ceasing to be poetical."³⁸ In fact, Kropotkin's *Russian Literature* shows a definite preference for a realism that resists or criticizes the

³⁶ Peter Kropotkin, *Russian Literature. Ideals and Realities* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1991) 61.

³⁷ Peter Kropotkin, *Russian Literature*, 90.

³⁸ Peter Kropotkin, *Russian Literature*, 71.

prevalent system of authority, what, as in the thought of his predecessor Proudhon, results in a privileging of content over form and leads him to ignore the aspects of literature that are not primarily social.

Kropotkin even shows a certain incomprehension towards the literature of his time. In his articles in *La Révolte* in the early 1890's he chastises the Naturalists, and yet has nothing to say on Symbolism in France, the only literary movement that was seriously engaged with anarchism in these years. He shows complete bewilderment towards Dostoevsky, whereas he deeply admires the more traditional realism of Tolstoy. He claims that the *Memoirs of the House of the Dead* is the only book of Dostoevsky with any artistic merit.

Dostoevsky's novels are otherwise "infected" with vague and confused ideas, their formal organization is "below the level of criticism," and the "slipshod" words of his characters transparently reveal the ideas of the author, which are then repeated over and over again (an interpretation far from the heteroglossia Bakhtin was to find in Dostoevsky). He is horrified at the subject matter he finds in Dostoevsky's work, and is profoundly disturbed by his characters:

The favorite themes of Dostoevsky are the men who have been brought so low by circumstances of their lives that they have not even a conception of there being a possibility of rising above these conditions. You feel, moreover, that Dostoevsky finds a real pleasure in describing the

sufferings, moral and physical, of the downtrodden -- that he revels in representing the misery of mind, the absolute hopelessness of redress, and the completely broken down condition of human nature which is characteristic of neuro-pathological cases... There is certainly not in any literature such a collection of the most repulsive types of mankind -- lunatics, half-lunatics, criminals in germ and in reality, in all possible gradations, as one finds in his novels.³⁹

The Brothers Karamozov, objects Kropotkin, may have pleased critics who are fond of "morbid literature," but he can find nothing appealing in this fantastic fabrication, "here, a bit of morals, there, some abominable character taken from a psycho-pathological hospital." It was a book he had the "greatest pain" to finish, and could not even bring himself to read *The Idiot* to the end.

More than Bakunin, Proudhon or Stirner, it was Kropotkin's theories on art and literature that appealed to the anarchist generation of the 1890's in France. Jean Grave and Fernand Pelloutier clearly favored Realism over the various currents of literature of the *fin de siècle*, including Symbolism. Grave's choice of literature that he included in the literary supplement of *La Révolte* and later *Les Temps Nouveaux* clearly shows this inclination: Tolstoy, Maupassant, Octave Mirbeau, Lucien Descaves, and Léon Cladel, among others. Though Grave approved of *Germinal*, he was critical of Zola's other works, particularly after 1891

³⁹ Peter Kropotkin, *Russian Literature*, 180, 184.

when Zola, as the president of the Société des Gens de Lettres sued *La Révolte* for non-payment of reproduction fees.⁴⁰ Grave was also critical of Symbolism, which he found too obscure in its means of expression, too elitist and disdainful of the people. He favored, by contrast, a literature of clear language and lucid thought:

On peut chercher à rendre une idée compréhensible, éloigner les obscurités voulues, chercher une façon claire de dire les choses, de façon à empoigner le cerveau des plus obtus, et provoquer chez eux une série de raisonnements qui les amènent à saisir un coin de l'oeuvre. Nous croyons même que c'est là, la tendance de tout art, et qu'il est bien plus facile de planer dans les hauteurs en restant incompréhensible, que d'être clair et précis, tout en restant impeccable dans la forme.⁴¹

During a polemic with Roinard in the pages of *L'Endehors*, Grave professed his indifference towards Symbolism and art for art's sake, preferring a literature "qui [évoque] une idée."⁴² In *La Société future*, he even envisioned the possibility of great works of art which would also be "des oeuvres de propagande."⁴³

Fernand Pelloutier, the pioneer of anarcho-syndicalism

⁴⁰ Since Proudhon, anarchists have always been against questions of copyright and limited reproduction. To this day anarchist publishers repudiate copyrights and allow the free reproduction of books.

⁴¹ Jean Grave, *La Société future* (Paris: Stock, 1895) 358.

⁴² Jean Grave's response to Roinard, and this latter's rejoinder in *L'Endehors*, n.12, 21 July 1891.

⁴³ Grave, *La Société future*, 359.

in France, ascribed a demystificatory role to art, much along the lines that Kropotkin had suggested: "Dévoiler les mensonges sociaux, dire comment et pourquoi ont été créées les religions, imaginé le culte patriotique, construite la famille sur le modèle du gouvernement, inspiré le besoin de maîtres: tel doit être le but de l'art révolutionnaire." The perversion with which contemporary art is infected, he went on to claim, is the contempt writers show for the masses and their common sense, which leads certain writers into their elitist and esoteric language. Others fetishistically present the degradation *le peuple* has fallen into (he denounces Paul Bonnetain's *Charlot s'amuse* and Huysmans' *Les Soeurs Vatar* among others), whereas the healthy work of Zola can cause indignation by accurately showing the fate of the worker: "Ce réalisme [that of Bonnetain and Huysmans] que le talent n'ennoblit pas, ne soulève nul mépris, -- tandis que le réalisme puissant et sain de Zola excite la réprobation."⁴⁴ In the last analysis art remains a tool for Pelloutier, an arm "qui doit faire des révoltés."

Grave and Pelloutier tended to judge art primarily in view of the needs of the anarchist movement. Their interpretations were thus firmly based on a sociological

⁴⁴ Fernand Pelloutier, *L'Art et la révolte* (Paris: Bibliothèque de *L'Art Social*, 1896) 18.

reading of art and literature, as is clear in the articles⁶¹ of the journal *L'Art Social*. This was the organ of a group of anarcho-syndicalists (including Fernand Pelloutier, Gabriel de la Salle and Bernard Lazare) founded in 1895 which sought to create an autonomous proletarian culture free from the influence of the bourgeoisie. Pelloutier attributed an extraordinary power to art: "Du même que l'art bourgeois fait plus pour le maintien du régime capitaliste que toutes les autres forces sociales réunies [!], de même l'art social et révolutionnaire fera plus pour l'avènement du communisme libre que tous les actes de révoltes inspirées à l'homme par l'excès de ses souffrances."⁴⁵ Accordingly, the group *L'Art Social* organized theaters, art exhibits, conferences and lectures on art and literature in the working class districts of Paris. Their journal is an important document of the rapprochement of a number of writers and the anarcho-syndicalist movement after 1894, the date of the demise of the anarcho-individualist tendencies in literary circles.

Bernard Lazare was among the first writers who joined the anarcho-syndicalist camp. He essentially agreed with Kropotkin and Pelloutier's ideas on art and literature. In 1896, he had met Pelloutier through the intermediary of another anarchist, Augustin Hamon, while they were both

⁴⁵ Pelloutier, *L'Art et la révolte*, 26-7.

delivering lectures on the revolutionary role of art for the group L'Art Social in the Parisian *faubourgs*. His *L'Écrivain et l'art social* is a harsh attack on the Symbolist, decadent, and mystical currents in the literature of the *fin de siècle*. Lazare seems to have wavered on the question of Symbolism, for he did write an article in 1895 in *La Plume* praising Mallarmé. In *L'Écrivain et l'art social*, however, he attacks the Symbolists for having rejected Naturalism, not because of its insufficiencies, but because they have a horror of life (a criticism often directed against the Symbolists). Literature, declared Lazare, must be realist, but realism should not limit itself to a passive reproduction of reality, base and abject as it has become. It must rather present the latent elements that are present today in society and will bloom tomorrow. "Pour rendre à la vie sa beauté, il faut donc que l'art à son tour aide à transformer la société et c'est ainsi que tout art social devient un art révolutionnaire."⁴⁶ Art, as Kropotkin had written, is a "torch-bearer which indicates a higher ideal,"⁴⁷ an idea that Lazare sought to demonstrate in his novel *Les Porteurs de torches*, an answer to Nietzsche's Zarathustra turned into anarchist prophet (see Chapter 4).

⁴⁶ Bernard Lazare, *L'Écrivain et l'art social* (Paris: Bibliothèque de L'Art Social, 1896) 30.

⁴⁷ Kropotkin, *Russian Literature*, *op.cit.*, 88.

Besides the anarchist personalities of the fin de siècle, Lazare was not the only *littérateur* who respected and was influenced by Kropotkin. Many writers were impressed by Kropotkin's simple, lucid yet beautiful writing; others with the sincerity and integrity with which he lived his life. One of his greatest disciples was the novelist Octave Mirbeau, whose American and French biographers have copiously documented the extent of his allegiance to the ideas of Kropotkin. Upon the publication of *La Conquête du pain*, even Zola was stirred, calling the book a "true poem," and Barrès wrote of Kropotkin's "beautiful logic" stemming from a "strong generosity" in 1891.⁴⁸ These writers (that is, *littérateurs*) were more inspired by Kropotkin's gentle dream of the society of the future, of a world in which individuals can live in harmony and develop to the full their aesthetic faculties, rather than his theories on art and literature. Even though he had advocated the methods of propaganda by the deed in the 1880's, the excesses of the wave of anarchist *attentats* drove Kropotkin to recoil from the Stirnean and individualist strands, elements that primarily appealed to the Symbolists. He himself never seriously engaged with the Symbolist movement, and one wonders if he ever read their

⁴⁸ George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Anarchist Prince: A Biographical Study of Peter Kropotkin* (New York: Shocken Books, 1971) 266.

works. In his case too we find writers more interested in⁶⁴ his political and social theories -- which they themselves applied to the aesthetic field -- rather than his theories of art. Was the utopia envisioned by the anarchists closer to literature than to politics? Or could we say that the anarchist dream blurs the distinction between the two?

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The work of Max Stirner (1806-1856) surfaces at certain turbulent moments of history before taking refuge, once again, on the dusty shelves of libraries. Upon the publication of his book *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* in 1845, Stirner enjoyed a *succès de scandale* that faded completely after the 1848 revolutions.⁴⁹ The book was nonetheless important enough to warrant a violent response by Marx himself, who devoted the major part of *The German Ideology* to brutally attack the book. We forget today that almost the entire 600 pages or so of *The German Ideology* were devoted to an attack on "Saint Max," as the abbreviated

⁴⁹ The title is difficult to translate and has been rendered in English as, at times, *The Individual and His Properties* and at others as *The Ego and its Own*. References will be to Max Stirner, *L'Unique et sa propriété*, trans. Docteur Reclaire (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1960). There were, originally two French translations, both published in the same year (1900). One published by Stock (translated by Docteur Reclaire), and the other published by the Éditions de *La Revue Blanche*, translated by Henri Lasvignes.

edition widely read today (in German, French and English) eliminates the majority of the polemic with Stirner.⁵⁰

Max Stirner was the pseudonym of Johann Kaspar Schmidt, a philosopher in the circle of young Hegelians in Berlin in the 1840's. He was a mild mannered man, quiet and reflective.⁵¹ His philosophy advocated violence, passionate egoism and condoned selfishness and crime. There is little known about him as Schmidt, and he was soon forgotten even as Max Stirner. It was not until John Henry Mackay rediscovered him at the end of the century -- in the midst of the vogue for Nietzsche and anarchism -- that he came to light again.⁵² Mackay presented Stirner as a precursor of the individualist current of anarchism, wrenching him from

⁵⁰ The full edition of *The German Ideology* was actually never widely read. Marx and Engels began writing the book in 1846, but abandoned the manuscript to start *The Communist Manifesto* and never returned to it with the outbreak of the 1848 revolutions. After the death of Marx, Engels picked up the manuscript once again in 1886, when he was at work on *Ludwig Feuerbach*, but thought it too fragmentary and set it aside. During the fin-de-siècle vogue for Stirner, Bernstein published long extracts on "Saint-Max." Finally, in 1927, a complete Russian edition saw the light of day, and was included in *The Collected Works* of Marx and Engels in Russia in 1932. The complete edition is still difficult to find: it first appeared in English in 1965. *The German Ideology*, trans. Clemens Dutt (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1965).

⁵¹ The standard biography of Stirner is John Henry Mackay, *Max Stirner: sein Leben und sein Werk* (Berlin: Schuster und Loeffler, 1898).

⁵² On Stirner and Nietzsche, Albert Lévy, *Stirner et Nietzsche* (Paris: Société Nouvelle de Librairie et d'Édition, 1904).

his proper historical context, which was the circle of young Hegelians in Berlin and the complex of their interests and concerns.⁵³ Born in 1806 in Bayreuth in a family of artisans, Stirner studied philosophy and theology at the university of Berlin, but failed to pass the examinations for obtaining the license to teach in Prussian universities.

In 1839 he began teaching in Madame Gropius' school for young ladies, and for a time this position seemed to stabilize his life. He began frequenting the taverns and coffee houses of Berlin and became a member of the group the "Freien," or the "free ones," as the bohemian young Hegelians called themselves, a group that included Bruno Bauer and his brother, Buhl, as well as more distant associates such as Marx, Ruge and Engels.

After publishing a few articles in the early 1840's, Stirner's *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* was published in 1845. Here is its argument, as described by Isaiah Berlin:

Stirner believed that all programs, ideals, theories as well as political, social and economic orders are so many artificially built prisons for the mind and the spirit, means of curbing the will, of concealing from the individual the existence of his own infinite creative powers, and that all systems must therefore be destroyed, not because they are evil, but because they are

⁵³ Henri Arvon's *Aux Sources de l'existentialisme: Max Stirner* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954) studies Stirner's career and life in the context of the young Hegelian group. See also William Brazill's excellent *The Young Hegelians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970) 175-225.

systems, submission to which is a form of idolatry; only when this has been achieved would man, released from his unnatural fetters, become truly master of himself and attain to his full stature as a full human being.⁵⁴

Stirner seeks to undo every form of authority outside of the self by claiming the absolute sovereignty of the individual, almost elevating him to the status of God: "Aussi bien que Dieu, je suis la négation de tout le reste, je suis pour moi tout, je suis l'Unique."⁵⁵ Stirner's "egoism" is incommensurate with romantic subjectivity since he denied any goal or end to the life of the individual: the realization of his egoism does not entail any notions of human emancipation, freedom or betterment. He was monomaniacally opposed to any teleological categories, which he considered so many *idées fixes* enslaving the human mind. "The autonomous individual was in his conception not a descriptive category but a hoped-for goal of future human endeavor, a goal that is presaged only among the outcasts of modern society, only among its criminals and paupers."⁵⁶

For the circle of Left Hegelians, religion represented the crux of centuries of human alienation: by objectifying his spirit into an alienated and abstract essence outside of

⁵⁴ Sir Isaiah Berlin, *Karl Marx, His Life and Environment* (New York: Oxford UP, 1959) 137-8.

⁵⁵ Stirner, *L'Unique*, 9.

⁵⁶ Paul Thomas, *Karl Marx and the Anarchists*, 129.

himself, man had forfeited his own freedom and willingly enslaved himself to an external principle. The Left Hegelians, therefore, never ceased to attack religion which they considered the greatest culprit in the drama of human alienation. This critique reached its clearest expression in Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, who saw that a demystification of the process of man's self-alienation by religion would restore the "human" by allowing man to find the categories of wholeness and freedom, which he had hitherto projected into a transcendent entity outside of himself. Stirner went beyond this criticism and even attacked Feuerbach head on, for trying to replace an abstraction with human essence: any category (Feuerbach's humanism and even the notion of "human") imposed from the outside on the individual was suspect to him. Feuerbach was merely replacing the category of God with that of "humanity," another abstraction that would dominate the individual. Stirner reserved his harshest attacks for Protestantism, which he saw as the highest completion of the spirit of Christianity, the greatest sublimation of the individual into "Spirit," into an abstraction. With Protestantism, "Aimer l'homme corporel, en chair et en os, ne serait plus un amour 'spirituel' [as it had been with Christianity], ce serait une trahison envers l'amour 'pur',

l'intérêt théorique."⁵⁷ "Man" truly becomes an abstraction, a mere fantom. The Humanity that we are supposed to love in the Protestant religion, according to Stirner, corresponds to no real human beings. It completes the cycle of alienation in the most radical fashion, by detaching man's essence from him and replacing it with "Spirit." To desire the freedom of Spirit, of the "heart," and of sentiment is a mere delusion, for these are only ideas that have taken on an autonomous, alienated life, with which, according to Christianity and its latest sublimation Protestantism, the individual is supposed to identify. The Unique, by contrast, only treats these elements as his property, which he can use at will. They cannot exercise authority over him.

For Stirner, the sublimation accomplished by Protestantism transforms religious obligation into an internal one -- the self-regulation of the individual by *himself* -- and replaces the kingdom of God with that of the Spirit. Its latest manifestation is to be found in the liberalism of the nineteenth century, for which the concept of Humanity becomes fetishized into an *idée fixe*. In philosophy, Descartes had already provided the foundations for this principle: the individual is not body or physical sensations, but thoughts: he is pure Spirit, pure

⁵⁷ Stirner, *L'Unique*, 28.

abstraction.

The Stirnerean ego sees even revolution as another abstraction, *idée fixe*, "spook" in history enslaving the self and submitting it to self-sacrifice for the sake of an "end." Stirner counters revolution with a rebellion which would know no specific goal, based purely on the unconcerted uprising of unique individuals. "Such an uprising would take place spontaneously and without regard to future arrangements; its object would be less the overthrow of the established order than the elevation of the autonomous individual above all established orders."⁵⁸ It is difficult to envision the world proposed by Stirner, as the very existence of anything outside the ego is at times solipsistically disputed by him: "Mais Moi, je ne suis pas un 'moi' auprès d'autres 'moi': je suis le seul Moi, je suis Unique."⁵⁹

After the publication of his book in 1845, Stirner abruptly resigned from his teaching job. The reasons are unknown to us, but we may speculate that he hoped the success of his book would bring him a certain degree of economic security. The book caused great agitation in Germany, but the revenues from sales were negligible. Bruno Bauer and the other Left Hegelians, being violently attacked

⁵⁸ Stirner, *L'Unique*, 141.

⁵⁹ Stirner, *L'Unique*, 327-8.

in *Der Einzige*, felt deep resentment and hostility, and their relationship with Stirner soon deteriorated. His marriage fell apart, and his new reputation prevented him from obtaining another teaching job. He sank into desperate poverty, and when the 1848 revolutions swept through Germany he could only watch the events with detachment and contempt.

He died in 1856, leaving behind only debts, his book and a brief notoriety.

In 1888, a young German philosopher by the name of John Henry Mackay chanced upon a reference to Stirner, saw in him the predecessor of anarchism and Nietzsche and began enthusiastically writing about him. Stirner gained once again a notoriety, particularly in France, where excerpts of his book were translated and published in various journals (namely, *Les Entretiens Politiques et Littéraires* edited by the symbolist poet Francis Viéle-Griffin, and the *Mercure de France*, both in 1892), before the translation of the complete *Der Einzige* was begun in 1898. This popularity among the writers of the 1890's was not particularly due to his aesthetic theories. In an essay written in 1842 and published in *Rheinische Zeitung* entitled "Kunst und Religion," Stirner described art as a phenomenon that had historically preceded religion, but worked essentially in the same manner: art, like religion, is human essence embodied and made sensible for man to worship outside of

himself. Art had indeed paved the way for religion and thus alienation. In artistic creation, "man stands alienated from himself."⁶⁰ In another essay in the same volume, originally published in 1843, Stirner criticized Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* along the same lines as Marx. His object of criticism was primarily political and not literary: he saw Sue (as well as his characters) enslaved by the *idée fixe* of the categories of morality, vice and virtue.

These essays did not offer a distinct theory of art or literature which could be of use to artists and writers. Instead, it was Stirner's aggressive individualism that won over the writers of the 1890's in France, who saw themselves as beleaguered by a world of philistinism. Anarchism was often lumped together with the Barresian "cult of the self," a confused category (to which we will return) which stood for the exaltation of the individual and his free and unfettered development at whatever cost necessary. The Symbolist writer Adolphe Retté equated "le droit au libre épanouissement de la personnalité" with anarchism, and in its first issue, *La Revue Blanche* presented its program in this way: "Très simplement, nous voulons développer ici nos

⁶⁰ This essay is reproduced in a volume edited by J.H. Mackay, *Max Stirner, Kleinere Schriften* (Berlin: 1898) 36.

personnalités."⁶¹ *L'Endehors*, a literary review run by Zo d'Axa, went even beyond anarchism in its nihilistic affirmation of the individual. Its program, as announced in its first issue, defined the journal thus: "Celui que rien n'enrôle et qu'une impulsive nature guide seul, ce passionnel complexe, ce hors-la-loi, ce hors d'école, cet isolé chercheur d'au-delà ne se dessine-t-il pas dans ce mot: "Endehors?"⁶² Zo d'Axa's nihilism was so extreme that he would even attack anarchism: "C'est en dehors de toutes les lois, de toutes les règles, de toutes les théories--même anarchistes--c'est dès l'instant, dès tout de suite que nous voulons nous laisser aller à nos pitiés, à nos emportements, à nos douceurs, à nos rages, à nos instincts--avec l'orgueil d'être nous-mêmes."⁶³ Victor Méric in his memoirs recounted how Zo d'Axa reproached his anarchist staff for believing too much in anarchism. "Il était seul, impeccablement 'seul,' et repoussait tout disciple. Comment le suivre? L'En-dehors. Il était L'En-dehors!"⁶⁴ Another Symbolist

⁶¹ Adolphe Retté. "Reflexions sur l'anarchie," *L'Art et la Vie*, n.28, June 1894. Also *La Revue Blanche*, 15 October 1891.

⁶² *L'Endehors*, n.2, 12 May 1891.

⁶³ Zo d'Axa, *L'Endehors*, ed. Jean-Pierre Courty (Paris: Éditions Champ Libre, 1974) 123-124.

⁶⁴ Victor Méric, *Coulisses et tréteaux: A travers la jungle politique et littéraire* (Paris: Librairie Valois, 1931) 16, 10.

writer, Remy de Gourmont, came very close to a Stirnerian conception: the unique individual (whom he equated with the artist), for him, does not need to bother with external contingencies, since he is complete unto himself. He can do away with practical matters such as tradition, family, procreation, morality, "la patrie," and even sociability. "Un individu est un monde; cent individus font cent mondes, et les uns aussi légitimes que les autres: l'idéaliste ne saurait donc admettre qu'un seul type de gouvernement: l'an-archie."⁶⁵ Anarchism for de Gourmont amounted to either the domination of all by a few superior individuals, or a lack of government which would allow these individuals to develop their selves indefinitely. He had equal contempt for the masses, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, all of whom he saw as a hindrance to the life of the intellectual elite. And for Oscar Wilde, "art [was] the most intense mode of individualism that the world has known."⁶⁶

The Stirnerean and individualist strands of anarchism have to be placed in the context of Maurice Barrès' trilogy of novels, *Le Culte du moi*. It is difficult to stress today the universal influence and prestige that Barrès enjoyed in

⁶⁵ Remy de Gourmont, "L'Idéalisme," *Les Entretiens Politiques et Littéraires*, n.19, October 1891, 16-17.

⁶⁶ Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of Man under Socialism," *The Artist as Critic. Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Richard Ellman (New York: Vintage, 1968) 270.

the 1890's before the Dreyfus affair (after which his influence waned). In the three volumes of his trilogy-- *Sous l'oeil des barbares* (1888), *Un Homme libre* (1889) and *Le Jardin de Bérénice* (1891), Barrès explored the dilemmas of modern individualism--a problem common enough in the literature of the period (for example, in the work of Paul Bourget), but which Barrès now presented in the context of modern politics. *Sous l'oeil des barbares* presents primarily the attempts of a young man (we only know him through his mental wanderings and never find out his name) to live the inner life of his own *moi*. Everyone outside of his self (and not merely the bourgeois) is a barbarian, incapable of understanding his delicate self forever in search of intense sensations.⁶⁷ In the next volume, *Un Homme libre*, the protagonist Philippe (whose name becomes only apparent in this volume) presents such anarchistic conclusions as the following: "Que chacun satisfasse son moi, et l'humanité sera une belle forêt, belle de ce que tout, arbres, plantes et animaux s'y développeront,

⁶⁷ "Qu'on le classe vulgaire ou d'élite, chacun, hors moi, n'est que barbare. A vouloir me comprendre, les plus subtils et bienveillants ne peuvent que tâtonner, dénaturer, ricaner, s'attrister, me déformer enfin, comme de grossiers dévastateurs, auprès de la tendresse, des restrictions, de la souplesse, de l'amour enfin que je prodigue à cultiver les délicates nuances de mon Moi." Maurice Barrès, *Sous l'oeil des barbares*, in *Le Culte du moi* (Paris: Plon, 1922) 103. All other references will be to this edition.

s'élanceront selon leur sève."⁶⁸ Barrès' protagonist in *L'Ennemi des lois* (1892), André Maltère, is a disciple of Saint-Simon and Kropotkin and avows anarchist theory. Most of the book is taken up by social and political debates, even though they are all presented in a shallow and undigested manner. To many of his contemporaries in the early 1890's -- perhaps too enthusiastic to claim him for their own cause -- Barrès was an anarchist. Today this claim seems an exaggeration, but Barrès was united with the individualist anarchists in the early 1890's in their common affirmation of the "exaltation of the individual against modern society."⁶⁹ As late as 1897, we find Léon Blum's enthusiastic review of Barrès' *Le Roman de l'énergie nationale*, which shows the ease with which Barrès crossed political lines.⁷⁰

The search for intense sensations and their acute individualism led many writers and artists of this period to the left of the anarchist movement. In the section on "illegalism" we will see how the philosophy of crime emerged spontaneously from among the popular classes and surprised and even dismayed some of the intellectuals who found it

⁶⁸ Barrès, *Sous l'oeil des barbares*, 114.

⁶⁹ Jacques Julliard, *Fernand Pelloutier et les origines du syndicalisme d'action directe* (Paris: Seuil, 1971) 93.

⁷⁰ In *La Revue Blanche*, Nov. 1897, 293.

thoroughly irresponsible. Yet Georges Darien in his *Le Voleur* (1897) depicts a dandy-thief who happily practices the *reprise individuelle* (see below) and argues in favor of a philosophy of crime. Or, the notion of "réfractaire," developed by Jules Vallès in the 1860's, which Proudhon, who emphasized work and family, would have found thoroughly senseless (Stirner was completely forgotten at this time and Vallès did not read German).⁷¹ Vielé-Griffin even made the argument that only the *illettré* -- the beggar or the shepherd -- could appreciate the free verse of Symbolist poetry: his meditative capacity was not yet atrophied, and his instincts not blunted by the rhetoricians.⁷² During the terrorist *attentats* of the early 1890's, Kropotkin and Malatesta loudly denounced the actions of Ravachol and the others.⁷³ The Symbolists had a different attitude. During

⁷¹ Besides Stirner, Bakunin also argued in favor of the *déclassé* urban elements, criminals, and social misfits as agents of revolution, a theory that particularly irked Marx. According to Bakunin, "Celui qui ne comprend pas le brigand ne comprend pas le peuple." *La Révolte*, n.2, 26 Sept. 1891. I will discuss the relation of Vallès with Bakunin in the third chapter.

⁷² Typical of this generation was the equation of the working classes and the aristocracy: both were the enemies of the bourgeoisie who was itself the enemy of the poets. The shepherd, Vielé-Griffin casually adds, could also be the inheritor of an aristocratic fortune! Francis Vielé-Griffin. "A l'illettré," *Les Entretiens*, n.2, 1 May 1890, 56.

⁷³ In the early 1890's, Paris was terrorized by a number of explosions by anarchists. Arrests and executions began a cycle of revenge and retaliation, leading to more bombs and more arrests. Among the more spectacular of these were

a banquet for the Symbolist journal *La Plume*, the Parnassian poet Laurent Tailhade, responding to a question about the bomb that Vaillant had thrown that day into the Chamber of Deputies, said: "Qu'importe la mort de vagues humanités, pourvu que le geste soit beau et si, par elle, s'affirme l'individu!"⁷⁴ The Symbolists Pierre Quillard and Paul Adam took on the defense of Ravachol, at a time when he stood for public enemy number one in the bourgeois mind. Ravachol's bombs, the superhuman strength he had shown at the time of his arrest, the calm heroism with which he had walked to the guillotine (as his head fell off, his final words were: "Vive la ré...") had indeed struck terror in the hearts of the bourgeoisie. In his delirious "Éloge de Ravachol," Paul Adam vindicated Ravachol as a martyr sacrificing his own life for the sake of the poor; it is society, claimed Adam, that must be blamed and not Ravachol, who retaliated instead of succumbing to humiliation and

Auguste Vaillant's bomb thrown into the Chamber of Deputies on December 9th, 1893; Ravachol, who was responsible for several explosions; Emile Henry, who threw a bomb in the Café Terminus of the gare Saint-Lazare on February 12th, 1894; and Caserio, who stabbed and killed President Carnot in 1895. See H. Varennes, *De Ravachol à Caserio* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1895).

⁷⁴ The incident was recounted endlessly and caused a scandal in the popular press. Two weeks later, Tailhade was himself a victim of an anarchist bomb and lost an eye. The conservative press gleefully reported the event, but Tailhade refused to denounce his original statement. See André Billy, *L'Époque 1900 (1885-1905)* (Paris: Jules Tallandier, 1951) 425.

cowardice. As long as injustice reigns in the world, he went on to write, theft and murder will be the weapons of true individuals (Adam often advocated violence and even war). Pierre Quillard also exonerated Ravachol: it is the task of poets to glorify this hero, as they did in the past with the killers of monsters.⁷⁵ Elsewhere, Quillard had seen literature to be an instance of the "propaganda of the deed," as the terrorist acts of anarchists were then called.⁷⁶

The strong individualism of the generation of 1890 drew them to anarchists. It is often claimed that these writers had no interest in politics but were spellbound by the individualism and the promises of artistic liberty they found in anarchist theory. Whatever the reason for their interest in anarchism, it is obvious that there are multiple links between the aesthetic and political theories of the anarchists and the struggles of the writers of the Symbolist generation to free literature of social and literary constraints, and claim it as an autonomous field of human activity. In the chapters that follow, we will examine the different aspects of this relationship and the different

⁷⁵ Pierre Quillard, "Entretien sur la vie et la mort de Ravachol," *L'Ermitage*, September 1892, 47-52; and Paul Adam, "Eloge de Ravachol," *Les Entretiens*, July 1892, 27-30.

⁷⁶ Pierre Quillard, "L'Anarchie par la littérature," *Les Entretiens*, April 1892, 150.

shapes it took in the work of writers in France in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER 2

ANARCHISM AND THE SYMBOLIST MOVEMENT

If we take as our point of departure Paul Valéry's definition of Symbolism as the first literary movement that isolated "la poésie de toute autre essence qu'elle-même," in order to return to "pure poetry," that is, a precept according to which all extra-literary phenomena should be excluded from poetry, we would be puzzled to find the numerous allusions the documents of the period make to the social dimensions of Symbolism, and in particular to its relations to the anarchist movement.¹ In *La Mêlée symboliste*, Ernest Raynaud remembered the collusion between the two groups:

C'est pourquoi l'on assiste à la collusion des esthètes et des compagnons anarchistes. Les uns et les autres se relayent dans les réunions publiques pour exposer leur programme à l'assemblée qui ne retient de tous ces discours mêlés qu'un seul point, c'est qu'il est question de détruire quelque chose. Edouard Dubus met sous le patronage de Louise Michel ses conférences sur l'esthétique nouvelle. On voit, à travers les nuages des pipes, se succéder sur l'estrade Rachilde et Sébastien Faure, Paul Minck et Paul Adam, Séverine et Roinard, Ibels et le compagnon Martinet. On fulmine contre les fusillades et l'interdiction de *Lohengrin* à l'Opéra et l'assemblée se sépare aux crix alternés de "Vive

¹ Paul Valéry, *Variété* (Paris: Gallimard, 1922) 95.

le vers libre" et "Vive l'anarchie!"²

The journal *La Plume* devoted a special number to anarchism in 1893, and in the same year the journal *Ermitage* ran a poll asking writers: "Quelle est la meilleure condition du Bien social, une organisation spontanée et libre, ou bien une organisation disciplinée et méthodique? Vers laquelle de ces conceptions doivent aller les préférences des artistes?"³ It is not only surprising that the social question should appear in a literary journal, but that it should be posed within the anarchist framework of freedom versus authority. The editors of *Ermitage* did not even sympathize with anarchism: the chief editor Henri Mazel was a royalist. The appearance of such a poll in the pages of *Ermitage* shows the extent to which anarchism had penetrated literary circles around 1890. Over half of the respondents to the poll declared themselves in favor of liberty and spontaneity, eleven explicitly identifying themselves as anarchists. Oscar Wilde responded: "Autrefois, j'étais poète et tyran. Maintenant je suis artiste et anarchiste."⁴ Paul Adam also sided with unconditional liberty, but warned that only poets and superior beings could live in such a society.

² Ernest Raynaud, *La Mêlée symboliste*, vol. 2 (Paris: La Renaissance du Livre, 1920) 7-8.

³ *Ermitage*, n.7, July 1893, 1.

⁴ *Ermitage*, n.7, July 1893, 21.

On the whole, however, the answers of the writers who favored anarchism suggest that their conception of liberty was literary rather than social, or that the two fields were conflated to the point that no distinctions could be made. Adolphe Retté, for instance, voted for a liberty on the model of the Egyptian theocracy, where only the priests enjoyed an absolute freedom. Remy de Gourmont approved of the same form of social organization (though his response to the *Ermitage* poll showed him rather indifferent to the social question), where the intellectual elite would be completely free. Being mainly concerned with the independence of the poet, the partisans of art for art's sake also sided with the camp of liberty, even though the gesture placed them in the same group as anarchists, once again underlining what the writers of this generation shared in common with the anarchist movement. Verlaine reluctantly took part for discipline and constraint, but the terms in which he formulated his idea almost undermined his statement. Constraint, he said, is the only *realist* (a despicable word for Symbolists) solution in the present time, whereas he associated the world of dream (one of the Symbolist keywords) with the position of the anarchists: "L'organisation disciplinée et méthodique en attendant que l'autre soit possible, ce qui me paraît un rêve. Je suis en fait de politique générale de l'avis de Joseph de Maistre,

le rêve de Bakounine n'étant pas encore réalisable."⁵

The writers of the Symbolist generation sympathized with the individualist aspects of anarchism rather than its social dimensions. Following Baudelaire and Flaubert, the Symbolists were convinced that dogmatism is the death of art, that no external ideas (be it politics or morality) could be applied to aesthetics. It was in the formal dimension that many of them saw a parallel between anarchism and art. An anarchist work of art was not so much measured for them by its content as by its internal formal organization. A work of art conceived as such seemed to offer a foresight of what a liberated life would resemble after the anarchist revolution. Anarchist art, as Richard Sonn remarked, thus stood simultaneously for "aesthetic autonomy and political engagement."⁶ Gustave Kahn suggested that great works of literature and art transcend the dichotomy of art for art's sake and *l'art social*: "A une certaine hauteur, la question cesse d'exister."⁷ And in response to Bernard Lazare's *L'Écrivain et l'art social*, the Symbolist (and anarchist) poet Pierre Quillard argued that

⁵ *Ermitage*, n.11, Nov.1893, 264, in the follow-up of the poll among the older generation of writers.

⁶ Richard Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1989) 6.

⁷ Gustave Kahn, *Symbolistes et décadents* (Paris: Vanier, 1902) 304.

art cannot support a thesis outside of its own proper sphere, for it would just as soon cease to be art. The work must be made according to its own, internal and formal rules, emancipated from all external constraints. It is the freedom and the autonomy of the work of art that point to other forms of liberty -- social, political and individual:

L'oeuvre ainsi conçue ne réjouira point seulement son créateur mais elle sera pour tous ceux qui la comprendront une créatrice immortelle de joies analogues, et son verbe libérateur, pour des minutes ou pour des heures, -- mais qu'importe le temps, si, une fois, les pesantes chaînes sont réellement brisées -- fera resplendir aux yeux des hommes, à travers les âges, de subites aurores d'affranchissement.⁸

Likewise, the Symbolist poet Gustave Kahn, who claimed to have invented free verse and described himself as "anarchiste et critique," noted the affinity between the practice of free verse and a social revolution in the preface to his *Premiers poèmes*:

Quel est le novateur qui... ne rêve une totale reconstruction de tout, d'autant que tout critique sérieux se rend compte qu'en ébranlant un peu de la façade artistique on touche à toute la façade sociale; c'est ce qui explique que, lorsque les revendications d'art se présentent, elles rencontrent d'aussi agressives résistances.⁹

Adolphe Retté went further and saw an affinity between the radical individualism of anarchism and the work of the

⁸ Pierre Quillard, "Lettre à Bernard Lazare, touchant l'art social et divers fariboles où il feignit malignement de se laisser piper," *Mercure de France*, July 1893, 258.

⁹ Gustave Kahn, préface to *Premiers poèmes* (Paris: *Mercure de France*, 1897) 21.

Symbolist poets, between the anarchist dream of a society where the individual is harmoniously integrated within the whole, and the melodious rhythms produced by the Symbolist's experiments in free verse:

Nous ne voulons *ni règle, ni loi* -- hormis la loi éternelle du rythme -- déterminant la libre expansion de l'instinct de Beauté... L'art actuel ne peut par raison d'existence, admettre que deux choses: l'individualisme, c'est à dire la *libre* manifestation de l'instinct de Beauté et de Solidarité... Pourquoi ne pas définir le mouvement [Symboliste]: l'Art Anarchiste? Anarchiste notre art l'est *essentiellement*, car individualiste... et c'est ici sa grandeur et sa beauté [emp. in the orig.].¹⁰

The Symbolists' emphasis of the autonomy and uniqueness of the poet and of poetry led them to the individualist aspects of the anarchist movement. Bakunin's conception of the revolutionary function of the work of art corresponds to the Symbolist notion of the continuity of the formal and political aspects in aesthetics. It is the singularity, the autonomy and the freedom of the work of art that constitute its revolutionary content. Bakunin, as we saw in chapter 1, was hostile towards an explicitly political art.

Furthermore, what brought Symbolists and anarchists together was their common cult of revolt: for the latter group, against the authority of State, capital and the Church, and for the former, against the rules of prosody and

¹⁰ Adolphe Retté, "L'Art et l'Anarchie," *La Plume*, 1 Feb. 1893, 45.

syntax.¹¹ Symbolism was indeed a revolt against all the remnants of classicism left in French poetry. Like Gustave Kahn, Symbolist poets often used social and political metaphors of insurrection when referring to the revolt against rules of prosody. In 1873, Rimbaud had already associated aesthetic disillusion with political (or social) revolt in the beginning of *Une Saison en Enfer*:

Un soir, j'ai assis la Beauté sur mes genoux.
 -- Et je l'ai trouvée amère. -- Et je l'ai
 injuriée.
 Je me suis armé contre la justice.¹²

But this association of aesthetics and politics was even more intensified during the 1890's, an idea that was not limited to Symbolist circles. Remy de Gourmont once suggested that the battle waged against free verse and Symbolism was patriotic in nature. Jules Simon, for instance, claimed that the traditional verse is patriotic and national, while he condemned free verse as anarchist and unpatriotic.¹³ The attacks on the Symbolist movement by the critics of the *École Romane*, the most astute and polemical of whom was Charles Maurras, were also waged from the patriotic front. They charged Symbolism (as well as Romanticism) for having introduced chaos in the harmony of

¹¹ See Pierre Aubéry, *Pour une lecture ouvrière de la littérature* (Paris: Les Éditions Syndicalistes, 1969) 105.

¹² Arthur Rimbaud, *Oeuvres, op.cit.*, 211.

¹³ Remy de Gourmont, *Épilogues (Réflexions sur la vie, 1895-1898)* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1903) 194.

classical verse which was itself the expression of a harmonious social order, that of the monarchy. Romanticism and its latest expression Symbolism, they protested, are the products of an irrational, incoherent social order ushered by the French Revolution, supplanting the world of the Ancien Régime which was based on nature, where each class and individual found their proper, fixed and natural place in a meaningful order of things, like the elegance and harmony of classical verse. It will also be recalled that Symbolism was often charged for being of "foreign" origin and not properly French. Not only were its sources of inspiration Northern (Schopenhauer, Ibsen, Wagner), but many of its actual adherents were actually foreigners: Francis Vielé-Griffin and Stuart Merrill were Americans; Gustave Kahn, Ephraïm Mikhaël and Bernard Lazare were Jews (considered a dubious origin at the time); Jean Moréas was Greek; Téodore de Wyzewa and Marie Krysinska (who claimed to be the real inventor of free verse) were of Polish origin; and a large contingent of the writers in the movement were Belgian: Verhaeren, Maeterlinck, Fontainas, Mockel, and Rodenbach, among others.

There are great similarities between the extreme individualism of Stirner with his theory of the Unique and the sensibility of the generation of 1890. The work of Stirner, as I explained in Chapter 1, was rediscovered

during this period by John Henry Mackay, a German philosopher who resided in Paris. Mackay considered Stirner as the predecessor of anarchism, and besides writing a biography of the unhappy philosopher, he also authored a number of books on anarchism.¹⁴ Several excerpts of *L'Unique et sa propriété* appeared in the Symbolist reviews of the early 1890's, *La Revue Blanche*, *Les Entretiens Politiques et Littéraires*, and *La Plume*. The first complete translation of *L'Unique* was published by *La Revue Blanche* in 1899. Stirner's aggressive individualism greatly appealed to the dilettantism of Barrès's contemporaries, whose search for rarefied sensations and the development of the self entailed an ambivalence towards social questions or the fate of the working class -- a subject we will explore in the final chapter. What is more, Stirner had postulated the Unique's subjectivity in contradistinction to Romantic subjectivity, a contrast that coincides with the Symbolists' differences with their literary precursors.

Romantic subjectivity was marked by expansiveness and generosity; it showed sympathy and compassion for *le peuple*.

Romanticism, at least in France, found its political apotheosis in the dream of universal fraternity during the 1848 Revolution. The revolution was a redemption that could

¹⁴ Such as *The Anarchists: A Picture of Civilization at the Close of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. George Schumm (Boston: Benjamin Tucker, 1891); and *Les Différents visages de l'anarchisme* (Paris: Éditions de l'En Dehors, 1927).

reconcile the classes and establish a harmonious social life. But liberal humanism underwent a profound crisis after 1848. As Micheline Tison-Braun has observed, after 1848, "La guerre sociale [succède] aux rêves de fraternité."¹⁵ Dreams of class reconciliation were no longer possible. The massacre of the Communards only deepened the bitterness of a generation who had already seen, as children, the Prussians march in the streets of their cities. "C'est persuasif pour toujours," wrote Maurice Barrès late in his life, "d'avoir vu en sa huitième année une troupe prussienne entrant sur un air de fifre dans une petite ville française."¹⁶ After 1871, writes Tison-Braun, "L'inquiétude devient un trait permanent de la vie nationale."¹⁷ When Victor Hugo died in 1885, his idealism, his optimism and faith in humanity were already things of the past. The Boulangist phenomenon would mobilize the Parisian people -- of whom Privat d'Anglemont had written around 1848: "[ils] sont naïfs, bons, secourables, ils ne se passionnent que pour ce qui est juste, inoffensif et

¹⁵ Micheline Tison-Braun, *La Crise de l'humanisme. Le Conflit de l'individu et la société dans la littérature française moderne*, vol. 1 (Paris: Nizet, 1958) 39.

¹⁶ The "Symbolist generation" were all born in the first years of the 1860's, and witnessed the Prussian war and the Commune as children.

¹⁷ Tison-Braun, 41.

plaisant"¹⁸ -- for the cause of anti-Semitism and reaction.

The Dreyfus affair confirmed the sense that *le peuple* can be manipulated, made to believe and do anything. A number of thinkers on the Left asked themselves if Gustave Le Bon was not right after all. During the Dreyfus affair, Clémenceau wrote: "Il n'y a plus moyen de le nier, c'est avec la complicité du peuple lui-même que le mal est parmi nous."¹⁹

There was in fact a profound transformation of the idea of *le peuple* in the second half of the nineteenth century. One need only compare Michelet's *Le Peuple* (1846) with Gustave Le Bon's *Psychologie de la foule* to fully appreciate the extent of this change. Michelet may find *le peuple* beaten down, but an authentic repository of tradition, organic culture, and most importantly instinct, which he equated with nature. Of the violent ferments of the Parisian "mob" during the periodic upheavals in the nineteenth century he wrote: "La bonne nature sait ce qu'elle fait." *Le peuple's* "nature," by contrast, becomes an irrational, brute force for Le Bon; the crowd's instinct and nature take on entirely different connotations by the

¹⁸ Alexandre Privat d'Anglemon, *Paris inconnu* (Paris: P.Rouquette, 1886) 22.

¹⁹ Georges Clémenceau, *Contre la justice* (Paris: Stock, 1900) V, quoted in Zeev Sternhell, *La Droite révolutionnaire. Les Origines françaises du fascisme, 1885-1914* (Paris: Seuil, 1978) 243.

end of the century -- those of a violent and savage energy which can be directed in any which way.

The historical reasons for this transformation are beyond the scope of this essay. The Symbolists' confused oscillation between political commitment and their suspicions of the masses can, however, be better understood in this context. Stirner had already expressed this position in the 1840's, a factor which I believe contributed to the revival of his work in the 1890's. An extreme radicalism is peculiarly coupled with diatribes against *le peuple* in *L'Unique et sa propriété*. "Le peuple? -- Oui, brave gens, le peuple! -- vous ne savez guère tout ce que vous lui devez! -- le peuple est policier dans l'âme, et celui-là seul qui renie son moi, qui pratique le 'renoncement' obtient ses suffrages."²⁰ The true individual, the Unique, is necessarily a criminal vis-à-vis the masses. Modern democracies demand liberty for the people, but, retorts Stirner, "La liberté *du Peuple* n'est pas *ma* liberté." In fact, claims Stirner, *le peuple* can be free only at the expense of the true individual, a scenario he would like to see reversed. "Plus le peuple est libre, plus l'individu est lié," because "tout peuple opprime ceux qui s'élèvent au-dessus de sa majesté [*le peuple*]."²¹ And

²⁰ Max Stirner, *L'Unique et sa propriété* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1960) 181.

²¹ Stirner, 193, 195.

he goes so far as to declare: "Le bonheur du Peuple est -- mon malheur."²²

Stirner's attacks on *le peuple* are the consequence of the unique's rejection of all "abstract" categories outside of the self, including Democracy, Liberty, Revolution and all other axioms, rules and theories which require a sacrifice on the part of the individual. Stirner's egoist does not recognize the authority of anything -- be it an idea or a principle or a person -- outside of himself. He does not act according to a principle that is not his "property." All principles outside of the self are fictions, spooks which only serve to bewitch men and compel them to obedience. Even revolution can turn into an *idée fixe* and enslave the self. It is another idea, another higher principle to which the individual must submit. The Unique rejects all abstractions for the right of affirming his self through the expenditure of energy, through *jouissance*, a privilege that society deems as necessarily immoral. "Jouir d'un privilège au dépens de la société, c'est pécher par égoïsme contre l'idée d'égalité; détenir le pouvoir, c'est violer en égoïste l'idée de liberté."²³ The egoist's affirmation of energy does not exclude the right to the assumption of tyrannical power and the oppression of others.

²² Stirner, 210.

²³ Stirner, 31.

But it is not correct, adds Stirner, to speak of "rights," of the "right" to *jouissance*, but rather of the *will* to *jouissance*. Communists are indeed wrong, he goes on to write, because right is for the one who can take it. The tiger who attacks me is within his rights, and if I beat him I am within mine. "Celui qui a pour lui la force, a pour lui le droit" (Baudelaire had clearly illustrated this philosophy in his *Assommons les pauvres*).²⁴ To the poor and the working class Stirner has only one bit of advice: "Une seule voie vous est ouverte si vous voulez donner tort aux puissants: c'est la force, dépouillez-les de leur puissance, vous les aurez *réellement* mis dans leur tort et privés de leur droits."²⁵ It is difficult to place Stirner in one political camp or another. His radical individualism as well as his philosophy of force and the will appeal to both extremes of Right and Left, where traditional political boundaries are blurred. In the chapter on Georges Darien and Hugues Rebell I examine the political ambiguities of individualism and the similitudes between the extremes of Right and Left.

We find many of Stirner's ideas expressed in the work

²⁴ Stirner, 174. In this light, it is interesting to recall that Baudelaire, who wrote *Assommons les pauvres* around 1865, set its time at around 1848, thus countering the libertarian principles of the revolution with a philosophy of the *Will*, long before Nietzsche or the translation of Stirner.

²⁵ Stirner, 175.

of the Symbolist writer Remy de Gourmont (1855-1915). Gourmont claimed to be a heir to the German Idealists -- which he equated with "literary anarchism" in his interview with Jules Huret. In the 1880's, "Idealism" was a very vague term simply designating the philosophies of Kant and Schopenhauer, at times even Hegel, who were lumped together without much ado about the disparities of their thought. Schopenhauer was not translated into French until 1888. His philosophy was only known through secondary treatises in France. "Enormous figures," according to A.G.Lehman, "whose work, seen through a mist, appeared only in the vaguest outline."²⁶ To these Germans we can also add Stirner, whose work appeared in translation in France only in the 1890's, but whose ideas, like those of Nietzsche, were already present in the thought of the Symbolist generation. What Remy de Gourmont calls "Idealism," for instance, seems to be the philosophical corollary to Stirner's theory of the Unique. Idealism, according to Gourmont, consists in the simple fact that the world is our, *my* representation. The first and foremost consequence of this point for Gourmont is that the individual is incapable of surpassing the barriers of his own consciousness and thus lives in the realm of his own ideas. From this it follows that:

La relativité de l'extérieur étant bien établie,

²⁶ A.G.Lehman, *The Symbolist Aesthetic in France, 1885-1895* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1950) 38.

nul besoin, théoriquement, pour le moi, de se mêler à de problématiques contingences; il se suffit à lui-même... Convaincu que tout est transitoire, hormis sa pensée, qui est éternelle...; convaincu qu'il est seul et impénétrablement seul, comme une molécule douée seulement d'un pouvoir de cohésion; convaincu enfin que tout est parfaitement illusoire, puisque, dans sa course à la connaissance, ce collin-maillard, il n'emprisonne jamais que son pérennel et fastidieux moi; bien assuré qu'il ne peut sortir de l'état égoïste que pour retomber dans l'état per-égoïste, -- l'idéaliste se désintéresse de toutes les relativités telles que la morale, la patrie, la sociabilité, les traditions, la famille, la procréation, ces notions reléguées dans le domaine pratique.²⁷

Stirner too had relegated these realms to that of the imagination, fictions ignored by the egoist: "État, Empereur, Église, Moralité, Ordre, etc., sont de ces pensées, des fantômes qui n'existent que pour l'esprit."²⁸

The idealist, for Gourmont, can thus live in the world of his own imagination, free from the contingencies of life, from the "*chose publique*." One individual has one world, a hundred have a hundred worlds. This purely cerebral life is indeed the one led by Entragues, the protagonist of Gourmont's novel *Sixtine* (1890). According to Gourmont, from this it follows that -- and it is in this sense that Entragues' universe differs from that of Des Esseintes -- the idealist "ne saurait... admettre qu'un seul type de

²⁷ Remy de Gourmont, "L'Idéalisme," *Les Entretiens Politiques et Littéraires*, n.25, Apr. 1892, 146. This essay was reprinted in Gourmont's *Le Chemin de velours* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1902) 215-216.

²⁸ Stirner, 68.

gouvernement, l'An-archie."²⁹ This is not the anarchism of Proudhon or Kropotkin, branches of various socialisms at the time. For Gourmont, what anarchism signifies is "la domination de tous par quelques-uns."³⁰ According to him, the idealist places things where they belong: the superior men at the top, and *le peuple* at the bottom. For the author of *Sixtine*, anarchism is in keeping with idealism, for in the absence of laws the ascendancy of superior men would be the only rule. Their "just despotism" could not be contested, freed as they are from any consideration for others and vice versa. Socially and politically, Idealism (and thus anarchism) is for Gourmont an absolutely anti-democratic, "immoral," even "anti-social and anti-human" doctrine.

Thus released from the demands of social life, the elite can devote themselves to the only thing that counts: art. While Idealism is the free development of the superior individual in his intellectual capacity, Symbolism, "only a variant of Idealism," or, elsewhere, a "substitute for Idealism," is the free development of the individual in his aesthetic capacity.³¹ "Le Symbolisme se traduit littéralement par le mot liberté, et pour les violents, par

²⁹ Remy de Gourmont, "L'Idéalisme," 146-7.

³⁰ Remy de Gourmont, "L'Idéalisme," 146-7.

³¹ Remy de Gourmont, "Le Symbolisme," *La Revue Blanche*, June 1892, 322.

le mot Anarchie."³² In *Le Livre des masques*, Gourmont described Symbolism as "individualisme en littérature, liberté de l'art, abandon des formules enseignées."³³ The word Symbolism itself "implique une absolue licence d'idées et de formes." Elsewhere he asserted that "L'essence de l'art est la liberté."³⁴ Art cannot be subjected to any principles, not even that of Beauty. Art must be free from all constraint, from all external codes; it must develop of its own accord and evolve in the obscure recesses of the individual's soul. Outside of his exterior comportment, the individual will always remain abnormal and maladapted. Art is the faculty of the soul of the individual, and like the individual, it is unique, true, illogical, incomprehensible. If this is true of all individuals, it is more so of the elite (who for Gourmont seems to consist solely of artists and poets):

Donc, si les êtres supérieurs diffèrent radicalement, essentiellement, les uns des autres, la production esthétique des uns différera non moins radicalement, non moins essentiellement de la production esthétique des autres. En conséquence, nulle mesure commune entre deux oeuvres d'art, nul jugement de comparaison possible, nulle théorie critique qui puisse les capter dans ses filets, nulle esthétique, qui, applicable à la première de ces oeuvres, soit

³² Remy de Gourmont, "Le Symbolisme," 322.

³³ Remy de Gourmont, *Le Livre des masques* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1896) 8.

³⁴ Remy de Gourmont, *Le Chemin de Velours* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1902) 227.

encore applicable à la seconde, nulle règle fabriquée d'avance, sous laquelle puisse se courber ni la première ni la seconde de ces oeuvres d'art, ni aucune oeuvre d'art.³⁵

What then is the role of criticism? Can we say anything about Gourmont's work in the light of his own theories of art and criticism? For the author of *Sixtine*, it is the integrity and the uniqueness of the work of art, its inaccessibility to criticism and extra-literary modes of thought that constitute its literariness (an idiosyncratic idea from one who wrote over 25 volumes of criticism!). Criticism, accordingly, is an aesthetic "après coup" which explains the obscurities of the magic lantern to a puzzled public. Gourmont's theory recalls Bakunin's notion of the revolutionary quality of the great work of art in its singularity, an idea shared by all the Symbolists. Stirner too claimed that the production of great works of art falls in the exclusive domain of the activities of the Unique: others can create, but their works remain insignificant, banal and "human."³⁶ According to all three thinkers, what is revolutionary in a work of art is not to be found at the level of its content. In the preface to *Le Livre des*

³⁵ *Le Chemin*, 230-1.

³⁶ This comment from *L'Unique* contradicts Stirner's theory of art in "Kunst und Religion" which I discussed in chapter 1. In that essay, it will be recalled, art was seen as a parallel to religion in its alienating role in human history, by sublimating human essence and presenting it to the individual as a fetish.

masques, Gourmont maintained that subject matter is only of secondary importance in literature. The critic would thus be mistaken to seek social, political or anarchist themes in his novels. Though *Sixtine* has often been compared to Barrès's trilogy of novels in *Le Culte du moi*, we find in Gourmont's book none of Barrès's anxiety at having to live under the gaze of the barbarians, nor the anarchistic assertions of André Maltère in *L'Ennemi des lois*. Entragues is indeed a gentle soul who lives the life of his imagination, without much concern for the world outside (with the exception of *Sixtine*). The novel has as epigram the following words from Villiers de l'Isle Adam's play *La Révolte*: "D'ailleurs, que nous importe même la justice!" To the social question Entragues' response is: "Je ne cherche pas à aggraver mes misères par des méditations sur l'universelle misère, que mon égoïsme, d'ailleurs, me rend à peu près indifférent: un état plutôt ataraxique me convient."³⁷ Even though in the midst of the Boulangist frenzy, Gourmont's "Joujou patriotisme" violently attacked patriotism as a new virus that must be eradicated -- an essay that was appreciated by anarchists -- Gourmont was less motivated by any social or political concerns than the nihilistic dismissal of bourgeois hypocrisy and the duplicity of the Third Republic. For Gourmont, the

³⁷ Remy de Gourmont, *Sixtine. Roman de la vie cérébrale* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions (10/18), 1982) 69.

rejection of patriotism and militarism did not entail pacifism or internationalism. It was an attack on the reigning power with its mystifying ideologies and received ideas. Gourmont did write many essays on the social and political events of his time (collected in the six volumes of *Épilogues*). But they constitute, in the words of Gourmont's greatest exegete Karl Uitti, "une revue de l'actualité essentiellement dégagée et liée seulement au désir d'impassibilité devant les faits du jour."³⁸ It can be argued that Gourmont's impassivity became so total that it turned into an acute nihilism -- a position he held in common with the anarchist dandies studied in the final chapter of this dissertation.

This nihilism is evident in Gourmont's theory of the "dissociation des idées," which, even though it does not directly stem from anarchist theories, betrays nonetheless an anarchic sensibility. We can either accept ideas and their associations as they are presented to us, writes Gourmont, or we can dismantle them by the method of "dissociation."³⁹ Ideas are associated with each other by force of tradition, formula and commonplace thinking (*les lieux communs*). One must imagine new relations among them,

³⁸ Karl Uitti, *La Passion littéraire de Remy de Gourmont* (Paris/Princeton: PUF/Dept. of Romance Languages at Princeton U.Publications, 1962) 104.

³⁹ Remy de Gourmont, *La Culture des idées* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1900) 69.

not in order to establish new truths, but in order to "remanier et... ordonner une infinité de couples nouveaux qu'une nouvelle opération désunira encore." Such operations can take on social or political implications, though these do not concern Gourmont. For instance, the association of "honor" and the military, Gourmont adds, is a cliché in need of dissociation at the present time (the essay is written in 1899, in the midst of the Dreyfus affair). "Les deux idées sont unies très énergiquement; elles forment une vérité qui n'est guère contestée à l'heure actuelle que par des esprits d'une autorité médiocre ou d'une sincérité douteuse [a stab at Zola?]. Sa dissociation est donc très peu avancée."⁴⁰ But dissociation destroys accepted truths without replacing them with other truths, and so Gourmont warns against associating the military with the notion of dishonor: "cette nouvelle association d'idées peut avoir une valeur destructrice; elle n'offre aucun intérêt intellectuel." For there are no true ideas, no false ideas. The Idea is necessarily true, adds Gourmont. The aim of dissociation is not to distinguish falseness from truth. The perpetual dissolution of truths (truth is "un lieu commun non encore dissocié"), of *idées reçues*, can thus have no specific goal other than thought itself. Ideas thus float in the ceaselessly mobile universe of constant dissociation,

⁴⁰ *La Culture des idées*, 86.

drifting perpetually and never allowed to congeal and reify into truths.

There are other points in common between Stirner and the Symbolists, and Gourmont in particular. The latter's exasperatingly solipsistic argument on the inaccessibility of the work of art also finds an echo in Stirner's theory of language. The language of *L'Unique et sa propriété* is indeed in keeping with its content, a dizzying whirlwind where several competing monologues ironically intertwine, dispute each other, where, in Henri Arvon's words, "tantôt [la langue] s'associe à la pensée, tantôt elle en diffère."⁴¹ Arvon calls Stirner's work "untranslatable" for its bewildering use of language. In *L'Unique*, Stirner himself hinted at the incongruous relation of the Unique to language: "La langue indigente n'a pas de mot pour Me dire, et le 'verbe', le *logos*, n'est, lorsqu'il s'applique à moi, qu'un vain mot."⁴²

The "secret language" of the self was one of the cornerstones of the Symbolist theory of language. Gourmont described the greatest pleasure of literature in its impenetrability to the public. Faced with the "stupid public," the poet is left with but one option: to descend into the catacombs. In his essay on Symbolism, Gourmont

⁴¹ Henri Arvon, *Aux Sources de l'existentialisme: Max Stirner* (Paris: PUF, 1954) 48.

⁴² *L'Unique*, 167.

defined art as personal and therefore incomprehensible.

"Compris, il cesse d'être de l'art pur."⁴³ Attacks on the public were common among the writers of the Symbolist generation. Hugues Rebell, for instance, called his contemporary public a "mob of ruffians," incapable of understanding art and poetry.⁴⁴

If pressed too far, however, the question of language reveals a number of tensions between Symbolism and anarchism. First, unlike Symbolism, anarchism lacks a consistent theory of language. But inasmuch as we can surmise a theory, it will be the anarchist's belief in popular forms, in language as it is practiced by the *classes populaires* themselves -- *argot*, dialect, *patois* -- and their rich stock of oral songs, myths and legends. In the first number of *Le Père Peinard*, its editor Émile Pouget declared that in his paper he would use the language spoken by the working classes, and not the one written by the bourgeoisie.

Le Père Peinard emulated the colorful language of the Parisian *faubourgs*, *argot*, a revolutionary and popular tradition that went back to Hébert's paper *Le Père Duchesne* during the French Revolution, which was also written in *argot*.

⁴³ "Le Symbolisme," *op.cit.*

⁴⁴ Hugues Rebell, "A Propos des *Noces de Figaro*," *Ermitage*, n.5, August 1892, 66.

Anarchists and Symbolists alike were suspicious of the rise of literacy in the first years of the Third Republic. The period had witnessed the intense development and democratization of the secular education system as well as a massive increase of the reading public, whether for a commercial literature or the sensational press. Anarchists viewed the situation with great consternation. The rise of literacy presented a flattening out of the creative and spontaneous popular culture of the working classes. It contained the peril of a culture manufactured from above, imposed on the working class, leading to the homogeneity and uniformity of thought. Symbolists too were alarmed at the rise of literacy, of "pulp" literature and the insipid language used in the press. In an article in *Les Entretiens Politiques et Littéraires*, Francis Vielé-Griffin brought up the problem felt by many Symbolist writers: in the face of the democratization of the education system and the entry of the "masses" into the world of literature, what is a writer to do?⁴⁵ The dominant response of the Symbolists was of course the "aristocratic" solution of taking refuge in hermetic forms and obscure language, intelligible only to an elite. Mallarmé had distinguished between everyday language and the language of poetry, "le double état de la parole,

⁴⁵ Francis Vielé-Griffin, "L'Abstentionnisme," *Les Entretiens Politiques et Littéraires*, n.9, 1 Dec. 1890.

brut ou immédiat ici, là essentiel."⁴⁶ According to this definition, everyday speech is only an impoverished, alienated aspect of language, emptied of its essential qualities and limited to practical use. Poetry is by contrast "le langage humain ramené à son titre essentiel," and it is the task of the poet to rekindle language in its essence, rich in suggestion and mystery.

Among a number of poets of the same period, however, we find a renewed interest in the oral culture of *les classes populaires*, a literature that, if not anarchist, can certainly be called *anarchisante*. The works of Jehan Rictus, Jean Richepin, Aristide Bruant and Paul Paillette delved into the lives of the poor, the marginal and the criminal classes, and was written in their spoken *argot*. These poets do not fall within the Symbolist camp of course, but their work does reveal a diametrically opposite response than that of the Symbolists to the problem of mass literacy.⁴⁷

It is clear that the anarchism of the Symbolist generation was in no way a faithful allegiance to any coherent anarchist doctrine, or to the thought of any one

⁴⁶ Stéphane Mallarmé, "Avant-dire" to René Ghil's *Traité du verbe*, in Mallarmé, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Gallimard (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), 1945) 857.

⁴⁷ The interconnection of the *chanson populaire* and anarchism is explored by Gaetano Manfredonia in *La Chanson anarchiste en France des origines à 1914* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997).

anarchist thinker. More fundamentally, the Symbolists were a generation at odds with themselves, full of contradictions. As already discussed above, Micheline Tison-Braun has shown that in contrast to the Romantics, who in their political aspirations maintained a sympathy and a commitment to *le peuple*, the Symbolists showed considerable contempt for the masses while remaining politically committed.⁴⁸ Laurent Tailhade, for example, would write: "L'individu seul existe: les groupes, les peuples n'existent pas, car le peuple n'est qu'un amas ingrat de forces mal éduquées." In anarchism, a strange amalgam of love of humanity and hatred of society, Symbolists found an echo of their own fluctuations between scorn for the mediocre masses and political *engagement*. The same calculated ruthlessness which had led Émile Henry to throw a bomb in a café full of ordinary people with the intention of killing as many of them as possible, had led him to say to his judge that "un milieu anarchiste développera dans chacun de ses membres la solidarité et l'amour de ses semblables, car l'homme saura qu'en travaillant pour les autres il travaillera en même temps pour lui."⁴⁹

The duality in anarchist thought between the monstrous

⁴⁸ Tison-Braun, I:85.

⁴⁹ Émile Henry, "Lettre au directeur de la Conciergerie," in Daniel Guérin, *Ni Dieu ni maître. Anthologie de l'anarchisme* (Paris: François Maspero, 1970) 63.

present and the dream of the coming utopia, furthermore, corresponded to the Symbolists' rejection of life in favor of misty dreams. In *Les Fenêtres*, Mallarmé wrote:

Je fuis et je m'accroche à toutes les croisées
D'où l'on tourne l'épaule à la vie, et, béni,
Dans leur verre, lavé d'éternelles rosées,
Que dore le matin chaste de l'infini⁵⁰

The Symbolists had pressed a great deal further Baudelaire's dictum of "anywhere out of this world," neglecting the appreciation of modern life that is also present in the work of the author of *Le Spleen de Paris*. This had led to the charge that Symbolism is a negation of life, a withdrawal into the hazy world of obscure language and dream. In Camille Mauclair's *roman à clefs* about the Symbolist movement in these years, *Le Soleil des morts* (1896), Calixte Armel, a character who conspicuously stands for Mallarmé, is shown as having abandoned life and surrounded himself with the world of his dreams. His many disciples only aspire to achieve the same total detachment from their own existence.

"Il nous faut fermer à jamais les yeux au soleil de la vie ordinaire, renoncer à ses avantages, ne pas prendre les girandoles de la réputation pour la clarté fixe, originelle, exemple de souffle d'aucun ouragan, qui rayonne

⁵⁰ Mallarmé, *op.cit.*, 33. After sending him this poem, Mallarmé wrote to Henri Cazalis in a second letter: "O mon Henri, abreuve-toi d'idéal. Le bonheur d'ici-bas est ignoble" (*Oeuvres*, 1421).

silencieusement dans la vérité nue et pure."⁵¹ Given the mediocre philistines who are to make up his public, the writer De Neuze -- another character in the novel -- turns his back on life and decides to simply create "in silence."

But living a life of inactivity, of resignation to inertia and irrelevance was not enough: "L'envie de réagir, de vivre, hantait ses nerfs."⁵² His friend Héricourt, by contrast, succeeded in resolving the contradiction between his literary ambitions and his thirst for life by converting to anarchism:

L'anarchie est, dans les doctrines de nouveauté, la seule qui admette l'expansion du sentiment. Il est tout simple que nous nous [Symbolist writers] tournions vers elle; elle seule peut susciter une grande personnalité, au lieu que le socialisme n'en admet pas. Le socialisme actuel, et, je le crains, futur, n'admettra qu'un congrès de théoriciens et d'applicateurs égaux en ingénuité, mais sans génie surlevé... Or, nous mourons d'excès de raison critique, et nous manquons d'énergie.⁵³

Anarchism is not a theoretical doctrine, but like Barrès' *culte du moi*, a cult of energy. Dream has become the sickness of our generation, says Héricourt, and the only cure is to plunge into activity. "Il ne restait qu'un mode d'action, la révolte, la brisure insensée, aveugle, la

⁵¹ Camille Mauclair, *Le Soleil des morts* (Paris: Édition de Paris, 1897) 24.

⁵² Mauclair, 125.

⁵³ Mauclair, 132.

détente nerveuse irréfléchie contre tout ce qui gênait."⁵⁴

It is evident that in their turn towards anarchism, none of the writers in the novel are motivated by any form of social or political sympathy for the working class, but rather by a nihilistic expenditure of energy and a Stirnerian affirmation of self. Did this fact have more to do with Mauclair's own disposition at the time of writing the novel, or is it accurately representative of the state of mind of the Symbolist writers in the early 1890's? By 1897, the year of the publication of *Le Soleil des morts*, Mauclair had renounced his earlier adherence to the anarchists and he consequently presents the movement with no small dose of cynicism. But I believe that there is a kernel of truth in his contention. Mauclair himself explained the continuity that existed between the two movements:

L'anarchisme étant la seule forme de rébellion qui permît l'expansion sentimentale, c'était à cette forme que devait se ranger l'élite, surmenée dans sa sensibilité, désarmée devant les faits. Le mystère terrifiant de Claude Pallat [one of the leaders of the anarchist movement in the novel] était une suprême dérivation de la littérature: l'anarchie dans les artistes aurait ses infaillibles recrues... A bout de la société, Calixte Armel [the poet standing for Mallarmé] préparait ce qu'à l'autre bout Claude Pallat utiliserait: tous deux prophètes et excommuniés, ils résumaient l'antinomie qui activait la décomposition du siècle, tous deux avaient la même influence mystérieuse, le même magnétisme individuel. L'isolement intellectuel prêché par le poète nécessitait l'individualisme absolu de

⁵⁴ Mauclair, 132.

l'anarchiste; entre eux il y avait un monde, mais aussi, ils n'avaient qu'un mouvement à faire pour se tendre la main "par dessus la mort"... La tentative héroïque et folle de Claude Pallat en Italie n'était ni plus héroïque ni autrement folle que celle de Calixte Armel créant dans le Paris moderne une Chartreuse d'artistes bafoués.⁵⁵

The poet's disdainful rejection of the public required the extreme individualism of the anarchists. Each doctrine supported and reinforced the other. Calixte (Mallarmé) recruited for Symbolism those who would then fight in the ranks of anarchism for Pallat (Bakunin).

The Symbolists' negation of life in favor of dreams has been the subject of much commentary. The Symbolist writer André Fontainas presented a perceptive and historical judgment on the perspective of life and death among his fellow poets. Their rejection of life, he claimed, was not because of an inherent nihilism, but because they abhorred to see the extent to which life was impoverished and reduced to banality with the triumph of the bourgeoisie and the Third Republic. This is not a hatred of life, "c'est aimer la vie, c'est la révéler, de ne la point chercher dans le monceau des immondices qui la diffame et qui l'accable."⁵⁶ In other words, it is a utopian attitude which, like that of the anarchists, is appalled by what it sees in the present and would rather take refuge in the dream -- of utopia or of

⁵⁵ Mauclair, 137-8.

⁵⁶ André Fontainas, *Mes Souvenirs du Symbolisme* (Paris: La Nouvelle Revue Critique, 1928) 183.

art.

Concurrent with this attitude was a nostalgia for life, a desire to cease the moment and plunge into the turmoil of existence, which Mauclair identified with anarchism. The Symbolists' fascination with life was not only manifested in their interest in anarchism. The critic Guy Michaud distinguished the tendency of the call to life, *l'appel de la vie*, within the Symbolist movement, a trend that has a number of affinities with anarchism.⁵⁷ Michaud, like Mauclair, presents the phase of the "return to life" as a second stage in the development of Symbolism dating from 1896 on. It was no longer the time for painful introspections of a weary and decadent self, but, like the young Gide, writers were demanding the "right to live." This tendency gradually materialized in the *Naturiste* movement, which along with *Romanisme* constituted the most important challenge mounted against Symbolism by its own former adherents.⁵⁸ I would, however, argue that the inclination towards life and action was present from the beginning within the Symbolist movement. It found an expression in the Symbolists' fascination with anarchism, after the demise of which they turned towards the *Naturiste*.

⁵⁷ Guy Michaud, *Message poétique du Symbolisme*, vol. 3 (Paris: Nizet, 1947) 518-547.

⁵⁸ As demonstrated in Marcel Raymond, *De Baudelaire au Surréalisme* (Paris: José Corti, 1940) 58.

movement. Many of the writers in the group of "return to life" had in fact held, at a certain point in their career, anarchist sympathies or even concrete ties to the movement.

The American poet Francis Vielé-Griffin, whose poems sang the joys of life and nature, was an anarchist and the editor of *Les Entretiens Politiques et Littéraires*, one of the literary organs of anarchism in the years 1890-93. The same was true of the poet Adolphe Retté, the successive stages of whose career as a writer and an anarchist well illustrate the complex relationship of the anarchist and Symbolist movements in the 1890's.

Born in 1863, Adolphe Retté began his literary career in 1887 in Paris, plunging into the heated polemics surrounding the beginnings of the Symbolist movement. His first volume of verse, *Cloches en la nuit*, appeared in 1889.

Even though it was dedicated to Gustave Kahn, the inventor of free verse (with whom Retté co-edited the Symbolist review *La Vogue*), the verse in Retté's book was not free, but a kind of nervous Alexandrine without punctuation. Archaic vocabulary and obscure language abound in the volume, where the poet inspects the dark and melancholy landscape of his self in Symbolist fashion, a hallucinatory voyage in the depths of the soul. The opening poem "Motifs" presents Symbolist (and Baudelairian) themes such as the hopelessness of the search for liberation and poetry as the

only possible consolation in life. Otherwise sadness, boredom and death dominate the mood of the volume.

Retté's second book, *Thulé des brumes*, was published in 1892. In keeping with his first volume, the predominant tone was that of despair, punctuated by the escape from reality afforded by art. Retté was now one of the foremost poets of the Symbolist movement, attended Mallarmé's *mardis* regularly, and was actively engaged in the world of the Symbolist reviews. His articles appeared consistently in *Ermitage*, the *Mercure de France*, as well as *La Plume*, where he also had an editorial position. In an article in *Ermitage* in January 1893 he expressed his admiration for Mallarmé.⁵⁹ But a number of events had already begun to push him towards the political turmoils of his time. At the end of the same year, in an article entitled "Une Année de combat," Retté recalled the circumstances of his radicalization in the course of that year, refering in particular to three definite events.⁶⁰ The first was a banquet held for Victor Hugo, for which Retté had opposed the creation of a table of honorary guests (which were to include himself) and demanded the abolition of all hierarchies and particularly the phenomenon of "leaders" and

⁵⁹ Adolphe Retté, "Stéphane Mallarmé," *Ermitage*, Jan.1893,1-7.

⁶⁰ Adolphe Retté, "Une Année de combat," *La Plume* n.112, 15 Dec. 1893, 527-528.

"masters" in the world of literature, an episode which seems to indicate Retté's anarchistic sensibility prior to his actual conversion to anarchism. The second event was the July riots in the Quartier Latin prompted by the conservative senator Henry Bérenger's repeal of the licence of the popular *Bal des Quat'z'Arts*, a week of feverish burning and looting by anarchists and students alike in which Retté himself had taken part. The third was a conversation with a socialist deputy during the strike of the Pas-de-Calais miners, where Retté lost any faith in the ability of the parliamentary government to meaningfully resolve the social problem and improve the living condition of the working class.

A month after the publication of the article in which he had proclaimed his devotion to Mallarmé, Retté wrote "L'Art et l'Anarchie."⁶¹ Responding to Alphonse Germain who had recently called on artists and writers to join the struggles of the masses, Retté criticized the idea that art should serve the people and argued that the artist must remain apart, a true individual, *le peuple* being "une brute massive qui souffre" and incapable of understanding art and poetry. He expressed his doubt as to the fate of poetry after the revolution, seeing the proletariat as barbarians who would annihilate civilization and bring about the demise

⁶¹ Adolphe Retté, "L'Art et l'Anarchie," *La Plume*, n. 91, 1 Feb. 1893, 45-6.

of art. Under such circumstances, he wrote, "le devoir des poètes est d'affirmer l'aristocratie de l'idée." Retté's ideas were at this point an aristocratic anarchism close to the one professed by Remy de Gourmont: the poet must have the right to live in the world of his own dreams and aesthetic creations, a life that is necessarily at odds with the social demands that are placed upon him.

But responses to his article by André Veidaux and Maurice Barrès helped change Retté's opinion. Veidaux distinguished anarchism from socialism, and suggested that the former allows the full extent of the individual's liberty and the development of all of his faculties. Barrès warned against too simplistic an understanding of literature as either propaganda or pure art, and suggested that a work constructed freely and according to its own principles can have unexpected effects on a reader and produce "[des] pensées qui nous donnent le goût de la vie harmonieuse, libre, sans lois, de l'anarchie, enfin."⁶² Retté seems to have been deeply impressed by these two arguments and began to take note of the affinities between the social visions of anarchism and the artistic liberty demanded by Symbolist writers. His anarchism was to be closely bound -- one may even say a consequence of -- the campaign for free verse in

⁶² André Veidaux' response to Retté in *La Plume*, n.92, 15 Feb.1893, 84; and Maurice Barrès' response in the same, n. 94, 1 March 1893, 116.

which he was engaged during these years. In the beginning of August of the same year he took up the debate once again in *La Plume*, apologized to the readers for what he had written in January and professed that at the time his knowledge of anarchism was still incomplete. He proclaimed that poets should not admit any laws outside that of rhythm.

He praised Jean Grave's *La Société mourante et l'anarchie* in September and attacked Hugues Rebell and *les aristocrates de la pensée* whom he had acclaimed only a few months earlier.⁶³

He now could not tolerate any form of hierarchy. In his *Réflexions sur l'Anarchie* he defined anarchism as the abolition of all authority -- be it social or literary -- and all forms of constraint.⁶⁴ He attacked the aesthetes who cynically avowed anarchist ideas before returning to the salons and the company of the upper classes and called for the total commitment of the writer. Retté's life had in the meanwhile spiraled down into the irregular existence of a bohemian. He was arrested several times for public drunkenness and carried to jail while screaming "Vive

⁶³ Adolphe Retté, "*La Société mourante et l'anarchie*," *La Plume*, n. 106, 15 Sept. 1893, 384-6; Retté attacked Rebell again in the same journal, 1 Oct. 1893, in "Lettre à M. Hugues Rebell."

⁶⁴ This text is reproduced in Retté's *Promenades subversives*. Paris: Bibliothèque Artistique et Littéraire, 1896, 7-22.

l'Anarchie!"⁶⁵ He was one of the writers imprisoned during the police crackdown on anarchists in 1894, and these experiences may have further contributed to his radicalization. In any case, the works he produced in the course of the next few years were decidedly marked by his conversion to anarchism.

One of the consequences of his conversion was to slowly alienate him from the Symbolist movement, even though his initial move towards anarchism had been prompted by the affinities and continuities he had perceived between the two doctrines. His individualist anarchist creed led him to reject the authority of schools and masters. His first polemic was an attack on the authority of Mallarmé. In a review of *La Musique et les lettres* he questioned Mallarmé's influence, criticized his prose style, and called him a sterile poet, the last of the Parnassians.⁶⁶ This was only the first of several articles in which Retté ridiculed Mallarmé as the priest and mystifier of a religion whose non-sensical poetry baffles and fascinates his disciples. His attacks, shocking his former friends and allies, gradually included the Symbolist movement as a whole. In a review of Henri de Régnier's *Aréthuse*, for instance, he was

⁶⁵ William Kenneth Cornell, *Adolphe Retté (1863-1930)*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1942, 61.

⁶⁶ Adolphe Retté, "Chronique des livres," *La Plume*, n. 138, 15 Jan. 1895, 64-5.

glad to see the poet freeing himself from the ghastly influence of Mallarmé.⁶⁷

The rejection of Symbolism and his turn to anarchism also altered Retté's literary productions. In the preface of his next book, *L'Archipel en fleurs* (1895), he declared that the poet must free himself from all external influences and write according to the rhythms of his inner nature. Accordingly, he abandoned questions of technique in favor of rhythm, which now became his principal preoccupation. Rhythm is "life itself," he wrote. He advised young poets to follow life and nature, the key of which he considered precisely to be rhythm, reject literary traditions and authority and return to a primitive simplicity. He attacked all poetic schools, including Symbolism as well as the *École Romane*. The belabored and obscure vocabulary of his earlier work was equally left behind and the style became clear and lucid. Despite the formula of the preface, many of the poems were written in the Alexandrine and delivered a simple message. "Triomphale," for example, recounts how the poor will rise one day and throw aside the yoke of oppression once they see through the mystifications and lies propagated by their rulers. The poem is dedicated to Jean Grave. In an epilogue, Retté spoke of the errors of his youth, and showed himself as a young man persecuted and

⁶⁷ In *La Plume*, 1 Apr.1895, n.143, 153.

misled by false prophets. Now he could travel the seas alone, navigating the waters away from the influence of schools and masters. He eventually finds an island inhabited by people who, like himself, left civilization behind in search of liberty.

His next book, *Similitudes*, was published in the same year. It is a prose piece in dramatic form which shows Retté moving closer to the anarchist-naturist philosophy. Its protagonist Guillaume is a homeless wanderer who provokes workers to revolt against the rich, preaches against the parliamentary regime and advises people to return to a natural simplicity in life. He is taken for a madman and brought to the alienist Docteur Lathèse. He escapes the doctor, proclaims that there is no *patrie* except Earth and Nature to patriotic villagers who stone him to death. But his work was not in vain. It has born its fruit and people revolt against their masters as songs of liberation and freedom are sounding everywhere in the countryside.

His following book, *La Forêt bruissante*, was published in 1896. It is a narrative poem that tells the story of Jacques Simple, a shepherd who is in search of Arcadia, the land of liberty and happiness. His exploration is obstructed by a sphynx who foretells the obstacles that lie on his way and advises him to retreat. But with the arrow

of revolt, Jacques kills the monster and enters the forest, meeting a number of allegorical figures such as kings, magicians and bards who represent the suffering *peuple* and the evil forces of tradition. Forced to choose between suffering and beauty during one of his trials, Jacques Simple opts for the former and repudiates beauty, a solution chosen by Retté himself who was increasingly suspicious of poetic form in favor of lucid language and even a propagandistic art. His anarcho-naturism consisted in the rejection of the elitist and rarefied language of the Symbolists and a return to simplicity and nature. *La Forêt bruissante* is written in a free verse that closely approximates everyday speech, thus breaking with the artificiality of poetic language and closing the gap between art and life. Some critics, like Henri Clouard, have seen in this simplification a kind of banality, a retreat from the more complex forms of Symbolist poetry.⁶⁸ Clouard's judgment does reveal the contradictions inherent in Symbolism's poetic and social ambitions, contradictions that may not have been apparent to contemporaries, but are evident in a historical examination of the career of Retté.

In 1897, the publisher Vanier decided to issue a second edition of *Cloches dans la nuit* (the "en" was changed to

⁶⁸ Henri Clouard, *Histoire de la littérature française. Du Symbolisme à nos jours*, vol.1 (Paris: Albin Michel, 1947) 123.

"dans"). Retté now added a new "Apologue" that explained, or rather explained away this obscure and difficult volume.

The poet visits his friend Jacques Simple (the protagonist of *La Forêt bruissante*) in Arcadia. He informs Jacques that he has published the record of his adventures in the forest of lies and pain, the chronicle of the sufferings he had to undergo for the conquest of happiness and the discovery of Arcadia.

Les vers qui suivent racontent donc la solitude hantée de Jacques Simple avant sa libération. Pour en préciser la confuse douleur, j'ai supprimé deux ou trois poèmes qui faisaient double emploi, j'ai changé quelques mots impropres et j'ai rétabli la ponctuation qu'une erreur produite par les sophismes de l'homme à "l'Aurore gourde" et au "Cher ennui!" m'avait fait omettre lorsque je publiai ce livre, *Cloches dans la nuit*, pour la première fois.⁶⁹

Some of the difficult vocabulary of the earlier edition is in fact altered, attributed to the harmful influence of Mallarmé (who by now had become Retté's *bête noire*). What is more remarkable, however, is the metamorphosis of Retté's most Symbolist and apolitical volume into an anarchist-naturist tract by the simple addition of a foreword and the alteration of some words. The hallucinatory and murky dream visions of *Cloches en la nuit* now appear as the record of Jacques Simple's wanderings in the dark and gloomy landscape

⁶⁹ Adolphe Retté, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Bibliothèque Artistique et Littéraire, 1898) 12. This version is the same as the one published the previous year, and discussed here.

of present society, before the revolution.

Retté's case demonstrates the intricate affiliations and differences that existed between anarchism and the Symbolist movement. It also shows the diverse ways in which anarchism appealed to the Symbolist writers, at times in its individualist aspects (which could be combined with an Nietzschean aristocratism), at others in its social facets, or yet in the radical form of a return to simplicity and nature, with its corollaries in writing. After a period of anarchist-naturist poetry, Retté converted to Catholicism in 1906 and simultaneously renounced his allegiance to all avant-garde poetic schools, turning instead to François Coppée for guidance and advice. He was initially led to anarchism through his adherence to the Symbolist movement and his involvement in the campaign for the liberation of versification, an anarchism that eventually incited him to question and reject the authority of Mallarmé, turn against the Symbolist movement and subsequently refuse adherence to all schools.

While anarcho-symbolism emphasized the autonomy of poetry and of the writer, there were also tensions within anarchism that demanded a socially responsible form of art, accessible to the public and in particular to the workers. A closer examination of the dates of Retté's works reveals that his move towards simplification coincided with the

transformation of the anarchist movement itself after 1895, from the individualism and the doctrine of propaganda by the deed to the anarcho-syndicalism of the second half of the 90's. The anarcho-syndicalists, as I suggested in chapter 1, favored a socially conscious art, and were critical of the disdainful attitude of the Symbolists towards the masses. Like Retté, a number of Symbolist writers seduced by anarchism gradually moved towards the use of lucid language and clarity of style after 1895, without ever explicitly renouncing the autonomy of poetry.

We can find this progression in the work of the American Symbolist poet, Stuart Merrill. Born in 1863 in Long Island, Merrill moved to Paris as a child, returning to New York when he turned 18. From there, he published his first volume of Symbolist verse entitled *Les Gammes* in 1887.

The volume was considered derivative of Baudelaire and Verlaine. The melancholy mood and the characteristic Symbolist retreat into the dream are the dominant themes of the collection of poems. Merrill seems to have been also impressed by the instrumentalist theories of René Ghil at this time, to whom he dedicated the book. He followed Ghil in emphasizing the musicality of words, yet he disputed Ghil's suggestion that poetry include the social question, and demanded that they be vigorously kept apart. The verse in the volume remains close to the frequent alliteration and

refrains used by Baudelaire, as well as the themes of aspiration to Beauty in *Les Fleurs du mal*:

Mon coeur, ô ma Chimère, est une cathédrale
Où mes chastes pensées idolâtres du Beau,
S'en viennent à minuit sous la flamme lustrale
Râler leur Requiem au pied de ton tombeau.

Mon coeur est une crypte où parmi les pilastres
S'enroulent les remous de l'encens des oublis,
Et vers l'heure qui luit de la lueur des astres,
La paix des nuits se mire en les pavés polis.⁷⁰

Merrill's second volume of verse, *Les Fastes* (1891) was a record of his new fascination with Wagner, and the poems revolved around the legend of Parsifal, medieval knights and mythological figures. Formally, Merrill pushed the element of musicality further, and emphasized the rhythmic patterns at the expense of the rhyme. These volumes show no interest in social questions or anarchism.

We have no record of Merrill's life in these years, but judging from his articles in *Ermitage* in the early 1890's, he was increasingly drawn towards anarchism. He had lived in Washington Square in New York in the late 1880's, an experience that, according to his biographer, had stirred in him a violent disgust with the extremes of poverty and wealth that he witnessed there.⁷¹ He was particularly

⁷⁰ Stuart Merrill, "L'Oubli," *Poèmes (1887-1897)* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1897) 32. This volume contains *Les Gammes*, *Les Fastes* (1891) and *Les Petits poèmes d'automne* (1895).

⁷¹ Marjorie Louise Henry, *Stuart Merrill* (Paris: Édouard Champion, 1927) 41.

revolted and felt helpless during the Haymarket massacre of anarchists in Chicago. In New York he founded a club for the nationalization of the means of production, publishing articles of propaganda in the *New York Times*, *The Evening Post*, and other papers under the pseudonym "M&M."

Returning to France, he took up the position of book reviewer for the Symbolist journal *Ermitage*. His review of Heredia's *Les Trophées* was a turning point in his career. He recognized the futility of pure art, proclaimed that poetry should be immersed in Life, criticized the "decadent" poets and invited them to "cesser de s'amuser à des raffinements douteux de Byzantins."⁷² For Merrill, Heredia's book was remarkable, for showed that an absolute perfection in form risks resulting in a sterile poetry. "L'or ne vaut pas par lui-même, mais par ce qu'il représente."⁷³ He invited poets to descend from the ivory tower, abandon excessive erudition which mystifies their public, quit their skillful handling of rhythm and rhyme, and look around themselves for inspiration. In an article written in December of the same year, he demanded that form be subordinated to subject matter, a concept that was explicitly at odds with Symbolist doctrine. In August, he praised Symbolism for prompting poets to be themselves,

⁷² Stuart Merrill, "Réflexions générales," *Ermitage*, June 1893, 93.

⁷³ Merrill, "Réflexions générales," 93.

"c'est à dire individuel," to refuse all forms of constraint, and seek an absolute poetic liberty. This emphasis on liberty had brought them close to the anarchists. "Ce n'est pas seulement au *Mercure*, à *la Plume*, et aux *Entretiens* que se lisent nos articles [those of the Symbolists], mais à *la Révolte*, à *l'En-Dehors* et au *Père Peinard*."⁷⁴ Next, he initiated *Ermitage's* poll on the question of liberty and constraint discussed in the beginning of this chapter.

But he would never embrace art as propaganda, as had Retté in his later period. *Les Petits poèmes d'automne*, however, does bear the signs of the simplicity in style that he advocated in his critical essays. The verse is free, lyrical, and on simple subjects such as sadness and love. The social question is kept at bay, except in the poem *Ame d'automne*, where vague allusions are made to the "ville maudite... menacée de futurs désastres."

Merrill was in fact to move further and further from the Symbolist movement in his shift towards simplicity and his rapprochement with the anarchists. His critical statements, however, are guarded, and they must be understood in the climate of fear that followed the *Procès des Trente*. Like his compatriot Francis Vielé-Griffin, who was also an anarchist, Merrill had to maintain a moderate tone in his

⁷⁴ Merrill, "Réflexions générales," 93.

language, because as a foreign citizen he could be accused of violating the rule of political neutrality, be taken to the border and summarily deported from France. Merrill remained an anarchist to the end of his life (1915), and his poetry continued evolving towards the simplicity and directness which had begun during the period of his most fervent involvement in the anarchist turmoil.

The contributions of Merrill's fellow American citizen Francis Vielé-Griffin to both Symbolism and anarchism should also be mentioned. Born in 1863 in Virginia, Francis Vielé-Griffin moved to Paris with his mother in 1872. After a bohemian youth in Montmartre in the early 1880's, he chose a literary career, wrote for *La Revue Indépendante*. In 1890, along with his closest friend Henri de Régnier, he founded *Les Entretiens Politiques et Littéraires*.

Les Entretiens played a pivotal role, not only as a Symbolist and literary journal, but also in the history of the anarchist movement. As its title suggest, *Les Entretiens* was from its beginnings engaged in the polemics surrounding anarchism as well as Symbolism. Its influence went well beyond literary circles. To this day, it is one of the only literary reviews mentioned in the histories of the anarchist movement proper. By 1892, *Les Entretiens* had flagrantly become an anarchist organ, publishing Proudhon, Stirner, Bakunin and Élisée Reclus among others. In May

1892, in response to the recent illegalization of the manufacture of dynamite by individuals, the journal threatened to publish the formula for the home-fabrication of a new explosive, even more powerful than dynamite. The next issue contained Mallarmé's "Vers et Musique en France," in which he supported the younger generation of Symbolist poets and proclaimed the victory of the Symbolist doctrine.

Les Entretiens's simultaneous accommodation of radical politics and literary questions was itself a sign of the times, characteristic of a period where the liberation of the verse and that of existence had come to coincide in the minds of revolutionaries and poets alike.

While the aristocratic Henri de Régnier kept a distance from the anarchist tendencies of the period, *Les Entretiens* was soon joined by two new editors who pushed the journal even further into the fray, Paul Adam and Bernard Lazare. The early 1890's were Adam's most fanatical anarchist period. His later militarism was already present in his thought, evident in his incitement to violence. In an article entitled "Pour la guerre," he called for an immediate war with Germany, in order to crush the authoritarian state and establish an anarchist utopia. "Il faut la guerre. Il la faut immédiate, acharnée, définitive," he wrote.⁷⁵ La patrie, he claimed, is not just

⁷⁵ Paul Adam, "Pour la guerre," *Les Entretiens Politiques et Littéraires*, n. 16, July 1891, 21.

a fiction but is rooted in the race, not a biological category but a historical and cultural one. After a hundred years of revolutions and struggle for liberty, the French race must now lead the world to freedom and disarmament by defeating its greatest enemy, Germany. It is difficult to decipher Adam's delirious prose, and it is not clear whether militarism and violence are a means to the establishment of a better society, or ends in themselves. In his novel *Lettres de Malaisie*, he presented a secret French colony hidden deep in the jungles of Malaysia. Again, it is not clear whether Adam was portraying a utopian anarchist society or a totalitarian and technocratic nightmare. His anarchism was from the beginning affected with the patriotism, militarism, and chauvinism that were to come to surface years later, but were not necessarily apparent to his contemporaries.

The other major contributor to the journal, Bernard Lazare, undertook a history of anti-Semitism in the pages of *Les Entretiens* as early as 1890 that became the basis of his work during the Dreyfus affair, where he was one of the first, in 1896, to expose the case of Dreyfus and tirelessly continued to report the injustice perpetrated by the army. Lazare was briefly part of the Symbolist movement in the early 1890's. He attended Mallarmé's Tuesdays and wrote an article in which he exalted the master. With the

collaboration of Ephraïm Mikhaël (or Georges Michel), he wrote the mystico-symbolist *La Fiancée de Corinthe* in 1888.

The book attempts to consolidate Pagan mythology with Christian mysticism, demonstrating the Symbolist precept of man's need for mystery and magic throughout history. Despite its subject matter, the style is lucid and the tone joyful, elements that put Lazare at odds with his Symbolist friends. His next book, *Le Miroir des légendes* (1892) is a collection of tales reinterpreting the myths and legends of world religions culminating in the rise of Christianity. In his position as book critic of *La Nation* in the same year, Lazare's choice of books reveals his taste for poetry over the novel, as well as a large number of books on mysticism and religion.⁷⁶ He routinely attacked Zola and the Naturalists, a requisite for all Symbolist writers during these years of polemic against Naturalism's dominance in the world of literature. By the end of the same year, however, there is evidence that Lazare was already moving towards anarchism. "De la Nécessité de l'intolérance," published in *Les Entretiens* in December 1891, is written with a violence of language and tone that shows his first moves towards radical social ideas. Lazare himself discussed his

⁷⁶ Nelly Wilson, *Bernard-Lazare* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1985) 57. This is a revised and expanded translation of Wilson's *Bernard Lazare: Anti-Semitism and the Problem of Jewish Identity in Late Nineteenth Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978).

conversion to anarchism in his interview with Augustin Hamon in *Psychologie de l'anarchiste-socialiste*, published in 1895. After an initial period of visceral revolt which took him to the individualist camp of anarchism, Lazare began to move towards a more socially conscious position which brought him close to Fernand Pelloutier and the anarcho-syndicalists. The comments he made to Augustin Hamon show him as sensitive to social injustice and the sufferings of the workers.⁷⁷ Like many writers of his generation, his political development occurred in conjunction with his literary progress, each one stimulating and reinforcing the other. Anarchism had made him aware of the necessity of educating the masses, and the social role that art and literature can play in this awakening. Socialism requires an art of propaganda and indoctrination, he wrote in 1894; anarchist art, by contrast, speaks the language of the people and stirs their passions against injustice by reviving in them a sense of Beauty.

Quant à ceux qui n'entrent pas dans les écoles,
qui s'éloignent des syndicats, qui ne vont pas
dans les universités, éduquons-les quand même.
Créons une littérature pour eux, naïve comme leur
cœur, profonde et simple comme leur âme,
racontons-leur des contes qu'ils puissent
comprendre, libérons-les des infâmes littérateurs
qu'ils subissent, accoutumons-les au commerce des
idées, faisons-leur connaître le beau.
Instruisons-les par le théâtre, instruons-les par
le roman. Fondons des bibliothèques, des

⁷⁷ Augustin Hamon, *Psychologie de l'anarchiste-socialiste* (Paris: Stock, 1895) 168.

publications; mettons à leur portée, dans des brochures peu coûteuses, les oeuvres des romanciers, des poètes, les semences des philosophes qui ont travaillé au cours des siècles à la libération de l'esprit humain.⁷⁸

By 1894, Lazare had clearly moved away from the anarcho-individualist conception of the work of art as singular and incomprehensible to philistines and barbarians. His earlier work did bear the signs of his later ideas, in that its language was intelligible and clear. But now he demanded that writers abandon the mystical landscape of the dream world, speak the language of *le peuple* and join their struggles. We recognize the aesthetic theories of Kropotkin, who had begun to exert a real influence over Lazare, probably through the intermediary of Pelloutier. It was Augustin Hamon who introduced Lazare to Pelloutier, and the two men formed the core of the group *L'Art Social*, anarcho-syndicalists who undertook to educate workers by creating an autonomous working-class culture. They produced plays in working class districts of Paris, delivered lectures on art, literature and history, thus putting into practice Pelloutier's claim that art is capable of making revolutionaries (see chapter 1).

In the meanwhile, the controversy with the proponents of anarcho-symbolism had reached a climax in the pages of *Les Entretiens*. The debate came to the fore in the May 1893

⁷⁸ In *Le Courrier Social Illustré*, 1 Nov. 1894, quoted in Wilson, 88.

issue of the journal, where Pierre Quillard attacked Lazare's conception of *l'art social*. Art's revolutionary content is in its autonomy, in its intrinsic freedom, argued Quillard.⁷⁹ The debate presents a disparity opened in the anarchist camp between the proponents of individualism and propaganda by the deed on the one hand, and those who supported the new doctrine of anarcho-syndicalism on the other. In 1892, Quillard had compared literature to an act of propaganda by the deed, even more effective than the bomb of the terrorists. By conveying his beautiful dream, argued Quillard, the artist can destroy the delusions and beliefs in the present social order. Flaubert, Balzac and Shakespeare sap the foundations of bourgeois society much more effectively than Ravachol, thus precipitating the fall of the old order and the arrival of the new. The notion of literature as a terroristic act was common among anarcho-symbolists. In his memoirs, Mauclair wrote of Mallarmé: "Mon bon maître avait horreur des bombes: 'La vraie bombe, c'est le livre', disait-il doucement. Mais son cœur s'émouvait pour les pauvres, et il avait tant souffert de l'injustice que nos rêves de justice lui plaisaient."⁸⁰

The debate on the question of *l'art social* came to a head over A.Ferdinand Herold's *Chevaleries sentimentales*.

⁷⁹ I discussed Quillard's argument in Chapter 1.

⁸⁰ Camille Mauclair, *Servitude et grandeur littéraires* (Paris: Ollendorff, n.d.(1922?)) 116.

In his review written in *Mercure de France*, Pierre Quillard praised Herold's book as "perfectly useless," a quality that constituted its worthiness for him. Undoubtedly aiming his criticism at Lazare, he denounced the proponents of *l'art social* and dismissed the theory that art should serve any cause outside of itself as a contradiction in terms.⁸¹ In turn, Lazare wrote his own review of Herold's book in *Les Entretiens* in May 1893.⁸² He distinguished between socialist art and *l'art social*, and maintained that it is perfectly legitimate to defend ideas -- whether they are philosophical, metaphysical or social -- in literature. This is not a form of propaganda, but an art that educates the public. Quillard's notion of utility, Lazare continued, is based on a very limited interpretation of the word. Certain works of literature shaped the spirit of their time, and in this they were surely useful, but not in the way that a telephone is useful. They enlightened and instructed their contemporaries. "L'écrivain, l'artiste vraiment digne de ce nom ne doit pas abuser de lui-même par sa propre et unique satisfaction, il doit être un éducateur, un éducateur comme l'était le mystagogue d'autrefois, comme l'était le

⁸¹ Pierre Quillard, "Les Chevaleries sentimentales de A.F.Herold," *Mercure de France*, vol.8, May 1893, 62-4. Quillard took up the argument once again in July of the same year in "Lettre à Bernard Lazare" (see note 8).

⁸² Bernard Lazare, "Les Livres," *Les Entretiens*, 25 May 1893, 475-7.

hiérophante, et doit nous enseigner des vérités, morales, religieuses, sociales, métaphysiques, scientifiques, qu'importe, mais il doit nous enseigner, d'une haute façon et non comme les pédagogues." He congratulated Quillard for being an anarchist, but reproached him for being incapable of shedding the Romantic prejudice of art for art's sake. This was the last article Lazare wrote for *Les Entretiens*, and he soon left the editorial group of the journal. *Les Entretiens* closed its doors a few months later, in the beginning of 1894, when the invective against anarchism in the popular press made Vielé-Griffin increasingly nervous about being deported, for it was he who almost entirely financed the anarchist review with funds obtained from his trust fund on Wall Street.⁸³

Lazare subsequently joined the group of *L'Art social*, who sought to educate the workers by introducing them to art, literature, history and theater. One of his lectures for the group was published in 1896 under the title *L'Écrivain et l'art social*. In it, Lazare harshly attacks the mystico-symbolist tendencies, as well as all forms of art for art's sake. Art is not a source of private sensations and individual enjoyment, a trend that began with Romanticism and is now found in the work of Barrès and his disciples (which included the Symbolists). This conception

⁸³ Henry de Paysac, *Francis Vielé-Griffin. Poète symboliste et citoyen américain* (Paris: Nizet, 1976) 133.

of art, Lazare suggested, is the equivalent of the bourgeois' attitude towards life. "Il se sert de l'art pour satisfaire ses goûts, de même que l'épicier enrichi se sert de son capital. Il se recrée lui-même, il veut que son plaisir soit solitaire."⁸⁴ The influence of Kropotkin (and to a lesser extent Proudhon) is evident in Lazare's theories: he deplores the specialization and isolation of artists, their obsession with the self, resorting to the dubious category of "degenerate" in describing the Symbolists. He invites writers to become realist and idealist, to describe the present reality but also perceive and accentuate the latent elements that hold the seeds of the society of the future and thus suggest to their readers the shape of things to come.

Pour rendre à la vie sa beauté, il faut donc que l'art à son tour aide à transformer la société et c'est ainsi que tout art social devient un art révolutionnaire [...] L'oeuvre de l'écrivain, l'oeuvre de l'artiste, l'oeuvre de l'art social, est de faire comprendre à l'homme d'aujourd'hui d'autres formes de beauté; c'est aussi de le rendre apte à habiter la cité de demain.⁸⁵

Even though he had attacked Zola and the Naturalists during his Symbolist period, he now approved of Naturalism, though he insisted that it become more socially responsible.

His novel from this period sought to put his aesthetic

⁸⁴ Bernard Lazare, *L'Écrivain et l'art social* (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'Art social, 1896) 17.

⁸⁵ Lazare, *L'Écrivain et l'art social*, 30, 31.

ideas into practice. *Les Porteurs de torches* (1897) are clearly inspired by Kropotkin, who had designated art as the "torch-bearer which indicates a higher ideal."⁸⁶ The book shows that Lazare had not completely broken with his former sympathies for Symbolism. The story is told in the form of parables -- much in the style of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (of whom Lazare was very critical). It recounts the adventures of a heretical philosopher named Marcus, who roams the countryside and on his way gathers a number of "disciples": Juste, the hedonistic vagabond; a poet; a young girl; and a disillusioned and guilt-ridden rich man. They observe the life around them, discuss politics and philosophy, and seek an answer to the social question. The book ends with the social revolution thundering on the horizon, with a promise of better things to come. Jean Grave wrote an exalted review of Lazare's book, and it received favorable commentaries in all anarchist journals.⁸⁷

Lazare was increasingly engaged in the Dreyfus affair during these years, as a result of which his literary output suffered. He died a premature death in 1903, and today he is primarily remembered for the pivotal role he played in the "Affair." Only his work on the history of anti-Semitism and the Dreyfus affair has been reprinted (as well as *Le*

⁸⁶ Kropotkin, *Russian Literature*, op.cit., 88.

⁸⁷ Jean Grave's review in *Les Temps nouveaux*, suppl. littéraire, n.51, 1899.

Fumier de Job); his novels are today forgotten and quite difficult to find. His career as a writer in the 1890's coincided with the transformation of the anarchist movement -- from the individualist elements to syndicalism -- which he followed more closely than anyone else. He never went as far as his colleagues on the editorial board of *Les Entretiens* in supporting and praising the terrorists in the early 1890's, but there is no doubt that he was a fellow traveler of the individualists and the anarcho-symbolists during this short period. Yet he was also sensitive to the social question, and empathized with the working-class. Was it a consequence of his Jewishness, of being an outsider himself? It is difficult to say. But it is clear that Lazare was not one of the aesthetes for whom anarchism was no more than a nihilistic gesture with which to shock the bourgeois. The attitude of the dilettante anarchists may in fact have contributed to push him towards the syndicalists. A few months after leaving *Les Entretiens*, he confronted the aesthetes and those who dismissed literary anarchism as nothing but a fad.

On veut dire que nos idées, nos théories ou nos doctrines, sont des doctrines, des théories et des idées d'apparat, que nous les affichons par attitude, qu'elles remplacent pour nous le gilet rouge des romantiques, en un mot que nous les professons pour étonner le bourgeois et qu'en dernière analyse nous sommes des farceurs sans conviction.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Bernard Lazare, "Anarchie et littérature," *La Révolte*,

But if it is true that we are nothing but posers, asked Lazare, why are we harrassed by the police, detained and put in jail? He came very close to being arrested during the police campaign of terror on the eve of the *Procès des Trente*, and had to seek refuge in Belgium during the summer of 1894. But he had already made his first steps towards the group *L'Art Social*, and, far from frightening him into the repudiation of his past, the trials served only to further reinforce his commitment to anarchism and the working class.

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In the few years following 1885, the world of literature witnessed one of the most experimental and intoxicated periods of literary history. A period of crisis, as Guy Michaud called it, during which we find "unis en un même homme, le poète et le révolté."⁸⁹ It was a period, continues Michaud, where the poet was *engagé*, committed to change poetry, life, and the world. Anarchism satisfied these tendencies, for it promised an aesthetic utopia to come, a world that seemed to approximate the Symbolists' desire for the unification of all the arts and

suppl.littéraire, n.24, Feb.1894.

⁸⁹ Guy Michaud, *Op.cit.*, II:234.

the Wagnerian cult of reconciling art and life, of *aestheticizing* life. In the anarchist society of the future, wrote a critic in the pages of *La Revue Blanche*, "L'art va ainsi doublant et triplant notre existence... Une vie d'imagination se superposera à l'existence réelle... On peut concevoir que l'Art, ce luxe de l'imagination, finisse par devenir une nécessité pour tous, une sorte de pain quotidien."⁹⁰ But just as the Symbolist movement itself ended with a more composed examination of its revolutionary advances in the *Romaniste* and *Naturiste* movements, one can trace also a trajectory which goes from the individualistic anarcho-symbolism of the early 90's to the collectivist and socially responsible commitment of the anarcho-syndicalist *littérateurs* of the second half of the 1890's. For the aesthetes of the first period, anarchism provided a model of literary individualism, of the *poète révolté* who could reconcile art and politics while avoiding the dilemmas of commitment; it furnished the writers of the second phase with the possibility of a *littérature engagée* that was not propagandist or necessarily social in its themes, but engaged with the life of its time in the way that Proudhon and Kropotkin had envisioned, realist yet idealist.

⁹⁰ Edmond Cousturier, *La Revue Blanche*, n.32, November 1892, 215.

Chapter 3

Jules Vallès:

Instantanéisme and Anarchism

According to the first anarchist historian Max Nettlau, anarchism did not turn into a coherent movement until 1879, even though it had its predecessors before that date.¹ As early as 1840, to be sure, Proudhon had written in his *Qu'est-ce que la propriété?*: "Je suis anarchiste."² The astonishment of his interlocutor and the length he then had to go to explain and clarify the term show the obscure nature of the word at the time. The "anti-authoritarians" did not adopt Proudhon's term for many years to come. In the early 1870's, when Bakunin and his followers began to take their distance from the "authoritarian communism" of Marx, they chose the term "collectivist" in order to designate themselves.³ We may therefore say that before

¹ Max Nettlau, *Bibliographie de l'anarchie* (Paris: Stock, 1897) 56.

² Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Qu'est-ce que la propriété?* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966) 295.

³ The pre-history of the words "anarchist" and "anarchism" can be found in Jean Maitron, *Le Mouvement anarchiste en*

1879 anarchism was a tendency, best defined by the refusal of certain individuals to accept any authority whatsoever: not simply the authority of Church and State, but the concept in its most general sense, i.e., the authority of any coherent doctrine or school of thought, be it revolutionary or not.

Jules Vallès (1832-1885) belonged to this generation, and his "anarchism"--if we may call it that--can be summed up in one word: refusal. Refusal of the State, surely; but also of the life offered to him by the society of Second Empire France; as a writer, refusal of the literature of his time, of the influence of the "great writers" of the past, of the education system that inculcates the respect and authority of the Great Writers; as a revolutionary and Communard, the refusal of the authority of past revolutions, of Jacobinism and its most forceful offspring in the nineteenth century, Blanquism. In his *Les Réfractaires* (1865), he portrayed men who had refused all authority and had quietly gone their own way, living sad and painful lives outside of society, even if it brought them nothing but misery, hunger and sadness. Their revolt against the world was not doctrinaire and did not have an ideology: it stemmed from their heart, it was an "existential revolt"

France, vol. 1 (Paris: Maspero, 1975) 13-14.

against the life of their time. "[Ils] ont juré d'être libres[...] Le monde veut en faire des précepteurs ou des notaires. Ils s'écartent, ils s'éloignent, ils vont vivre une vie à part, étrange et douloureuse..."⁴

There is one person whose influence Vallès did not refuse. It was Proudhon, whom Kropotkin was to call the "father of anarchism." In an essay entitled "Proudhon," he explains what he learned from the author of *Qu'est-ce que la propriété?*⁵ He recalls his souvenirs of the 1848 revolutions, when, as an adolescent, he had plunged into revolutionary agitation in Nantes in the days of February, and arrived in Paris in June just as the defeated revolutionaries were being paraded in the streets, clad in chains. "Deux hommes, dans ce temps-là, préoccupaient ma vie et agitaient mes rêves: ces deux hommes étaient Auguste Blanqui et P.-J. Proudhon[...] Proudhon! Celui-là m'apparaissait comme une espèce d'anté-christ qui riait sa large de bouche au nez des idoles puissantes" (811-2). Two men, two revolutionaries, yet very different from one another. Blanqui, the ideological descendant of Babeuf, and

⁴ Jules Vallès, *Les Réfractaires* (Paris: Les Éditions Français Réunis, 1955) 24, 25.

⁵ "Proudhon," in Vallès, *Oeuvres*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), 1975) I:808-823. Hereafter, references to this edition will be made in the text, with

representative of the most radical branch of Jacobinism; and Proudhon, whose position seemed unclear at the time: his anarchic attacks on everyone seemed to the Jacobins to be nothing more than an irrational polemicizing for the sake of itself. Two men, two contradictory tendencies that the fever of revolution could momentarily unite, at least in the eyes of the young Vallès.

But something went wrong with the revolution and the Second Republic. What was the cause of their failure? "Si l'on me demande à qui il faut attribuer les malheurs qui arrêterent en route cette république, je n'hésite point à répondre que c'est le collège qui fut coupable" (815). The school in nineteenth century France instructed two traditions to children: the Latin book, the rules of rhetoric and discourse descending from the Romans; and the lives of great men, the cult of heroes. This latter is also Roman in its origins, but was mediated through the Revolution and the Jacobin tradition.⁶ Reared in this heritage in school, *by the school*, the men of 1848, according to Vallès, slavishly looked back and imitated

the page number in parentheses.

⁶ Roger Bellet, "Jules Vallès critique de l'État," *Littérature et anarchie*, eds. Alain Pessin and Patrice Terrone (Toulouse: Presses Universitaire du Mirail, 1998) 57.

their "masters," the "saints of revolution" whom they had been taught to venerate. "Quelle influence désastreuse, sanglante et triste le monde romain, enseigné par les professeurs de lycée, a exercé sur le monde nouveau!" (816).

Instead of taking stock of their own historical moment, the revolutionaries (including the young Vallès) were too busy imitating their idols of the past. They were "victims of books," of the school and the education system that taught them fidelity to the cult of heroes and hero worship. Vallès' critique of the 1848 revolution comes close to that of Marx in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, who likewise protested that "From 1848 to 1851, only the ghost of the old revolution walked about."⁷ But the comparison must stop there, for Vallès never read Marx. As a participant in the events of 1848, Vallès shows the extent to which the revolutionaries were driven by the imitation of the authority of the Great Men of the past. This had its source in their education and upbringing, cast as they were

⁷ Karl Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1963) 17. Marx had also mentioned the Roman model of the revolutionaries: "The new social formation once established, the ante-diluvian Colossi disappeared and with them resurrected Romanity[...] And in the classically austere traditions of the Roman republic its gladiators found the ideals and the art forms, the self-deceptions that they needed in order to conceal from themselves the bourgeois limitations of the content of their struggles."

after Classical models of Roman austerity and mediated through the Romantic cult of genius. The ideals and goals of 1848 were thus bound to fail (and in this Vallès is perhaps unjustly harsh on the revolution), led by men who were incapable to free themselves from the yoke of history and were condemned to repeat it.

Notre enthousiasme, hélas! n'était qu'une traduction. Notre foi politique nous venait, aveugle et sourde, des livres où nous avons lu ces mots de liberté ou de patrie exalté par le génie héroïque de Tite-Live ou de Lucain.

Le Collège, toujours le collège! L'éducation ridicule et fatale de l'université!

C'étaient des forts en thème qui commandaient les hautes barricades dans la terrible journée de la Saint-Jean, et dans les chambres où ils furent massacrés par les soldats, parce qu'ils avaient les mains noires de poudre, il y avait des prix de collège à côté des portraits sinistres de Robespierre et de Jean-Jacques.

Des imitateurs aussi, et des forts en thème, ces révolutionnaires de 93, tout grands qu'ils furent! (817).

But the men of the Great Revolution, being now imitated, were themselves imitators. Rousseau had looked to Sparta for the salvation of humanity, and his student Robespierre was grappling to save the Republic under the shadow of the Spartan Lycurgus. Vallès himself had not escaped this attitude in his youth: "Presque tous les amis de 48 à 51, et moi le premier, nous avons été des petits copistes du temps passé" (818).

But now (1865) he has changed and he can see that the greatest enemies of the revolution and liberty are those who are dominated by the specter of the past, which they follow blindly and uncritically. How did Vallès come to throw the weight of the past off of his shoulders? It was Proudhon, "l'auteur des *Confessions*, qui a jeté la lumière dans mon esprit et m'a montré le néant de ces gloires autoritaires et jacobines" (818). As early as March 1848, in his newspaper *Le Représentant du Peuple* (an ironic title for a man who did not believe in representative government and advocated direct democracy!) Proudhon had begun to criticize the Constituent Assembly, attack the Jacobins, reproach the communists and rail against the course the revolution had taken.⁸ He shocked the readers every morning, used as they were to a press that followed or represented a coherent political doctrine. Proudhon, by contrast, seemed to tow no particular party line, "n'a subi le joug d'aucune coterie et d'aucun parti, il n'a jamais sacrifié à personne, à rien, un lambeau de sa conviction" (820). This sentence can refer to its author as well, for Vallès lived and died by this motto, always questioning authority whatever form it may take: in politics, in literature, in language and in thought itself.

⁸ See Édouard Dolléans and J.-L. Puech, *Proudhon et la révolution de 1848* (Paris: PUF, 1948).

Vallès' attack against the education he had received was not limited to questioning the authority of Jacobinism in the French politics of his day. It also encompassed his ideas on literature and writing. The model of rhetoric (also in the Roman tradition) taught in school aimed at convincing, seducing, and mastering the reader. The "book" crushes the individual, leaving no room for authentic initiative and thought. The authority of the printed word ("Tyrannie comique de l'*Imprimé!*") imposes its own version of truth, captures the mind and the imagination.

Pas une de nos émotions n'est franche.
Joies, douleurs, amours, vengeances, nos
sanglots, nos rires, les passions, les crimes;
tout est copié, tout!
Le Livre est là.⁹

How does Vallès subvert the rules of rhetoric? The rhetorical construction is based on a balance that seeks to structure and extend the sentence according to a rhythmic harmony, often at the expense of meaning. Vallès explodes this consonance from the inside by eliminating the ongoing length in favor of short, succinct sentences that produce intense and immediate sensations.¹⁰ But the result,

⁹ "Les Victimes du livre," *Les Réfractaires* (Paris: Les Éditions Français Réunis, 1955) 163.

¹⁰ See Hubert Juin, *Lectures du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions (10/18), 1977) 286.

surprisingly, generates new forms of consonance, harmonious sonorities which nonetheless include harsh incongruities (this was noticed by Rimbaud). This fragmentation didn't only bother Brunetière, who attacked Vallès' tampering with the rules of rhetoric.¹¹ Paul Bourget was equally disturbed and complained of "Les sursauts de styles... [et] les phrases [qui] vous entrent dans les oreilles comme le fracas de la rue, comme l'accent d'une voix. La sensation est copiée telle quelle."¹² For Bourget, Vallès's writing was characterized by an infantilism that was incapable of abstraction or higher modes of thought. It was therefore condemned to reproduce the physical, "animal" sensation of the world.

Nul écrivain n'a été emprisonné plus que celui-ci dans la sensation personnelle et toute animale des choses. Ce qui ressuscite dans son esprit quand il songe, ce sont des couleurs, des sons, des odeurs, tout cela d'une manière très intense à la fois et très bornée, car ces images ne lui servent pas d'instruments pour sortir de lui-même. Il en jouit ou bien il en souffre, à la manière des enfants et des sauvages. Aussi, comme les enfants, charge-t-il tout naturellement ses phrases d'onomatopées qui reproduisent

¹¹ F. Brunetière, "La Confession d'un réfractaire" *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, March 1st, 1885.

¹² Paul Bourget, "Jules Vallès," *Études et portraits*, vol.1 (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1889) 158.

l'impression directe et concrète.¹³

In the beginning of *L'Enfant*, little Jacques is beaten by his mother: "Vlin! Vlan! Zon! Zon!--voilà le petit Chose qu'on fouette;"¹⁴ and later in the novel: "On n'entendait jadis que pif-paf, v'lin-v'lan et allez donc! -- On m'appelait bandit, sapré gredin!"¹⁵ Onomatopoeia constitutes only one of the means by which Vallès conveys the immediate sensations of the vécu in his writing. Though critical of Vallès, Bourget's essay is one of the most insightful critiques ever written on his work. For it is true that Vallès' writing conveys an intense sense of immediacy, what Jacques Dubois has termed "instantanéisme."¹⁶

What are the characteristics of the literature of instantaneity? Rupture of style, juxtaposition of incongruous elements, fragmentation of form, and autonomy of each element over the whole create and reinforce an acute sense of the real, of the vécu. I already commented on

¹³ Bourget, "Jules Vallès," 158.

¹⁴ Jules Vallès, *L'Enfant* (Paris: Gallimard (Folio), 1973) 39.

¹⁵ *L'Enfant*, 216.

¹⁶ Jacques Dubois, *Romanciers français de l'instantané au XIXe siècle* (Brussels: Palais des Académies, 1963).

Vallès' reduction of the sentence to short, succinct and vibrant units. He also extends this rule to the paragraph, often composed of one short sentence. Such paragraphs follow one another in rapid succession and create a dizzying impression. A vagabond has appeared in little Jacques' town in *L'Enfant*:

Prisonnier! Mendiant!
 Il appartient, bien sûr, à cette race.
 On ne veut pas de lui dans les fermes, parce
 qu'il y a quelque histoire dans sa vie.
 Il est le fils d'un guillotiné ou d'un
 galérien; ou bien il a lui-même eu affaire aux
 gendarmes.
 Il rôde sur la marge des bois, sur le bord de
 la rivière, dans la montagne.¹⁷

Or:

Je vais chez mes tantes à Farreyrolles.
 J'arrive souvent au moment où l'on se met à
 table.
 Une grosse table, avec deux tiroirs de chaque
 bout et deux grands bancs de chaque côté.
 Dans ces tiroirs il traîne des couteaux, de
 vieux oignons, du pain. Il y a des taches bleues
 au bord des croûtes, comme du vert-de-gris sur de
 vieux sous.
 Sur les deux bancs s'abattent la famille et
 les domestiques.
 On mange entre deux prières.
 C'est l'oncle Jean qui dit le Bénédicté.
 Tout le monde se tient debout, tête nue, et
 se rassoit en disant: "Amen!"
 Amen! et le bruit des cuillers de bois
 commence; un bruit mou, tout bête.
 Viennent les grandes taillades de pain comme

¹⁷ *L'Enfant*, 114.

des coups de faucille.¹⁸

The chapters themselves are cut "en morceaux, en tout petits morceaux," as noticed Jules Renard,¹⁹ sometimes into each hour of the day. Even though the trilogy (*L'Enfant*, *Le Bachelier* and *L'Insurgé*) is a remembrance of events in the past, it is narrated in the present tense, in a disorder that reflects only the rapid sequence of unrelated thoughts and impressions as they occur, far from the coherence and clarity that memory brings to experience.

This minute fragmentation has as its corollary the special role that description takes in Vallès' work. As opposed to Flaubert and Zola, the descriptive elements in Goncourt had already shown a certain autonomy; they do not fit in the overall design of the plot and pull in different directions. Vallès pushes this tendency to an even more extreme degree. Descriptions often rupture the logical flow of the story, taking on an autonomy and weight of their own.

Bourget had noticed this principle in Vallès' work; he criticized the absence of a logical course in his narratives, the plot advancing instead by "des associations

¹⁸ *L'Enfant*, 92.

¹⁹ Quoted in Dubois, 45.

d'images" rather than ideas.²⁰

The relation of detail to the entirety of the plot corresponds to Vallès' individualist sensibility, to the anarchist conception of the relation of individual to community, of part to whole, at once autonomous (but not dissociated) yet harmoniously integrated. The singular is restored in all its presence, not in relation to other elements but in itself and for itself. The privileging of the individual object in the descriptions has, as Jacques Dubois has remarked, another consequence: it destabilizes the larger scheme, the overall "reality": "C'est... affirmer un réel multiple où chaque élément du nombre est particulier."²¹ The singular is thus supplied with the possibility of contesting the order of things, while, thematically, we find little Jean, crushed as he is by parental and school authorities, able to maintain a critical outlook on the world around him. He will indeed grow up to be a *bachelier*, and later on an *insurgé* and a *Communard*. The telos of the story is the advent of the Commune, its point of redemption when Vingtras succeeds finally in living *life* to the full in the revolutionary festival. But Vallès'

²⁰ Paul Bourget, *op.cit.*, 158.

²¹ Dubois, 89.

narration succeeds in creating the plenitude of an authentic existence in his retrospective narration of a life lost under the weight of authority.

Vallès reenacts the same process in the treatment of time in his novels, so that the moment jumps out in all its immediacy and presence, restored to its plenitude. Most critics place Vallès among the naturalists (or in the margins of Realism, as did René Dumesnil²²), but we may more aptly speak of his *vitalism* (I borrow the term from Dubois), what I believe corresponds to the anarchist poetics in his work. If we can find one principle in common among the theorists of anarchist aesthetics, writes André Reszler, "[c'est de] détruire tout ce qui sépare l'art et la vie."²³

What Vallès' writing achieves, through the strategies examined above, is a closing of the gap between art and life by restoring a plenitude to experience that had begun to recede from the realm of everyday life into that of art (beginning most visibly in Flaubert) in the nineteenth century. Vallès negates aestheticism and the authority of the book with *the book*. He is suspicious of literature, he

²² Dumesnil places Vallès the "réfractaire" "en marges du réalisme," in his *Le Réalisme et le naturalisme* (Paris: Del Duca, 1965) 149.

²³ André Reszler, *L'Esthétique anarchiste* (Paris: PUF, 1973) 6.

wants to affirm life--with literature. We are all victims of books, his *books* tell us, yet it is also the book that can demystify the authority of the father and reveal the banality of bourgeois life: "Le Livre tuera le père."²⁴

His anti-intellectual sensibility is closest to Bakunin's in this regard (rather than to his friend Proudhon). Vallès seems to have only read Proudhon's *Confessions d'un révolutionnaire* (1849) and *Manuel du spéculateur* (1856).²⁵ He makes no references to *Du Principe de l'art et de sa destination sociale*, and we may speculate that the moral art advocated by Proudhon would not have appealed to him. Bakunin, however, showed a similar inclination for action--as opposed to art and literature (see chapter 1). He imbued revolt and revolution with a poetic, dreamlike fantasmagoria. For the Russian anarchist, the frenetic intoxication of living the revolution replaced the pleasures of aesthetic experience. "Plutôt que par la parole, c'est par l'action qu'il s'exprime et devient créateur."²⁶ It is as though he was following revolutions

²⁴ *Les Réfractaires*, 171.

²⁵ According to Roger Bellet, in Vallès' *Oeuvres*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard (Pléiade)) 1585.

²⁶ André Reszler, 30.

around Europe, present at every insurrection that took place in his time. If he concedes that "L'art est le retour de l'abstraction à la vie," he could have said the same of revolutions and barricades.²⁷ His life, close to the stuff of legends, blurred the lines between fantasy and reality. More than his militant anarchism, Bakunin fascinated people by his fantastic allures, as he seemed to have stepped out of a Romantic book to take his part on the stage of history.

In his memoirs, Herzen remembered him after his return from eleven years of imprisonment in Russia. Far from being crushed by the experience,

He argued, preached, gave orders, shouted, decided, arranged, organized, exhorted, the whole day, the whole night, the whole twenty-four hours on end. In the brief moments which remained, he would throw himself down at his desk, sweep a small space clear of tobacco ash, and begin to write five, ten, fifteen letters to Semipalatinsk and Arad, to Belgrade and Constantinople, to Bessarabia, Moldavia, and White Russia. In the middle of a letter he would throw down his pen in order to refute some reactionary Dalmatian; then, without finishing his speech, he would seize his pen and go on writing... His activity, his leisure, his appetite, like all his other characteristics--even his gigantic size and continual sweat--were of superhuman proportions.²⁸

²⁷ The episodes of the barricades during the bloody week at the end of the Commune in *L'Insurgé* are the most abstract in the book.

²⁸ Quoted in E.H.Carr, *Michael Bakunin* (New York: Vintage, 1961), 254-55.

Nothing could stop his colossal personality from living--living and acting the romance of revolt. He wrote in his *Confessions* that the thing he hated most was a *quiet life*. During his trip to the United States he was horrified at what he called "la banalité du bien-être," of the life of material comforts and well-being. "What he longed for most ardently was always something--anything--fantastic, unheard of adventures, perpetual movement, action, battle... He suffocated in peaceful conditions."²⁹ He accused Marx of spoiling the workers by excessive theorizing, thus dissipating their capacity for revolt. Bakunin's anti-intellectualism--against books, for *Life*--remains one of the basic features of anarchism. It does account for the decline of his influence after his death, for it was not with his writings that he gained his followers. It was his superhuman energy and his extravagant personality that seduced all who came in contact with him and prompted them to join his adventures and revolts.

This appetite for life would be renewed again in the 1890's among the writers of the Symbolist generation (Rebell, and the young Gide; see Chapter 4), mediated

²⁹ Isaiah Berlin, "Herzen and Bakunin on Individual Liberty," *Continuity and Change in Russian and Soviet Thought*, ed. E. Simmons (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1955) 497.

through Nietzsche's life-affirmative stance. At the end of *Les Nourritures terrestres* (1897), Gide advises Nathaniel: "Jette mon livre; dis-toi bien que ce n'est là qu'une des mille postures possibles en face de la vie. Cherche la tienne."³⁰ Vallès has his share of this suspicion of books, but he also remained a writer, "un artisan des lettres." His attitude towards Bakunin? While in exile in London, Émile Gautier asks him in a letter: "Que pensez-vous de l'anarchiste Bakounine?" Vallès doesn't denounce the Russian revolutionary, nor does he answer.³¹ Roger Bellet sees this as a proof that Vallès could not have been an anarchist. In my view, it is a further proof for it. To acknowledge no authority, not even that of yourself (or that of another anarchist)--that is Vallès' anarchism. Besides, he has no misgivings in recognizing true individuals, regardless of what politics they wear on their sleeves. In a review of Barbey d'Aurevilly's *Le Chevalier des Touches*, he writes of its author: "Celui qui a écrit ce livre est un homme; s'il eût vécu du temps de ces héros, il eût été des

³⁰ André Gide, *Les Nourritures terrestres et les Nouvelles nourritures terrestres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947) 185-6.

³¹ Quoted in Roger Bellet, *Jules Vallès. Journalisme et révolution, 1857-1885* (Tusson, Charente: Éditions Du Lérot, 1987) 450.

leurs... Certes, je ne les aime guère ces chouans assassins pour Dieu et leur roi, je hais la politique autoritaire et dévote de M. Barbey d'Aurevilly." But Barbey also belongs to a special group of writers. "Il est des écrivains... qui n'ont pour chef de file que leur fantaisie ou la conviction, et vont bravement leur chemin sans se soucier des préjugés sur lesquels ils marchent et des hommes qu'ils blessent au coeur."³² They are true individuals; non-conformists who accept no authority, reject all *coteries* and cliques and go their own way.

There are other elements in common between Bakunin and Vallès. Against his number one enemy, Marx, who saw the working classes as the agents of revolution, Bakunin placed his faith in the potential of *déclassé* intellectuals and the urban *lumpenproletariat* for a spontaneous uprising.³³

³² Jules Vallès, "Deux romans singuliers: *Le Chevalier des Touches* de Barbey d'Aurevilly et *Renée Mauperin*, des Goncourt," *Littérature et révolution* (Paris: Les Éditions Français Réunis, 1969) 83, 81.

³³ Marx was suspicious of the urban *lumpenproletariat* and the *déclassé* children of the bourgeoisie, and thought them more likely to join the ranks of the armies of Reaction rather than the revolution. Louis Bonaparte's Society of December 10, for example, was composed of such shady elements: "On the pretext of founding a benevolent society, the *lumpenproletariat* of Paris had been organized into secret sections, each section being led by Bonapartist agents... Alongside decayed *roués* with dubious means of subsistence and of dubious origin, alongside ruined and adventurous offshoots of the bourgeoisie, were vagabonds,

"[Bakunin] puts his hopes in the sons of the ruined gentry, in all those who drown their sorrows and indignation in violent outbreaks against their cramping milieu. Like Weitling, he calls upon the dregs of the underworld" to rise and topple the social order.³⁴ At the time of the writing of *Les Réfractaires*, Vallès could not have known Bakunin. Yet we find the same appeal to the *bacheliers*, the *réfractaires*, the educated sons of the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie to rise up and claim their due:

La misère sans drapeau conduit à celle qui en a un, et, des réfractaires épars, fait une armée, armée qui compte dans ses rangs moins de fils du peuple que d'enfants de la bourgeoisie. Les voyez-vous forcer sur nous, pâles, muets, amaigris, battant la charge avec les os de leurs martyrs sur le tambour des révoltés...?³⁵

The *réfractaires* are not the bohemians of Murger, blithely going about their carefree existence, heedless of the morrow or their evening meal. They are miserable, cold and hungry. They have no place to sleep, have to devise a thousand

discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, *lazzaroni*, pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, *maquereaus*, brothel keepers, porters, *litterati*, organ grinders, tinkers, beggars--in short, the whole indefinite, disintegrated mass, thrown hither and thither, which the French term *la bohème*." Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1963) 75.

³⁴ Isaiah Berlin, 495.

³⁵ Vallès, *Les Réfractaires*, 114.

schemes to scrape a piece of bread each day. Nor do they have the indifference that Murger's characters showed towards the bourgeoisie. In *L'Insurgé*, Jacques Vingtras explains his motivations for writing *Les Réfractaires*:

C'est bien le diable si, avec ce bouquin là je ne sème pas la révolte sans qu'il y paraisse, sans que l'on se doute que sous les guenilles que je prendrai, comme à la Morgue, il y a une arme à empoigner, pour ceux qui ont gardé de la rage ou que n'a pas dégradés la misère.

Ils ont imaginé une bohème de lâches, -- je vais leur en montrer une de désespérés et de menaçants!³⁶

The trajectory of Vingtras in the trilogy is itself one more illustration of this potential for revolt. The unhappy child, crushed by parental and school authorities, grows up to be a *bachelier* and a *réfractaire*, and then an *insurgé*. *Les bacheliers* are precisely the *déclassé* intellectuals to whom Bakunin appealed: deceived by an education system that promises them a life and a career yet cannot deliver, the anger and frustration of this class is raw material for revolutions.

But the book that sows the seeds of revolt is not a book of propaganda; it is not a *political* book. Like Proudhon, like all anarchists, Vallès rejects politics in favor of the social, "la sociale": "La Sociale arrive,"

³⁶ Vallès, *L'Insurgé* (Paris: Gallimard (Folio), 1975) 57-8.

Vallès wrote ecstatically, "entendez-vous! Elle arrive à pas de géant, apportant non la mort, mais le salut."³⁷ His critique of politics and political revolutions was a corollary of his dispute with the Jacobins, whose principle aim was to establish a revolutionary government by seizing political power. They are "copyists," "imitators," who want to act according to a rigid, *a priori* model. Furthermore, a political revolution cannot undermine authority at its basis, and is bound to reconstitute another form of authority, another State power. The revolution must annihilate all authority, all *idées reçues*, demystify all social "truths," a venture that a revolutionary literature must also undertake. This is not a "political" literature, like the late, socialist novels of George Sand, of which Vallès wrote:

Ses livres étaient trop souvent des thèses, et je ne voudrais pas que le roman se fit avocat ou tribun, même pour défendre les idées que j'aime. L'auteur de tous ces plaidoyers sentimentaux et socialistes qui ont à une certaine heure ému la foule, perdra, je le crois bien, la moitié de sa gloire devant la postérité.³⁸

Instead, the "francs-parleurs," regardless of their political opinions (Barbey d'Aurevilly and Sainte-Beuve,

³⁷ Vallès, *Oeuvres*, vol. 2, 6.

³⁸ Vallès, *Oeuvres*, vol. 1, 550.

among others) represent "la liberté de l'esprit." And their work, despite what they intended, is more likely to contribute to the revolution:

Ils auront beau se débattre comme de beaux diables; j'ose dire que tous, quelle que soit leur opinion, la nuance de leur drapeau, leur mépris des petits ou des irréguliers, tous sont entraînés par la Révolution. Ils peuvent cracher sur elle, ce sera comme des enfants qui se mouchent dans le tablier de leur nourrice, après s'être saoulés de son lait... Est-ce que *La Dame aux Camélias*, est-ce que *Madame Bovary*, est-ce que *L'Assommoir* ne sont pas, en dehors de toute volonté de l'écrivain, des oeuvres sorties de la république des douleurs et des vices? Est-ce que les socialistes socialisants ont écrit contre la famille, la vertu et l'or, des pages plus cruelles que Dumas fils, Flaubert, de Goncourt, Zola?³⁹

In the 1860's Vallès saw his own project as analagous with the new tendencies of Realism (not yet called Naturalism). He wrote an enthusiastic review of the Goncourts brothers' *Germinie Lacerteux*.⁴⁰ But he was mistaken; his *instantanéisme* places him apart from other naturalist writers, except, perhaps Loti (who was not, strictly speaking, a Naturalist).⁴¹ But Loti's *instantanéisme* is meant to reproduce the disorientation of his travels and

³⁹ Vallès, *Littérature et révolution*, 423,25.

⁴⁰ Vallès, "Les Livres nouveaux," *Oeuvres*, vol.1, p.496-501.

⁴¹ Dubois' "literature of instantanéisme" includes the Goncourts, Alphonse Daudet and Pierre Loti; but Vallès pushes the technique to an extreme and for very different ends than the other writers.

foreign surroundings. It is in the service of exoticism. In Vallès, *instantanéisme* functions as a leap between art and life. It thwarts the aestheticism of the Goncourts, in whose work things are petrified into distant, aestheticized images. The philosopher Jules de Gaultier wrote of this tendency in the work of one of the brothers: "En vain il s'efforce de prendre part, d'éprouver des émotions personnelles. Il reste rivé à son point de vue d'observation, dans un lointain recul: il consulte la rue vivante comme il interrogerait une estampe du XVIII^e siècle."⁴² Furthermore, language does not operate in Vallès' work in terms of the familiar division of the signifier and the signified; he does not describe characters and objects but seeks to embody the immediate forms of experience through a literature of spontaneity. He thus eludes the contradictions that plague the "literature of commitment," as we find them in the work of a number of Naturalist writers who worked in this direction. Primarily socialist in their political outlook, these writers sought to redirect the course of Naturalism back to the milieu of *le peuple*, of workers, the condition of their lives and

⁴² Jules de Gaultier, "Les Goncourt et l'idée d'art," *La Revue Blanche*, n.94, May 1st, 1897.

their revolts, against Edmond de Goncourt's recommendation to the young generation of Naturalists to concern themselves with the cultivated classes. Goncourt was indeed worried about the course that Naturalism was to take after Zola's *L'Assommoir*. In the preface of *Les Frères Zemganno* he advised talented writers "à la reproduction des hommes et des femmes du monde, dans des milieux d'éducation et de distinction."⁴³ But the second generation of Naturalist writers took a very different direction. Against the harsh, negative portrayal of the working class in *L'Assommoir*, they presented a humane group struggling against injustice in a society where the odds were stacked against them. In *L'Apprentie* and *Cécile Pommier*, Gustave Geofroy presented the story of Cécile, the daughter of a worker raised in similar circumstances as Zola's Gervaise. She loses her brothers to war, her father to alcoholism, and her sister to vice, but her strong proletarian instincts and her moral uprightness save her from the fate of the laundress of Goutte d'Or: she educates herself and marries a bourgeois. Geoffroy's simplicity was appreciated by a number of critics who hailed his work as a "heroic naturalism."⁴⁴

⁴³ Quoted in Pierre Martino's *Le Naturalisme français* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1923) 164.

⁴⁴ Benjamin Crémieux, "Gustave Geoffroy," *Nouvelle Revue*

Another writer who was among the second generation of Naturalists, J.-H. Rosny (the elder brother) also wrote a cycle of novels set in the proletarian milieu, attempting to adopt their point of view and to present a sympathetic picture of life in the Parisian *faubourgs*. Rosny's *Le Bilatéral* (1889), for instance, has as its milieu that of the anarchist workers in Paris. The author shows a great familiarity with the world of the workers. According to Georges Casella, Rosny lived for a time among the workers and was able to collect copious material on the conditions of their lives, as opposed to the methods used by Zola who hastily gathered information from occasional visits to working class cafés.⁴⁵ Rosny, furthermore, reduces commentary to a minimum in an attempt to place the reader in the milieu, instead of narrating it from the point of view of an outsider. But this literature was plagued by a naiveté that seems at best compensatory. As Michel Raimond once complained, in Rosny's novels characters differ from one another only by the political opinions they avow in the long debates that punctuate the narrative. Their psychological traits are almost indistinguishable and lack

Française, 1 Jan. 1924.

⁴⁵ Georges Casella, *J.-H. Rosny* (Paris: E. Sansot, 1907) 6.

depth and subtlety. "Si pleins d'intelligence et d'aperçus de toute sorte soient ces livres, ils manquent d'art."⁴⁶ Is the writer to bring, even by fiat, a degree of optimism to his subject and make it subservient to his own moral and political outlook (as had done Geoffroy)? Vallès' spontanéisme circumvents the problematics of art for art's sake versus political or committed art by subverting the methods of representation as they were generally understood within Realism or Naturalism, namely that of *describing* the world.

In Vallès' writing, objects, alive, jump out in all their presence, freed from the whole, restored to their singularity. The plot presents characters in the web of all their complex social relations, weighed down by family, school, and economic need. Yet formally, the detail, the object, the individual is freed from all constraint, is restored to its full potential, set on the course of revolt, to live, if only for a short moment, in the act of revolt or *in the book*, the plenitude of life: "Fils de désespérés, tu

⁴⁶ Rosny's novels are divided in two general groups: his "social" and his historical novels. Raimond's comments concern obviously the social novels. Raimond's article on Rosny in the *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises. XIXe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1971) 345.

seras un homme libre"!⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Vallès, "Une Journée de printemps révolutionnaire: le 26 mars," *Littérature et révolution*, 362.

CHAPTER 4

TWO ANARCHO-INDIVIDUALISTS

*[Je suis] un homme qui, après
avoir examiné les choses
d'ici-bas, a vu qu'il n'y
avait que deux partis à
prendre: ou une stupide
obéissance ou la révolte. Je
n'obéis à rien.*

Vautrin, in Balzac's *Le Père Goriot*.

Among the extreme individualists of the generation of the 1890's two writers stand out who pushed the consequences of individualism to their logical ends and who ended up at opposite poles of the political spectrum: Georges Darien and Hugues Rebell. Their revolt against everything placed both at odds with all the literary movements of their time.

The later part of the careers of both men was spent in anonymity; they were only rediscovered years later. Unable or unwilling to compromise with the society of their time, both of these anarchic figures had very little success during their life, though they desperately sought it. In 1905, when Rebell died prematurely, at the age of 37, he was already a completely forgotten figure.¹ The doors of

¹ Auriant, preface to *Les Chants de la patrie et de l'exil* (Paris: Librairie de France, 1929) 6.

publishers as well as the anarchist press were all but closed to Darien after World War I. He died in obscurity in 1921, and it was not until 1955, the year that Jean-Jacques Pauvert reprinted his *Le Voleur* and André Breton's "Darien le Maudit" appeared, that an overdue recognition was granted to this impossible figure in literary history, the one who, in Breton's words, "reste à ce jour la plus haute incarnation de l'Unique qu'a voulu Stirner."²

* * *

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century in France, a number of very different political as well as literary doctrines combined to give birth to unbridled modes of individualism, an individualism very different from the one advocated by the bourgeoisie or the Romantics of the earlier part of the century, and even, in certain respects, the antipode to it. Its origins have to be sought in the 1860's and 70's, in the work of such disparate figures as the Comte de Gobineau, Barbey d'Aurevilly and Max Stirner.

In his *Histoire de la Renaissance* as well as *Les Pléiades*, Gobineau resuscitated a certain type of hero from the works the authors of Antiquity as well as writers of the

² Breton's "Darien le Maudit" is reprinted in Georges Darien, *Le Voleur* (Paris, Julliard, 1964). The quote is from p.10.

Renaissance and Corneille. His protagonists display all the heroism and the firmness of the will of the classical heroes, plus the rarefied sensibility and the aesthetic sense of the modern individual. What is missing from their modernity is the "decadent" weakness of the Romantics. It is an aristocratic individualism that shows disdain for the weak, for the poor and the downtrodden. Gobineau's characters entertain such classical values as honor, valor and freedom - the freedom of the superior individual, and not the one introduced by the *philosophes* or the Great Revolution for the "mob." This freedom allows the hero to overstep the bounds of the law, of morality and other social values, which are necessary for others, but superfluous for the superior individual. The elite owes no justification for his actions to others, and outside of these "fils de rois," Gobineau sees in humanity nothing other than "imbéciles," "brutes" and "drôles."³ *L'Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* attempts to provide a racial and physiological basis for Gobineau's theory of the superior individual. Will and energy are directly dependant on the purity of *blood*. The Revolution and the democratic values that it ushered have had as their worst consequence the disappearance of pure blood, which the inbreeding among

³ It is interesting to recall that the "Comte" de Gobineau was in reality of humble origins which he took pains to hide, fabricating an aristocratic identity for himself.

the aristocracy under the Ancien Régime had to a certain extent safeguarded, thereby sapping away at the energy and the will power of the pure breed. For Gobineau, the future holds nothing but the tyranny of the mob, the mediocrity of the majority, and the disappearance of the hero.

The absolute pessimism of Gobineau's thought did not gain many adherents in France during his lifetime. The failure of the 1848 revolution, the defeat of 1870 and the tragedy of the Commune were required for such a doctrine to gain followers. The disillusionment that the defeat of revolutions engendered led to a general pessimism about the capacity of human beings for emancipating themselves, the possibility of a better life, and finally to a rejection of liberal humanism.

Liberal humanism had its critics from the left as well, the most extreme of whom were among the anarchists. Proudhon, Bakunin and Louise Michel had all criticized the '48 revolutions. But they were also its most radical products, and their critique does not aim at the principles but rather at the historical contingencies that had derailed the course of the revolution. Max Stirner's violent individualism, by contrast, attacks the humanism at its very foundations and shows an absolute contempt for anyone outside of the self. "Rien n'est, pour Moi, au-dessus de

Moi!"⁴ The Unique acts according to his interests and not that of an ideal. An ideal is an abstraction that functions as master to the self. My interest, claims Stirner, is my property, and I make of Ideals my property, things which will serve *me*, and not vice-versa. Humanism is the latest stage of the protestant ethic, whereby the individual is increasingly replaced by an abstraction called human, humanity, Spirit, *le peuple*, etc. Like all other categories outside the self, they are "phantoms" and "spooks" that have bewitched men. According to Stirner, one of these phantoms in the humanist era, that is, in the nineteenth century, is Man himself: he has become a spirit, a spook to himself, a bodyless phantom to penetrate and understand.

I discussed Stirner's attitude towards *le peuple* in the second chapter of this dissertation: *le peuple* oppresses *me*, its happiness is *my* misery. I think it is important to distinguish Stirner's thought from that of Gobineau and Barbey. Stirner's contempt for the masses is only an expression of his individualism. His primary concern is the safeguard of the individual and the affirmation of his singularity. At the basis of "l'anarchisme de droite" however, is what Pascal Ory has called the principle of "contempt" elevated to the status of an ethic: contempt for

⁴ Max Stirner. *L'Unique*, *op.cit.*, 9.

the other, for *le peuple*, for the oppressed and the weak.⁵ It is important to take note that this ethic of contempt is nonetheless the attitude of the *vaincu*, the defeated and the humiliated. The *fin de siècle* cult of Stendhal, which also avows the right of the superior individual to act according to his will and the affirmation of his energy, contains such an ethic of defeat. As Léon Blum observed in his *Stendhal et le beylisme*:

Mais Nietzsche, qui place son surhomme, tantôt dans l'action héroïque, tantôt dans la vie cénobitique du penseur, a pu concevoir idéalement sa victoire. Stendhal, au contraire, affronte son élite avec la réalité immédiate; il l'engage dans la vie de société, dans cette suite d'échanges et de rapports menus que le monde impose, c'est-à-dire qu'au lieu d'imaginer, comme Nietzsche une élite triomphante, il raisonne sur une élite vexée et presque persécutée. Le monde n'admet pas les différences; l'originalité l'offense comme une rébellion, et, s'il ne parvient pas à l'annuler, il la châtie.⁶

Gobineau and Barbey indeed consider the elite as persecuted and trampled upon by the *canaille triomphante*, the mob, the philistine majority.

Besides Stirner, the critique of humanism had other proponents among the anarchists, primarily in the figures of Anselme Bellegarigue, Joseph Déjacque and Ernest Coeurderoy,

⁵ Pascal Ory, *L'Anarchisme de droite, ou du mépris considéré comme une morale, le tout assorti de réflexions plus générales* (Paris: Grasset, 1985).

⁶ *Stendhal et le beylisme* in *L'Oeuvre de Léon Blum* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1962) 529.

all three anarchist individualists *avant la lettre*. They were of the '48 generation, fought on the barricades and subsequently fled into exile (though the exact details of Bellegarigue's life remain obscure). Coeurderoy was haunted by the idea of a general war, of a universal uprising, a human deluge that would consume in its flames all remnants of the old world. He believed that a new barbarism might be necessary before humanity could regenerate itself and his apocalyptic visions are considerably more astonishing and fantastic than those of Bakunin. Bellegarigue displayed the same solipsistic arguments than Stirner, often denying the existence of the outer world and affirming only the reality of the self: "I deny everything; I affirm only myself."⁷ Déjacque, for his part, was the first to advocate the idea of "propaganda by the deed," which did not gain adherents until the late 1880's. In his book *La Question révolutionnaire* (1858), he advocated war on civilization through individual and criminal means, another idea that was to resurface around 1890. Though Déjacque approved of Proudhon, he went far beyond his theories in attacking the institutions of existing society, for example the family, which Proudhon considered the basis of the society of the future. Déjacque's idea that all moral constraints should be discarded in the service of the revolution anticipated

⁷ Quoted in George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (New York: Meridian, 1962)

Nechaev's theories from the 1870's, and came to the forefront once again among the anarchists and the illegalists of the 1890's. But these three *solitaires* were completely isolated in their lifetime and it was not until Max Nettlau republished their work in the 1890's that they achieved any recognition. Jean Grave published Déjacque's book *L'Humanisphère* in 1899 with a degree of embarrassment about its extreme violence. And Jean Maitron merely mentions them in a short footnote in his *Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France*: they still remain *réfractaires*, outsiders within the anarchist movement...

It is in the framework of this extremist and obscure history of the anarchist movement that Darien's work must be considered. Little is known of Georges Darien's early life.

He was born in Paris on April 6th, 1862 in a protestant family, though religion seems to have played no part in his childhood. He enlisted in the military after finishing the lycée Charlemagne in 1881. He was sent, on June 23d, 1883, to a *compagnie de discipline* (called "Biribi" in the argot *militaire*) in Gafsa, Tunisia. It was a hell of humiliation and torture reserved for "insubordinates." Darien was released from Biribi in 1886 and began frequenting the literary milieu, and particularly the decadent writer Georges-Albert Aurier. His first book *Biribi* (1889) is based on his experiences in the army. Military novels had

been an important part of Naturalism (*Les Soirées de Médan*, *Contes du Lundi*, many of Maupassant's short stories, Zola's *La Débâcle*), but the new generation of Naturalist writers in the late 1880's had taken up this genre under the anti-militarist and anarchist flags: Abel Hermant's *Le Cavalier Miserey* (1887) and Henri Fèvre's *Au Port d'armes, mœurs militaires* (1887) are two remarkable examples of this new tendency.

The best-known anti-militarist novel of these years was Lucien Descaves' *Les Sous-offs* (1889), which unleashed a storm of controversy and for which Descaves had to stand trial for *outrages à l'armée* (it only increased the sales of his novel).⁸ The writing of Darien's *Biribi* actually predates Descaves' novel, but Darien had great difficulty finding a publisher for his book (as for all his subsequent ones). Having read his manuscript, a publisher told him: "Aujourd'hui le public ne demande que du scandale, mais du scandale qui ne soit pas du scandale."⁹

Descaves' *Les Sous-Offs* was written in the Naturalist

⁸ The record of the trial can be found as an appendix in Lucien Descaves, *Les Sous-Offs* (Paris: Stock, 1900).

⁹ Quoted in Auriant, *Darien et l'inhumaine comédie* (Brussels: Ambassade du livre, n.d. (1966?)), 32. The first exegete of Darien, the author of the first book-length study on him (*Georges Darien*. Brussels: Les Presses Libres, 1955), and very protective of a certain interpretation of the work, of which he felt he was the guardian, Auriant's studies (encompassing two books and many essays) remain one of the major points of reference to any reading of Darien.

tradition: he was primarily influenced by Huysmans and Edmond de Goncourt, whose *grenier* he used to frequent (being one of the signatories of the *manifeste des cinq* in 1887, his relationship with Zola was strained). His vocabulary recalls that of Huysmans' Naturalist novels (*Marthe*, *Les Soeurs Vatard*, *En Ménage*) and he remained a lifelong disciple and close friend of the decadent writer. Years later in his memoirs, Descaves claimed that he had had no qualms with the "sous-offs" (sous-officiers) during his military service and that he had been discharged from the army with honors.¹⁰ He was indeed an ambiguous figure who managed to tread the delicate divide between radicalism and respectability with ease. He was one of the first members of the Académie Goncourt (years later he played a central role in granting the prize to an obscure young writer for his first novel, *Voyage au bout de la nuit*; *Mort à crédit* is in fact dedicated to him); and his novel *Philémon, vieux de la vieille* (1913) on the Commune shows a genuine sympathy for the Communards. But it remains the case that *Les Sous-offs* is only a mild protest against the excesses of the army and not an attack on the spirit of militarism itself, which was raging in the France of Boulanger and *la revanche*.

Anti-militarist novels were a staple of anarchist literature in the 1880's. Anarchists of course advocated

¹⁰ Lucien Descaves, *Souvenirs d'un ours* (Paris: Les Éditions de Paris, 1946) 51-58, 107.

anti-patriotism, pacifism and internationalism. But the authoritarian system of organization in the army was one of their favorite targets. The anti-militarist novel provided an ideal ground for the demonstration of the ways in which the human personality is mutilated under the irrational weight of blind authority. The anarchist sociologist Augustin Hamon's *Psychologie du militaire professionnel*, for instance, recorded the rampant criminal behavior of soldiers on leave, the high rate of rape and sexual abuse in the army, the systematic and violent maltreatment of the soldiers of the lowest ranks by the officer class, and in general, the brutal effects of the military profession on the mentality of the individuals concerned.¹¹

Biribi is a roughly autobiographical account of Darien's experiences in the disciplinary camps. The protagonist Froissard is an insubordinate and an anarchic personality whose passive resistance to the discipline and the authority of his superiors only intensifies the extent and duration of his punishments. We see the violent hatred that a system of authority instituted from above generates between individuals, who turn into savage beasts in the process.

Many critics immediately recognized the tremendous anger and energy that fueled *Biribi* and detected its

¹¹ Augustin Hamon, *Psychologie du militaire professionnel* (Brussels: Charles Rozes, 1894).

continuity with the Vallésian tradition. Séverine (in *Le Gaulois*) compared Darien to Vallès, which soon became a common view, and was repeated by Descaves in Jules Huret's book.¹² The preface to *Biribi*¹³ is indeed a ingenious tribute to Vallès in its claim for a literature of life based on authentic human experience and suffering: "Ce livre est un livre vrai. *Biribi* a été vécu."¹⁴ Some have recommended to its author, claims Darien, a moderation of temper and a restraint in tone. "Je leur ai répondu, tout simplement, que j'avais voulu faire de *la Vie*" (*Biribi*, 9).

¹² "Vallès ...a laissé, dans le roman, deux arrière-petits-cousins de talent: Henry Fèvre..., et Darien, celui de *Bas les Coeurs* et de *Biribi*," asserts Descaves in Jules Huret's *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire* (Vanves: Thot, 1984 (1891)) 219. Séverine's comments can be found in her "Les Enfants: *Bas les coeurs*!" *Le Gaulois*, Dec.14, 1889. After his return to France in 1880, Vallès developed a close and intimate relationship with a younger woman by the name of Séverine. She was also his intellectual collaborator, and after his death took over the direction of his paper *Le Cri du peuple*, becoming the first woman editor in France. Like Vallès, she avoided the schisms and the dissensions characteristic of the Left in France during the 1880's and 90's, and *Le Cri du peuple* was, under her editorship, a common forum of debate and polemic for all the left groups, from the Guesdists to the anarchists.

¹³ Gaston Gille, the biographer of Vallès, wrote: "La préface de *Biribi*... le père de Jacques Vingtras aurait pu l'écrire." In Gille's *Jules Vallès (1832-1885). Ses Révoltes, sa maîtrise, son prestige* (Paris: Jouve, 1941), 534.

¹⁴ Georges Darien, *Voleurs!* (Paris: Omnibus, 1994), 9. This collection contains all the novels of Darien, and references hereafter will be to the title of each novel and the page number in the Omnibus edition in the text.

In Vallès, melancholy bitterness can at times give way to anger (particularly in *L'Insurgé*), but the dominant tone is the former sentiment. In *Biribi*, by contrast, it is anger that steps to the forefront, not only in its theme but also in its writing. Throughout the novel, the protagonist Froissard nurtures and safeguards his anger, source of his sanity, and later on his writing. When he is finally released from the army, as the other soldiers run to drinking dens and bordellos, he shuts himself in a room to write:

Ma vengeance!... Est-ce que je veux me venger? Oui, c'est se venger que d'ouvrir devant tous le livre de son existence, de montrer ce qu'on a souffert, de dire ce qu'on a pensé. Je veux faire cela à présent. Si c'est ma vengeance, tant pis; et si c'est justice, tant mieux (*Biribi*, 175).¹⁵

Darien does not "describe," according to the realist or naturalist formula, the horrors of the disciplinary camps. Like his predecessor Jules Vallès, Darien seeks to abolish the distance between art and life, to destabilize and fracture the dominant modes of representation, and restore experience to a state of immanence. *Biribi*, like Darien's other novels, rejects the Naturalist aesthetic of description: the book "n'est point l'étude des milieux"

¹⁵ In *Bas les coeurs!*, le père Merlin tells little Jean: "Il faut... enfouir les choses au fond de toi. Ne les oublie pas, souviens-t'en, au contraire, repasse-les souvent dans ton coeur. Laisse là ta colère, mais conserve ton indignation. L'indignation est toujours une chose juste. C'est pour cela qu'elle vit" (293).

(*Biribi*, 10). The repudiation of naturalism and its descriptive component does not take Darien to a psychological novel, or a novel of *la vie cérébrale* (the subtitle of Remy de Gourmont's *Sixtine*). His novels, as in the work of Vallès, are first person narratives in the present tense, yet are not subjectivist (as in Barrès' early work). They continue the tradition of Vallès' *instantanéisme*, but in the new historical circumstances they have turned bitter, disillusioned about the possibilities of salvation, about the capacity of *le peuple* in bringing about its own emancipation, themes that would be developed in Darien's subsequent work, further nurtured by his own isolation and marginal status. We find many other Vallésian themes in Darien's early work (most of which have come to be known as staples of "anarchist literature"¹⁶): an unhappy childhood, the awakening of consciousness not due to formal education but through experience (*through* writing, and hence the principal role of literature in the *bildung* of the self), auto didacticism, critique of the education system and anti-intellectualism.

Waiting for the publication of *Biribi*, Darien wrote his second novel *Bas les coeurs!* It is less violent in its tone

¹⁶ In *L'Histoire de la littérature libertaire en France* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1990), Thierry Maricourt identifies the recurring themes of what he calls "anarchist literature" (a term I would hesitate to use) as: work, education and autodidacticism, antimilitarism, and illegalism, among others.

and closer to Neo-realism, an ill-defined category then becoming current, which included a number of different novelists continuing in the Naturalist tradition.¹⁷ With Flaubertian irony, *Darien* recounts the fortunes of a bourgeois family from Versailles during the Franco-Prussian war and the Commune. The story is told from the point of view of a child, and records his increasing disgust with his own family and class as he sees their patriotism in the early stages of the war giving way to a perfect amiability towards the Prussians under the occupation, engaging in business enterprises with the occupying army, providing them with all the necessities for bombing Paris during the Siege and later the Commune, and enriching themselves in the process. Their chauvinism and bloodthirsty *revanchard* attitude return after the fall of the Commune: they now preach patriotism once again and talk of revenge against the Prussians. Maupassant had obliquely hinted at the collaboration of the bourgeoisie with the occupying forces during the Siege in *Boule de Suif*, but had not gone nearly as far in exposing the extent of their cooperation with the enemy. *Bas les coeurs!* remains an important instance in the literature of the Paris Commune, which, in contrast to its

¹⁷ This is at least how Jules Huret defines it. In his chapter on "les néo-réalistes," in his *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire*, Huret includes, among others, Octave Mirbeau, J.-H. Rosny, Gustave Geffroy, Paul Bonnetain, Lucien Descaves, Abel Hermant and Jean Ajalbert. Many of them can be equally included in the naturalist camp.

monumental status in the history of the nineteenth century, produced a curiously small number of novels and poems.

In 1889, Darien was not yet an anarchist, though in *Biribi*, we already detect an anarchist sensibility. Auriant claims that according to Quesnel, at the time of his arrival in Tunisia, Darien "ne connaissait pas les questions sociales... mais était inépuisable sur la littérature"¹⁸ (Darien had befriended Emmanuel Quesnel in *Biribi*; he was a worker and a member of Guesde's party and appears in the novel under the name Queslier). Quesnel was to initiate Darien to "La Sociale" if not socialism. In *Biribi*, we follow Froissard's awakening to the "system." Crushed by the sergeants (or the "sous-offs"), Froissard is so enraged as to fantasize about some form of revenge. But Queslier advises him not to be angry against individuals: "il ne faut pas s'en prendre aux individus; il faut s'attaquer au système" (*Biribi*, 62).¹⁹

We can speculate that in this period Darien's ideas on politics were derived from literature. His adolescent love for Hugo had gradually given way to a preference for Vallès.

Already in *Biribi* Darien sees the army as an institution the goal of which is to crush the individual, to create a structure for the transmission of the authoritarian

¹⁸ Auriant, *Darien et l'inhumaine comédie*, 287.

¹⁹ Though this idea will be revised in Darien's later work, when he holds individuals responsible for their conformism.

relations from top to bottom. Authority in turn generates the mindless desire for submission. For the mutilated individual, authority becomes a necessity. Constantly abused by sadistic officers, Froissard confesses:

Il y a des moments où je ne me sens pas assez misérable, où je voudrais souffrir davantage, où je voudrais être torturé comme je ne l'ai pas encore été (*Biribi*, 142).

The army becomes the model for the entire social order.

What army and society demand is "une obéissance passive et aveugle, un abrutissement complet, un avilissement sans bornes, l'obéissance de la machine à la main du mécanicien, la soumission du chien savant à la baguette du banquier" (*Biribi*, 63). But they do not only rule by terror; it is also pomp and spectacle that inculcate a slavish fascination prompting people to obey. These spectacles are upheld and maintained by two classes: the priest and the soldier. "Le prêtre leur [that is, to the people] donne l'illusion de la force mentale... Le soldat leur donne l'illusion de la force matérielle" (*L'Épaulette*, 707). Like Vallès, Darien's was at this time an "instinctive" anarchism, his political conceptions do not stem from books but from direct experience. Queslier is a worker "qui sait tout au plus ce qu'on enseigne à l'école primaire, mais qui a appris, à l'école de la misère, à penser bien et à voir juste" (*Biribi*, 62).

Darien's political development was rapid, perhaps spurned by the feverish atmosphere of Paris in the early 90's. In September 1891 he wrote an article in *La Plume* on the painter Maximilien Luce, calling him an "anarchist," "Sa peinture violente, crue, brutale, sait évoquer l'âme saignante du peuple, la vie des foules angoissées et exaspérées par la souffrance et les rancœurs."²⁰ On September 8, 1891, Zo d'Axa was pleased to announce the addition of Darien to *L'Endehors*' regular staff of writers.

His participation lasted less than two months, ending in a duel with Zo d'Axa. He did manage in that short time to publish part of an important essay, "Le Roman anarchiste."²¹

Being incomplete, the essay never articulates a positive vision of the anarchist novel. Considering the familiar anarchist taste for destruction with no concerns for

²⁰ *La Plume*, 1 September 1891, 300.

²¹ Only two installements of this essay appeared: the first in *L'Endehors*, n.23, 8 October 1891; and the second in n.24, 23 October 1891, with the indication "A suivre" at the end of the article (the quotes below are from these two essays). Darien's name never again appeared in the pages of *L'Endehors*. The details of the disagreement with Zo d'Axa remain obscure, though it can be imagined that the pages of one journal could not accommodate these two fierce individualists. With his characteristic humor and self-criticism, Zo d'Axa was to write an article after this fiasco, denouncing the institution of the duel as a "stupid prejudice" (in *L'Endehors*, 17 January, 1892). Darien wrote four other articles for *L'Endehors*, most of them directly or indirectly dealing with militarism ("Les Grandes manoeuvres," Sept. 9th, 1891; "*Lohengrin*," Sept. 15th, 1891; "*L'Armée en omnibus*," Sept. 24th, 1891; and "*Condottieri*," Oct. 1st, 1891).

rebuilding (we may recall Bakunin's famous line, "the passion for destruction is also a creative passion"²²), we can even doubt that Darien was planning to present a positive theory of the novel in this essay. In his usual dislike of theorizing, he rejects theory and system building ("Je ne suis pas plus théoricien que prophète"). The first part of "Le Roman anarchiste" seeks to demonstrate the end (and the impossibility) of the "socialist novel," which many writers in that time equated with Naturalism. In the early 90's, the "Naturalist/Symbolist opposition between the popular and the pure work of art still defined the boundary between the socialist art of the masses and the anarchist art of the individual."²³ Darien's essay is indeed a simultaneous attack on both Naturalism and what he calls the "socialist novel." "Parbleu, que voulez-vous faire, avec ces éternelles descriptions de milieux, engluées de la viscosité des romances; avec ces analyses d'états d'âme, poissées de sentimentalité? Que voulez-vous faire, avec votre grandissement à l'absurde de l'existence lugubrement terre-à-terre des misérables, dont vous faites une épopée?"

To *describe* - as do the Naturalist and the socialist novel -- the misery of human beings cannot capture the intensity

²² "Reaction in Germany," in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, ed. Sam Dolgoff (New York: Knopf, 1972) 57.

²³ Richard Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin de Siècle France* (Lincoln: Nebraska UP, 1989) 204.

and the depth of their suffering, "le hurlement de la douleur, le cri de l'angoisse, le bâillement de la faim." Can the novel be political, he asks? "Certes, on pourrait en faire une arme, du roman. On pourrait en faire même la machine de guerre qui battrait en brèche les murailles de la Société bourgeoise, qui lancerait contre les forteresses du Capital d'énormes quartiers de roc qui les feraient crouler." But in order to do so, much must be accomplished first. For one thing, there is, in the present society, no reader for such a novel. And furthermore, the novelist must abandon sentiments of pity and charity, wipe the tears that hinder his vision from his eyes and see the world clearly:

Vous êtes les romanciers socialistes, romanciers de la larme à l'oeil. Vous êtes les virtuoses de la pitié, les Jérémies sopranisés de lamentations liquéfiantes... Comme vous les écartez avec horreur, ces gens qui pensent que les yeux d'un écrivain, pour être clairs, doivent être secs, non rougis de pleurs de crocodile et tamponnés par des mouchoirs en deuil.

Rejecting the dominant traditions of literature in the nineteenth century (as Proudhon had lashed out against all the writers of his time), Darien nonetheless concedes a place to Balzac and Vallès, and affirms the necessity for an *anarchist* literature. The next installment of the article never appeared in *L'Endehors*.

At this time he wrote, together with the poet Edouard Dubus, *Les Vrais sous-offs*, ironically adopting the voice of patriotism and attacking Descaves's recently published *Les*

Sous-offs. The irony is not very subtle, but Émile Moselly in his short biography of Lucien Descaves took this book seriously and went to some length repudiating it.

In November 1893, Darien began the publication of *L'Escarmouche*, a journal managed, edited, and solely written by himself and illustrated by Toulouse-Lautrec, Bonnard, Willette and Ibels. The editorial declaration of the first issue deserves to be quoted at length, as it illustrates the twists and turns of Darien's humor and *fumisterie*, his frantic and abrupt language:

L'Escarmouche, c'est l'engagement qui précède la bataille, qui détermine l'action sérieuse; c'est le contact pris avec l'ennemi, l'épreuve de l'adversaire avant la lutte.

Titre oblige. Ce journal, donc, sera l'organe des combattants d'avant-garde, des tirailleurs dont le coup de fer, insouciant du mot d'ordre, décide le canon à faire tonner sa grosse voix--des francs-tireurs des opinions libres...

N'en croyez rien.

Un titre n'oblige pas. Un titre, ça n'a rien de noble. On en prend un parce qu'il en faut un, et voilà tout. On ouvre un dictionnaire au hasard, on choisit un mot au petit bonheur. Ça ne tire pas à conséquence.

D'abord, une escarmouche, à propos de quoi? contre qui? Une bataille? Pour quoi faire?

Partir en guerre sans avoir, devant soi, même des moulins à vent!

Ce n'est pas sérieux.

La Paix! La Paix!

Nous n'hésitons pas à l'avouer: nous mentons à notre titre[...]

Le besoin de la naissance de *L'Escarmouche* ne se fait pas sentir du tout.

Elle paraît tout de même, comme ça, on ne sait pas pourquoi--parce que...²⁴

²⁴ Like all the works of Darien, *L'Escarmouche* is extremely rare and sought after, in the words of a book dealer

L'Escarmouche appeared for nine months and fell victim, like so many other organs of the anarchist press, to the *lois scélérates* in the early months of 1894. Its last issue was published on March 16th, after which Darien fled to London along with Émile Pouget and others. He did not return to France after a few months (as did the others), staying in London and leading a down and out existence in the milieu of anarchists and the lower world of criminals. There is little known about this period of his life, and he was out of sight for the next three years. In 1897 Stock published *Le Voleur*, his best-known novel today. But we must step back and explore the individualist and illegalist currents of anarchism and Darien's role in them in order to fully grasp the place of this novel in the literature and politics of the 1890's.

In October 1886, a man named Clément Duval was arrested and brought before the court for the robbery of a Parisian *hôtel particulier*. His fate would have been the same as that of any other common criminal and he would have been soon forgotten had he not written a letter to Grave's paper *Le Révolté* in order to justify his act. He identified

specializing in Darien's works, "mythical." If the interest shown by bibliophiles is any indication of a writer's lasting interest, Darien's must be significant: the first edition of *Le Voleur* was recently auctioned at Drouot for 75,000 francs...

himself as a member of a group of anarchists named "La Panthère des Batignolles." An unemployed worker, he was won to anarchism not by books, but by his own experiences:

"J'étais anarchiste de coeur, aimant ce qui est beau, grand, généreux, me révoltant contre les abus et les injustices."²⁵

Driven to desperation by poverty, he began to steal, claiming "Quand la société vous refuse le droit à l'existence, on doit le prendre et non tendre la main, c'est une lâcheté." For Duval, theft was the restoration of property to an individual who is denied his share of collective wealth. In his trial, he refused to take up the position of the accused or thief and argued confidently in favor of the right of the restitution of property. He soon gained great notoriety in anarchist circles; several groups were formed in his support and his case was increasingly taken up and debated in the anarchist press. The judge, perhaps irked by the impertinence of the defendant, sentenced him to the death penalty. The sentence being so disproportionate with the crime, the President of the Republic, Jules Grévy, reduced it to a life of forced

²⁵ *Le Révolté*, n.29, 6-12 November 1886. Besides the press of the period, I follow the history of illegalism from the accounts of Jean Maitron, *Le Mouvement anarchiste en France* (Paris: Maspero, 1975); his *Ravachol et les anarchistes* (Paris: Julliard, 1964); and the special number of *Crapouillot* on anarchism, January 1938, particularly Alexandre Croix' "Le Terrorisme anarchiste," 14-28.

labor.²⁶

In June 1889, worried about the radical activities of an Italian anarchist named Pini who lived in Paris, the Italian government requested that the French police examine their subject. A routine visit to his apartment revealed an enormous stash of stolen goods and a battery of tools for robbery. The stolen property amounted to 500.000 francs, a considerable fortune at the time. Pini avowed theories similar to Duval's on property and theft. He was a member of an Italian anarchist group in Paris named the "Intransigenti." *La Révolte* claimed that Pini was not a thief by profession and stole only for reasons of anarchist propaganda. Like Duval, Pini could speak persuasively during his trial and his lawyer, M.Labori, even adopted his line of reasoning for the defense and presented his client as a *justicier social* who had set out to correct the injustices perpetrated by society (he was thus applauded in the pages of *La Révolte*). The jury and the judge proved insensitive to this argument and Pini was sentenced to twenty years of forced labor.

Duval and Pini were only two of the more notorious cases of what came to be called "la reprise individuelle" and gained more and more popularity in the anarchist

²⁶ Duval was to escape from prison after a few years. He fled to the United States and lived in New York and Paterson, New Jersey, among the Italian anarchists who welcomed him as a hero and later on published his memoirs.

movement between 1885 and the Great War. As early as 1885, *Le Révolté* had adopted a subtle critique of the *reprise individuelle* during the arrest of an Italian band of anarchist thieves.²⁷ Grave argued that there is no real difference between thieves and the bourgeoisie: both use the same method for the acquisition of money. The thief is not a *révolté* or a victim of the present society, but its product. The reappropriation of wealth has to be collective, argued Grave, in the revolutionary context and cannot be carried out by individuals. During the Duval affair in 1887, *Le Révolté*, though it published Duval's letter, refused to take sides and simply referred its readers to the two articles "Les Voleurs" and "La Morale" from two years before. Jules Guesde, the leader of the Marxists in France, had in the meanwhile attacked Duval in Vallès' paper *Le Cri du peuple*, and Séverine had replied in another article, defending Duval while maintaining some reservations on his theories on theft. Guesde replied once again in a harsh tone, and the violent polemic ended with an offended Séverine leaving *Le Cri du peuple* and taking the name of Vallès with her (Vallès had died two years before, and Séverine had taken his place as editor of *Le Cri du*

²⁷ *Le Révolté*, "Les Voleurs," n.6, 21 June-4 July 1885; "La Morale," n.9, 2-15 August 1885. I remind the reader again that Grave's paper *Le Révolté* changed its title to *La Révolte* in 1887, but remained essentially unchanged.

peuple).²⁸ Both Vallès and Séverine had refused to take sides in the intense disputes among various leftist groups in France in the 1880's, and *Le Cri du peuple* was a common forum for debate among the different camps of the Left. The affaire Duval thus created a schism in the heart of the Left in France and forced new lines of rapprochement between Guesdists and the editorial of *Le Révolté*. This, I think, accounts for the timidity of Grave on the question of theft in this period, for Guesde and his party were the *bête noire* of anarchists and Grave could not rally the paper to a cause they supported, save losing the support of a large number of his readers. The question of theft was to haunt him for years, as the debates and the letters in the early 1890's show. In "La Propriété," for instance, he concluded with the ambiguous line: "Les bourgeois sont donc mal venus de crier au vol lorsqu'on veut les forcer à restituer; car leur propriété n'est elle-même que le produit d'un vol."²⁹ In numerous articles on *la reprise individuelle* in the early 1890's, Grave reluctantly supported the individuals, all the while trying to subtly maintain a distance from their acts.³⁰ Other anarchist papers were not so prudent: in

²⁸ *Le Cri du Peuple*, 29-30 and 31 Januray 1887. Also Maitron, *Le Mouvement anarchiste*, I:190-1.

²⁹ *La Révolte*, n.8, 14-20 November 1891.

³⁰ In his memoirs published in 1930, Grave showed no more of his former ambivalence and vehemently attacked the individualists and the advocates of illegalism, comparing

September 1888, for example, *Ça ira* would tell its readers:

Prenez et pilliez, ceci est à vous!... Il n'y a pas dix routes à suivre, il n'y en a qu'une: montrer l'exemple, se mettre immédiatement à reprendre aux riches leurs fortunes. Et que nous importe qu'on nous assimile aux voleurs! Les voleurs sont les parias de la société; ils sont comme nous des victimes.³¹

The related phenomenon of *l'estampage* (or "swindling") soon developed, and *La Révolte* would often complain of the *compagnons* who were taking advantage of the situation in order to steal and rob others. Zo d'Axa protested in *L'Endehors* against a certain Alain Gouzien, an anarchist who had made a name for himself in meetings by his "appel au pillage" and even advocated the principle of "l'estampage des camarades."³² This is the betrayal of friends and the movement as a whole, charged Zo d'Axa, plain robbery adorned with rhetoric and phraseology! Grave reprinted Zo d'Axa's article in the literary supplement of *La Révolte*, but judging from the letters of response that appeared in subsequent issues the readers were reluctant to accept Zo d'Axa's criticism.³³ The boundaries of the *reprise*

them to the *mouchards*. Jean Grave, *Le Mouvement Libertaire sous la Troisième République* (Paris: Les Oeuvres Représentatives, 1930) 185.

³¹ *Ça ira*, n.7, 16 September 1888, quoted in Maitron, *Le Mouvement anarchiste*, vol.1, 191.

³² Zo d'Axa, "Le Néophyte cacolet" *L'Endehors*, n.22, 1 October 1891.

³³ For example, the anonymous letter of protest against Zo d'Axa's article in *La Révolte*, 31 October-6 November 1891.

individuelle were difficult to define, for it was not very clear at what point a theft could be declared moral or amoral, and according to what conception of morality (which was denounced in more extreme circles as a bourgeois fiction). While the anarchism of Proudhon and Kropotkin was based on an eighteenth century conception of human nature, the radical individualists' nihilism would reject all ethics as a product of existing society and therefore invalid, often ending in an ideological vacuum which, in the volatile context of the 1890's had the potential of being redirected to the extremes of Right or Left.

Except for the brothers Reclus (Paul and Elisée) and Sébastien Faure, anarchist intellectuals distanced themselves from the advocates of the *reprise individuelle*, but the debate remained open and intensified during the more sensational cases. There was for example the case of Alexandre (also called Marius) Jacob. Following a stormy career at sea in piracy and whale fishing, he began contributing to the anarchist journal *L'Agitateur* in Marseille in the later 1890's, while committing small

In *Leurs figures*, Barrès wrote of an anarchist by the name of Fanfournot, who "accusait la Révolte de modérantisme, parce qu'elle blâmait les 'actes' de Pini et de Duval, qui venaient d'enthousiasmer les compagnons de leurs 'reprises individuelles.'" Maurice Barrès, *Leurs Figures* (Paris: Plon (Livre de Poche), 1967) 220-1.

robberies in casinos in Monte-Carlo.³⁴ In 1900, he organized a band called "Les travailleurs de la nuit," who claimed to have developed the *reprise individuelle* into a "science." Jacob had a sense of humor and would leave humorous messages for his victims. To the judge Hulot in Mans, for example, he wrote: "Aux juges de la paix, nous faisons la guerre. Attila." And the following note was found after the famous robbery in the Cathedral of Tours: "Dieu Tout-Puissant, retrouve tes voleurs. Attila." In Rochefort, after breaking into a house he realized to be the residence of the writer Pierre Loti, he quietly withdrew, saying that he had no qualms with poets but only with the bourgeoisie. He was finally arrested in 1903, and his case spurred new debates in anarchist journals. He eloquently took up his own defense, and like Duval and Pini confronted the judge and jurors head on:

Puisque vous me reprochez surtout d'être un voleur, il est utile de définir ce qu'est le vol. Le vol c'est la restitution, la reprise de possession. Plutôt que d'être cloîtré dans une usine, comme en un bagne; plutôt que mendier, ce à quoi j'avais droit... j'ai préféré m'insurger et combattre pied à pied mes ennemis en faisant la guerre aux riches, en attaquant leurs biens. Certes, je conçois que vous auriez préféré que je me soumette à vos lois, qu'ouvrier docile et avachi je crée des richesses en échange d'un salaire dérisoire et que le corps usé et le cerveau abêti, je m'en aille au coin d'une rue. Alors vous ne m'appelleriez pas "bandit cynique"

³⁴ Jacob's standard biography is Alain Sergent, *Un Anarchiste de la Belle Époque* (Paris: Seuil, 1950).

mais "honnête ouvrier" [...]
 Anarchiste révolutionnaire, j'ai fait ma
 révolution.³⁵

Jacob's revenues from his illegal ventures were almost entirely used to subsidize anarchist causes: he supported the wives of several anarchists in jail, financed journals and helped purchase the building where the anarchist review *Le Libertaire* was based (the main and the most violent organ of illegalism). He lived ascetically with very little money, and in this sense his actions must be distinguished from the criminal fantasies of the Decadents or the dissolute actions of a Jarry. There was indeed a vogue for crime in the literature of this period. In *A Rebours* (1884), Des Esseintes had introduced the young Auguste Langlois to illicit pleasures in order to make him into a criminal. Thinking back on the affair, Des Esseintes reflects to himself: "La vérité c'est que je tâche simplement de préparer un assassin."³⁶ Otherwise, the boy would have had to live the dismal life of a worker, "Demeurer honnête[...], avoir, en somme, sa petite part du monotone bonheur réservé aux pauvres."³⁷ The decadent writer Maurice Beaubourg blatantly indulged in the pleasures

³⁵ Alexandre Jacob, *Écrits*, vol. 1 (Paris: L'Insomniaque, 1995) 61.

³⁶ J.-K. Huysmans, *A Rebours* (Paris: Gallimard (Folio), 1977) 165.

³⁷ *A Rebours*, 165.

afforded by crime and murder in his *Contes pour les assassins* (1890), and even claimed that in order to truly know oneself one must commit at least one murder.³⁸ The philosopher in Octave Mirbeau's *Le Jardin des supplices* (1899) casually asserts that "Le besoin de tuer chez l'homme naît avec le besoin de manger, et se confond avec lui."³⁹ Jean Lorrain's fascination with crime is well known (Monsieur de Phocas, in the novel of the same title, commits murder for pleasure).

Crime in literature was certainly not an invention of the *fin de siècle*. We find it in innumerable works of the romantic period, but like other aspects of Romanticism, romantic crime needs to be understood in the context of the optimism of liberal humanism before the defeat of the revolutions of 1848. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the idea of revolution as the means of reaching universal fraternity which had inspired the '48 generation was replaced by that of the *guerre sociale*. Class reconciliation was no longer possible. One can accordingly

³⁸ In "La Littérature des assassins" (*La Revue Blanche*, n.1, October 1891, 38) he spoke of "l'utilité non seulement physique mais morale du meurtre." Beaubourg seems to have harbored some anarchist sympathies. In the *Ermitage* poll on the role of the writers and their ideal society, he called the artist an "anarchist" who must subordinate his well-being to his instinctive urges and live life spontaneously outside of all regimentation and all discipline. *L'Ermitage*, n.7, July 1893, 3.

³⁹ Octave Mirbeau, *Le Jardin des supplices* (Paris: Gallimard (Folio), 198), 52.

conceive the difference between crime as it appears in the literature of the two periods. In Romanticism, crime could range from the sentimental and the picturesque -- as in *Rocambole*, the feuilleton novel of Ponson de Terrail, Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*, or Alexandre Dumas' *Les Mohicans de Paris* -- to a cry for the establishment of justice (as in Hugo's *Les Misérables*). The literature of the *fin de siècle*, by contrast, finds in crime a repository for the unbridled release of the energies of the lower classes, with their brutal eroticism and misdirected violence. This is also the period in which began the fascination with the lower depths of Parisian life. Aristide Bruant's songs lauded the lives of pimps, prostitutes and criminals; the bourgeoisie, as one contemporary critic complained, was more than happy to pay exorbitant prices for a glass of beer in *Le Chat Noir* to hear them and be verbally abused by Bruant, Poet of the streets. The social and linguistic interest in *argot* and the history of criminality also date from this period. Marcel Schwob undertook his studies of *argot* and the work of Villon at this time (*Etude sur l'argot français* was first published in 1889). In his conversations with Bijvanck he compared the criminals of the Paris of Villon with the Workers' International:

Savez-vous pourquoi j'attache autant d'importance à la connaissance précise de l'état des classes criminelles durant cette période du XVe siècle?

C'est que je crois être sur la trace d'un fait moral qui me semble d'une valeur capitale pour la science historique et pour l'histoire de l'humanité. C'est alors pour la première fois que ces classes dangereuses ont acquis la conscience d'une vie autonome et située hors des limites de la société régulière. Elles faisaient contrepoids à la bourgeoisie, qui se groupait autour de la royauté. C'était la substance dont allait s'alimenter le mouvement contre l'autorité de l'Eglise et de l'Etat qui commence à se manifester au début du XVIIe siècle... Ce sont ces couches inférieures de la société qui, pour une grande part au moins, ont rapproché instinctivement les diverses nations de l'Europe. C'était la première internationale en dehors de l'Eglise.⁴⁰

But crime primarily serves as a transgression of bourgeois morals in *Decadence* and in the literature of the *fin de siècle* in general, and it does not necessarily have any political or social implications. It was in the world of the *roman populaire* of the years before WWI that illegalism, properly speaking, left its mark: the novels of Gustave Le Rouge (*La Conspiration des milliardaires*, Todd Martin *détective milliardaire*, and *Le Mystérieux Docteur Cornélius*), of Maurice Leblanc's Arsène Lupin ("le gentleman-cambrioleur," "redresseur de torts") novels, and *Fantômas*, among others. The appearance of the thief as *justicier* in the *littérature populaire* of the first years of the twentieth century owes much to the illegalist movement. Much ink has been spilled in proving whether Arsène Lupin was modeled after Alexandre Jacob or not (Leblanc is said to have attended Jacob's trial, but denied a direct link

⁴⁰ W.G.C. Byvanck, *Un Hollandais à Paris en 1891* (Paris:

between his character and the leader of "les travailleurs de la nuit"). It is more pertinent to note that these novels were informed by the illegalist movement. Indeed, Darien's *Le Voleur* situates itself in the same tradition while maintaining a critical distance from it. He parodies the work of *feuilleton* novelists such as Xavier de Montépin or Jules Mary. *Le Voleur's* chapters are short and have *feuilleton* headings such as "15: Dans lequel le vice est bien près d'être récompensé," or "28: Dans lequel on apprend que l'argent ne fait pas le bonheur."

Le Voleur begins under the sign of theft. The preface begins thus:

Ce livre ne m'a point été remis par un
ministre, ni confié par un notaire, ni légué par
un caissier.
Je l'ai volé.
J'avoue mon crime (*Le Voleur*, 319).

Darien claims to have accidentally found the manuscript of the memoirs of a certain Georges Randal in a hotel room. The hotel being a hideout for criminals, the owner is sure to identify the new guest to Randal, and Darien is hence forced to publish the manuscript in order to protect himself. The story itself is Randal's autobiography, his realization, after becoming an engineer, of "le mensonge bourgeois" and turning to crime for a living. He is very successful at this new profession and leads the respectable life of a bourgeois in a London townhouse. The novel is the

Perrin, 1892, 220).

account of the robberies punctuated by long discussions on the philosophy of crime and illegalism.

The ex-police commissioner Goron who aspired to be a writer and had just published his memoirs, claimed that the author of *Le Voleur* must have first hand knowledge of the burglaries and the places he describes in his novel. Goron went on to some length to delineate the unsolved crimes and robberies of the previous ten years, identifying the characters and locations that appear in the book and proving beyond doubt that they could not be the work of a writer's imagination. Darien responded by providing alibis and taking this comedy even further.⁴¹ The debate is not significant, but reveals a curious aspect of *Le Voleur*: the combination of a fantastic, *feuilleton*-style adventure and the uncanny sense that we are reading the record of a life, of an experience that was lived. Vallésian *instantanéisme* is combined with melodrama and the serial novel. Accordingly, the plot, while exceptionally engaging, remains superfluous. Breton noticed this in his essay on *Le Voleur*: "Il s'agit, en effet, d'un ouvrage assez captivant pour que les plus rebelles, dont je suis, aux charmes de toute intrigue romanesque - pour eux matière à objection sans fin et guet d'ennui - aient chance de le lire comme j'ai fait,

⁴¹ The story is recounted in Auriant's *Darien et l'inhumaine comédie*, 101.

sans désespérer."⁴²

Darien had no source of income in London, and most of his friends in Paris assumed that he was involved in illegal schemes even before the appearance of *Le Voleur*. Auriant vehemently denies this, but the matter is very difficult to determine since Darien led a very secretive life. In the early 90's to the inquiries of the journalist Rodolphe Darzens he could reply: "Il m'est vraiment impossible de te fournir d'autres renseignements biographiques [besides his date of birth and the date of the end of his military service]. Je n'ai pu comprendre jusqu'ici ce que la vie privée d'un littérateur pouvait avoir à faire avec la publication ou la représentation de ses oeuvres."⁴³

⁴² Breton, "Darien le maudit," 7-8.

⁴³ Quoted in Auriant, *Darien*, 17. The Goncourt entry on Darien is instructive in this regard, as it shows the irregular and bohemian life he led in Paris in the early 90's: "[Descaves] nous parle de Darien, disant que c'est un garçon étrange et qui ne travaille qu'au café ou dans la chambre d'un ami, le plus désordonné bohème qui soit, et avec cela, hanté par un tas de conceptions pratiques, étranges, bizarres comme celle-ci, après l'échouement de laquelle il tombait chez Descaves, cette phrase dans la bouche: 'Décidément, mon affaire de syndicat des marchandes de quatre-saisons est manquée, nom de Dieu!' Et nécessairement, la plupart du temps sans le sous et obligé d'aller emprunter cinq francs à son frère le peintre, qui gagne de l'argent. Emprunt amenant le dialogue suivant: 'Frère, j'ai besoin de cent sous. -C'est bien, les voilà... Mais j'ai besoin d'un modèle qui m'a manqué aujourd'hui... Tu vas me poser.'" Edmond and Jules de Goncourt. *Journal. Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, vol. 4, 1891-1896 (Paris: Fasquelle-Flammarion, 1956) p.104-5, entry from June 14th, 1891.

In *Le Voleur* Darien breaks with the anarchist movement and begins moving towards an impossible individualism which was to lead him to the darkest nihilism. The thief is the last individual, and Randal is driven to crime not for a source of income but as a Stirnerean affirmation of his individuality: "Le voleur seul sait vivre; les autres végètent... Il agit, les autres fonctionnent" (*Le Voleur*, 367). He is unique, "un être à part, qui existe par lui-même, indépendamment de toute règle et de tous statuts. Son seul rôle dans la civilisation moderne est de l'empêcher absolument de dépasser le degré d'infamie auquel elle est parvenue; de lui interdire toute transformation qui n'aura point pour base la liberté absolue de l'individu" (*Le Voleur*, 369). He is an individual who simply wants to live life, "qu'il refuse de sacrifier au bien général défini par les légistes. [Il est] le dernier représentant, abâtardi si l'on y tient, de la conscience individuelle" (*Le Voleur*, 370).

Le Voleur is the most polyphonic of all Darien's novel, and in the long debates with other characters in the novel, mainly Issacar and l'abbé Lamargelle, no opinion gains a monologic upper hand. Differing views give complex shades to the ideas put forth by the novel as a whole. Randal's reasons for being a criminal are revealed to have no significant purpose, whereas for Issacar, another criminal, "le voleur est un prédestiné" in the war that governments

wage against the individual. But Randal refuses to submit his actions to any higher purpose, "Je veux vivre pour vivre," he claims, "je vole parce que je ne suis pas assez riche pour vivre à ma guise. Je n'accepte aucun joug, même celui de la fatalité" (*Le Voleur*, 372). Randal won't submit his actions to any higher moral plane (even nihilistic ones), as indeed Issacar sees the thief as the embodiment of some higher principles, the affirmation of the individual. But Randal won't replace one set of morals for another. He rejects all values at their basis and just simply lives life. Issacar warns him: "Prenez garde. Si vous vous dérobez à toute domination, vous vous condamnez à subir toutes les influences passagères." Randal's answer is a frivolous "Ça m'est égal. Et puis, j'aime voler."

The notorious burglar Canonnier, the one who comes closest to a Stirnerean *Unique* in Darien's novel, promotes an aesthetic vision of his profession. The bourgeoisie is lucky, he maintains, that thieves steal for material purposes and have not yet developed an aesthetic sense. He believes that the "tramps" in America topple trains and burn houses down just for the sake of the pleasure it affords them, "*for the fun of the thing*" (both in English in the original, *Le Voleur*, 475). Roger la honte, another robber who is also an artist and paints in between burglaries, presents yet his own ideas on the profession: stealing gives him the time to educate himself and practice his art. The

masterpieces of art are emblems of exemplary individualities; the paintings of the masters hanging in museums are calls to independence, "des cris vibrants vers la vie belle et libre, des cris pleins de haine et de dégoût pour les moralités esclavagistes et les légalités meurtrières (*Le Voleur*, 383), recalling Bakunin's theories on the singularity of the great works of art. And Randal to reply:

Rien de plus anti-social--dans le sens actuel--qu'une belle oeuvre. Le chef-d'oeuvre est individuel, aussi, dans son expression[...] Il est une protestation véhémement et superbe de la Liberté et de la Beauté contre la Laideur et la Servitude; et l'homme, quelles que soient la hideur qui le défigure et la servitude qui pèse sur lui, peut entendre, s'il le veut, comme il faut qu'il l'entende, cette voix qui chante la grandeur de l'Individu et la haute majesté de la Nature... Voilà pourquoi, sans doute, les gouvernements nés du capital et du monopole font tout ce qu'ils peuvent pour écraser l'Art qui les terrorise, et ont une telle haine du chef-d'oeuvre" (*Le Voleur*, 383)

The bourgeois who visit museums are offered a fugitive glimpse at a beautiful life that existed and could exist; they are given--if they can allow themselves to experience them--the sensation of a liberated and full life which they are otherwise forbidden to even dream of, "car ils sont les damnés qui doivent croire, dans les tourments de leur géhenne, à l'impossibilité des paradis."

The profession of the thievery has an advantage over other careers open to Randal: he escapes specialization that dominates actual society. It was a common anarchist

creed to denounce the mutilations of the self due to specialization in the nineteenth century (a point that brought them close to the aesthetes, as we shall see in the last chapter). Issacar had warned Randal against fetishizing thievery earlier in the book: "Il n'y a que le vol qui ne soit pas une spécialité. N'en faites pas une" (*Le Voleur*, 373). Randal takes on his own education during the ample amount of free time that his "job" allows him. Like Vallès (and all anarchists), Darien rebuts the system of education that trains the individual for a particular profession. Instead, he favors autodidacticism.⁴⁴ He complains about his childhood schooling:

Éducation. La chasse des instincts[...] On m'inocule la raison--ils appellent ça comme ça-- juste à la place du cœur. Mes sentiments violents sont criminels, ou au moins déplacés; on m'enseigne à les dissimuler. De ma confiance, on fait quelque chose qui mérite d'avoir un nom: la servilité; de mon orgueil, quelque chose qui ne devait pas en avoir: le respect humain. (*Le Voleur*, 334).

During a train ride, Randal is sharing a compartment with a hideous bourgeois who advocates universal education for *le peuple*, because an education would inculcate them with "patience." These ideas trigger a number of anti-

⁴⁴ Autodidacticism was a common staple of anarchist literature, from Vallès' *L'Enfant* to Octave Mirbeau's *Sébastien Roch*, where the little Sébastien's consciousness is initially awakened not from his studies (which he doesn't follow), but from the class hostility that his fellow students show towards him. Later on it is art and poetry that capture his imagination, and not his bland studies.

intellectual reflections in Randal, who concludes that the vital energies of the masses for action are sapped by reading. "Au Moyen Age, la cathédrale, aujourd'hui, la bibliothèque" (*Le Voleur*, 432). In *L'Épaulette* (1900), the school and the army are one and the same, institutions for the manufacture of servility.

Both *Biribi* and *Bas les coeurs!* end with a hopeful note: protagonists recognize the difficulties that lie ahead, but are determined to take on the struggle in order to affirm their individuality. But in *Le Voleur*, Randal increasingly comes to doubt the privileged status of the thief, and the value of his lone revolt against society. This line of thought had been presented all throughout the novel by minor characters, such as Paternoster who claims, turning Proudhon on its head: "On a dit que la propriété c'est le vol; quelle confusion! La propriété n'est pas le vol; c'est bien pis: c'est l'immobilisation des forces. Le peu d'élasticité dont elle jouit, elle le doit aux fripons. Le voleur a articulé la propriété, et l'honnête homme est son bâtard" (*Le Voleur*, 396). Randal's self-doubts continue, and while visiting a haunt for pimps and prostitutes he questions his own former certainties: "Tout se tient et tout arrive à se confondre. Est-ce la cocotte qui a perverti l'honnête femme, ou l'honnête femme la cocotte? Est-ce le voleur qui a dépravé l'honnête homme ou l'honnête homme qui a produit le voleur?" (520). He looks

at the pimps: they are no different than others, and they certainly are not what he would like to believe them to be.

They are not parias or outsiders, they even believe in some important role they play in the social organism, they think they must have a real function in the scheme of things.

"Non, ces souteneurs n'ont pas l'air dépaysé dans la société actuelle." Is there a real difference between them and the rest of us? "Quelle différence entre une orgie bourgeoise et une ripaille d'escarpes?" (*Le Voleur*, 520). The ideas we have of criminals are false, maybe encouraged by the work of writers and novelists. The more repressive a society, Randal thinks to himself, the more the imagination takes flight in the direction of brutal transgressions, and the present popularity of Cartouche is one more sign of this phenomenon (Cartouche was enjoying a "comeback" in the vogue for illegalism). Hélène, the daughter of the celebrated thief Canonnier later tells Randal: "Nous, les aventuriers, nous sortons de la société pour arriver à y rentrer. C'est un peu dérisoire, mais qu'y faire?" (*Le Voleur*, 606). The individual rebellion of the thief has made of him a respectable bourgeois. Unable to account for the failure of his revolt, Randal turns to a deterministic model: bound by some aptitudes inherited from his family and class, he may redirect these to illegal ends, but the method and goal remain the same, as he ultimately cannot escape the influence of the class and the milieu in which he was

raised:

Au fond, je mets simplement en jeu, moi, fils et neveu de bourgeois, par des actes franchement caractérisés, des aptitudes que j'ai reçues de mes parents et qu'ils développaient sournoisement, dans leur genre d'existence timide, par des actes fort rapprochés des miens[...] J'ai répété, avec quelques variantes, les actes de mes parents parce que les conditions de milieu dans lesquelles nous avons eu à vivre, eux et moi, ont été à peu près les mêmes. Hypocrites ou brutales, légales ou illicites, bienfaisantes ou nuisibles, les actions humaines, permises par les aptitudes, sont déterminées par les milieux. (*Le Voleur*, 575).

Earlier in the novel, Randal rejects the biological determinism of Lombroso and his notion of a "born-criminal." He becomes a contributor to the *Revue pénitentiaire*, a journal run by one of the disciples of Lombroso in which Randal, in a spirit of *fumisterie*, develops his own preposterous and outlandish ideas on crime. They are even praised by the editor and readers of the review!⁴⁵ But this note of despair and the consciousness of the failure of individual revolt dominate from here on all the later novels of Darien, *L'Épaulette* (1900), *Gottlieb Krumm*⁴⁶ (1904), and the violent pamphlet *La Belle France* (1905). His revolt

⁴⁵ Lombroso had lumped together the psychology and the physiology of the anarchist and the criminal, both being degenerates. His book was translated in 1897 into French. C. Lombroso, *Les Anarchistes*, tr. M.Hamel and A.Marie (Paris: Flammarion, 1897).

⁴⁶ This curious novel was actually written in English and first published in London by R.A. Everett & Co. in 1904. I was not able to find this edition in any of the libraries of the United States or France. It was first translated into French in 1987.

does not stop at the comfortable "endehorisme" of a Zo d'Axa, whose individualist rebellion led to a sense of being "outside" all material conditions, taking up a comfortable residence there and going no further. A reviewer of d'Axa's book *Le Grand trimard* pointed this out: "Il pousse [l'idée de l'endehors] au culte, au paradoxe, et finit par croire lui-même qu'il est en dehors de tout et de tous et ne ressemble à personne[...]. Se croire "en dehors" ce n'est en réalité qu'une variante de ceux qui se croient "au dessus", ce qui ne rime à rien."⁴⁷ At the end of *Le Voleur*, Darien's tragic realization that the individual cannot bring about his own liberation leads him to his violent attacks on *le peuple* and the "dark nihilism" that has won him--I believe mistakenly--the reputation of a "right-wing anarchist." In his *L'Anarchisme de droite dans la littérature contemporaine*, François Richard repeatedly mentions Darien's name in the company of Gobineau, Bernanos, Céline, and Roger

⁴⁷ Vindex, Review of *Le Grand trimard* in *Les Temps nouveaux*, n.7, 15-21 June 1895. I was not able to find the real identity of Vindex. In 1899, Jean Grave leveled the same charge at Zo d'Axa: "On n'est jamais en dehors. Nous sommes dans l'état social, dans la vie... Il n'y a, par conséquent, personne qui soit 'en dehors'. Cependant, cette profession de foi avait une certaine allure qui ne pouvait que plaire aux anarchistes, et à laquelle ils ont applaudi... D'Axa semble trop vouloir s'en faire un panache, et surtout poser l'idée anarchiste comme une entrave à cette expansion de l'individu, pour que l'on n'essaye pas de réfuter cette façon de présenter les faits." Jean Grave, "Quand nous débarrasserons-nous de l'amour des 'distinctions'?" *Les Temps nouveaux*, n.28, 44-10 November 1899.

Nimier, all of whom he defines as right-wing anarchists.⁴⁸ According to Richard, what they share is a hatred of democracy and intellectuals, an instinctive revolt, and an aristocratism that places them above the world. The last point is clearly not true in Darien's case. More convincing are the arguments of Marie-Christine Bellosta and Yves Pagès who show Céline's relation to the individualist branch of anarchism that, they claim, he assimilated almost entirely through Darien.⁴⁹ Though they still place Darien on the right of the political spectrum, they do not consider him the direct predecessor of Céline; Céline, they assert, achieved a synthesis of Maurrassian values and Darien's individualism. It is a more nuanced view that can account for the contradictions of Darien's work and life.

A study of the Jewish question in Darien's work would be instructive in this connection. We may recall the relations of anarchism with anti-Semitism. Proudhon had recorded this sinister entry in his *Cahiers*: "Le Juif est l'ennemi du genre humain. Il faut renvoyer cette race en

⁴⁸ François Richard, *L'Anarchisme de droite dans la littérature contemporaine* (Paris: PUF, 1988). Richard's reading of Darien seems to be based on a few fragments and is in no way comprehensive, leading to a one-sided interpretation.

⁴⁹ Marie-Christine Bellosta, *Céline ou l'art de la contradiction* (Paris: PUF, 1990), and Yves Pagès, *Les Fictions du politique chez L.-F.Céline* (Paris: Seuil, 1994).

Asie ou l'exterminer."⁵⁰ Bakunin's anti-Semitism is well known, a remnant of his youth that he never managed to shed.

Many anarchists were rallied to Boulangism around 1890, at a time when the idea that capitalism is a Jewish conspiracy was a truism. There were few dissenting voices. In a short text entitled *Antisémitisme et révolution*, Bernard Lazare presents the conversion of a worker with anarchist sympathies to Drumont's ideology: the misery of the workers is due to their exploitation by Jews. Drumont argued that the increasing impoverishment of workers was the direct result of the emancipation of Jews. Lazare was himself Jewish, and as early as 1892 he had taken on a history of anti-Semitism which was first published in *Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires*. But Lazare was an exception. Other anarchist attacks on anti-Semitism, such as the work of Zo d'Axa and Sébastien Faure, date from the Dreyfus affair, at which time the political lines were much more polarized than during and immediately after the Boulanger affair in the early 90's.⁵¹ One of the clear effects of the Dreyfus affair was to bring the Left and the Right in opposing camps by posing the struggle in terms of patriotism

⁵⁰ Quoted in David Bosc, *Georges Darien* (Aix-en-Provence: Éditions Sulliver, 1996) 46.

⁵¹ Zo d'Axa launched the Dreyfusard paper *La Feuille*, written solely by him and illustrated by Steinlen and others. Sébastien Faure's *Les Anarchistes et l'affaire Dreyfus* (Paris: Laffont-Libertaire, 1898) demystified anti-Semitism as displaced scapegoating.

and anti-patriotism. Boulangism, by contrast, had dissolved traditional political demarcations, and many anarchists during that time were rallied to anti-Semitism. Zeev Sternhell has studied the joining of interest of anarchists with the far right in this period, a union that was primarily accomplished through the binding role played by anti-Semitism.⁵²

It was at this time that Darien undertook the writing of *Les Pharisiens* (1891). According to Darien (the process is recounted in the novel itself), his publisher Savine and Drumont hired him to write an anti-Semitic novel. Darien instead portrays this episode in the book, while violently attacking Savine, Drumont and anti-Semitism (under the thin disguises of "Rapine" and "L'Ogre," which was the nickname given to Drumont in Jewish circles). Informed of the contents of the manuscript, Savine naturally decided against the publication of a book that contained a violent attack on him, and cancelled Darien's contract. As I mentioned above, Auriant has claimed that this whole story was an invention of Darien, an account confirmed more recently by Walter Redfern.⁵³ It is perfectly plausible, given Darien's persecution paranoia. In the book, the protagonist

⁵² Zeev Sternhell, *La Droite révolutionnaire. Les Origines françaises du fascisme, 1885-1914* (Paris: Seuil, 1978).

⁵³ Walter Redfern, *Georges Darien: Robbery and Private Enterprise* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994) 64.

Vendredeuil is offered to make a name for himself by opportunistically attacking Jews and Freemasons. He is an author (like Darien himself) whose earlier books have had only meager sales, a writer who is having difficulty finding his audience. L'Ogre, by contrast, is a writer perfectly in tune with the public, and his book *La Gaule sémitique* (another transparent disguise for Drumont's *La France juive*) is received in a storm of acclaim and glory.

Oh! oui, c'était bien le livre de cette époque platement égoïste, trop lâche pour la foi, trop lâche pour la souffrance, trop lâche pour le crime même[...] L'Ogre avait parlé le langage de son temps: il avait parlé exclusivement d'argent[...]

Il avait été complètement l'homme de son époque, et voilà ce qui était admirable. Sa cervelle en avait pompé, comme une éponge, tous les fiels et toutes les boues, toutes les biles et tous les crachats, tous les purins et toutes les fanges; et le jour venu, il n'avait eu qu'à la presser, de ses doigts sales, pour faire couler, sur le papier blanc, la quintessence des passions cupides, des appétences immondes d'une génération entière (*Les Pharisiens*, 933-4).

In his earlier novels *Biribi* and *Bas les coeurs!*, there is a distinct division and an opposition between *le peuple* and the bourgeoisie. Beginning with *Les Pharisiens*, *le peuple* becomes increasingly a malleable mass that demands nothing more than becoming... bourgeois (Bakunin often complained of the same problem). *Le peuple* has become *la foule*, "une foule qui n'est qu'une foule et veut rester une foule-- [et] ne veut pas devenir un peuple." (*L'Épaulette*, 775). Should this fallen *peuple* be liberated? "Lorsque les gens sont

trop lâches pour se sauver eux-mêmes, il ne faut point leur présenter de sauveur" (*L'Épaulette*, 771). Of Vendredeuil, the protagonist of *Les Pharisiens*, he writes:

C'était une sorte de barbare intolérant et immiséricordieux. Il avait été très malheureux déjà, à différents titres. Et, de la compulsion de ses souvenirs douloureux, il était entré en lui une grande haine des tortionnaires et un grand dégoût des torturés. De sorte qu'il lui arrivait de souhaiter ardemment le bonheur des misérables, tout en restant convaincu le plus souvent, que la seule chose méritée qui pût leur advenir était d'être, de temps en temps, massacrés en masse...

In his last book *La Belle France* (1905), this cynicism becomes extreme:

Quand on voit ce que sont devenus les maîtres et ce qu'est devenu le peuple, on s'aperçoit facilement que ce n'est pas le peuple qui s'est donné des maîtres, mais que ce sont les maîtres qui, peu à peu, systématiquement, ont réussi à créer le peuple qu'il leur fallait, le peuple selon leur coeur, le peuple à leur image--le peuple prêt à l'ignoble politique des coups d'épingle, des coups de gueule, des coups de Bourse... (*La Belle France*, 1167).

But even at these moments of pessimism, as the quote above shows, there is still a kernel of historical understanding of the conditions that have created this abasement of *le peuple*, and not the inherent hatred of people characteristic of many writers of the period (a subject we will return to in relation to Rebell).

L'Ogre is only the embodiment of the vile passions of *le peuple* turned into a crowd. This conception of the writer and his audience was perhaps exacerbated for Darien by the

dismal sales of his own books (his most successful book was *Le Voleur*: a handful of copies were sold, from which he made a total of 200 francs). But the criticism of L'Ogre the anti-Semite is at times ambivalent, nor are Jews presented in any positive light in *Les Pharisiens*. The attacks on L'Ogre/Drumont echo anti-Semitic stereotypes themselves: he is accused of having a Jewish ancestry, he has "dans les veines du sang d'usurier et de renégat." In his monologue, Léon Bloy (presented under another obvious cover, "Marchenoir") claims to hate Jews, but he despises L'Ogre/Drumont even more, not so reassuring a criticism of the anti-Semitic camp.⁵⁴ But there are also many nuances to Darien's attitude towards the Jews. Issacar, who first appears in *Le Voleur* and in Balzacian fashion returns in later novels, is Jewish. Randal is much impressed by his unusual intelligence:

Sa hardiesse de vue m'étonne et je suis surpris de la netteté et de la sûreté de son jugement. D'où vient, chez le juif, cette précocité de pénétration? Je ne lui vois qu'une seule cause: l'observation, par l'Israélite, d'une règle religieuse en même temps qu'hygiénique, qui lui permet de contempler le monde sans aucun trouble, de conclure et d'apprendre à raisonner avec bon sens; tandis que le jeune chrétien, sans cesse dans les transes, passe son temps à faire ses confidances aux médecins et à consterner les apothicaires. (*Le Voleur*, 339).

⁵⁴ In 1890, Darien had met and befriended Léon Bloy. Even though their politics were vastly different, they were brought together by their independence of spirit and their intense individualism.

Later in the same novel, during one of their discussions, Issacar refers to one of the maxims of the Hebrew prophet which greatly appealed to Darien: "Ne méprise pas ton corps." Furthermore, claims Issacar, "Les juifs sont absolument dépaysés dans la civilisation actuelle," and as such they make up the best candidates for revolutionaries and *révoltés*. Issacar's acute intelligence and the detachment that give him his privileged perspective on the world are a direct result of his Jewishness. In *Le Voleur*, Randal is shocked to find out that Issacar, his friend in crime, is also spying for the police. But for Issacar, crime is not simply an inversion of bourgeois values, and anticipating Genet's thieves he can operate on either side of the line: "Ah! non; je n'engage pas ma liberté ni à droite ni à gauche; je méprise assez les lois pour les narguer le matin et pour leur prêter le soir le concours de mon expérience, si j'y trouve mon intérêt." (*Le Voleur*, 485). The Jew is able to conceive of this absolute liberty by a detachment and indifference to everything dear to others: "Ce détachement absolu n'est pas une manière d'être: c'est une raison d'être." For Darien, Judaism offers a potential for individual salvation impossible in Christianity. "Notre civilisation?" asks the abbé Lamargelle in *Le Voleur*, "On peut la définir d'un mot: c'est la civilisation chrétienne."

Oh! cette religion dont les dogmes pompent la

force et l'intelligence de l'homme comme des suçoirs de vampire! qui ne veut de lui que son cadavre! qui chante la béatitude des serfs, la joie des torturés, la grandeur des vaincus, la gloire des assommés! Cette sanctification de l'imbécillité, de l'ignorance et de la peur! (*Le Voleur*, 609).

In his last book *La Belle France*, Darien puts forth his final word on the Jewish question. Anti-Semitism is a product of the Church, and "si la foule réfléchissait, elle comprendrait que la haine du juif comme juif est imbécile. Le juif n'a pas créé l'état social actuel; cet état est contraire à ses tendances et à son caractère; qu'il en profite souvent, ce n'est pas niable; et qu'il est raison d'en profiter, c'est encore plus certain. Un système meurt des abus qu'il engendre." (*La Belle France*, 1356).

This last idea -- that by exacerbating the tendencies present in capitalism, we accelerate its demise -- is at once correct and naive. In *L'Épaulette*, Issacar makes his way in the world of politics in order to bring about, "from the inside," the end of present society. He orders the massacre of workers during a strike at Fourmies (a real historical event) hoping to precipitate their uprising, but is grieved to see that *le peuple* sank in a deeper stupor than before. Following the same logic, after *Le Voleur*, Darien was violently calling for immediate war, thinking that the unleashing of a total war would bring a social revolution, and having learned from the experiences of the Commune *le peuple* can this time avoid past mistakes. It was

a naive idea, as the experience of WWI proved. His call to war, however, does at times steer into a Stirnerian cult of energy and instinct. The advocates of pacifism, he claims, are wrong: "Si la guerre était supprimée d'après leurs formules, l'instinct combatif disparaîtrait et l'exploitation des pauvres deviendrait plus facile encore qu'elle ne l'est" (*L'Épaulette*, 847). At least here, we can argue, the violent instincts are not valued entirely in themselves but also for the role they play in class struggle. But even this vision disappears at times, and Darien indulges in nihilistic calls to war: "Nous sommes devenus si affreusement civilisés, tellement confits en moralité infâme, qu'il nous faut la guerre pour nous faire voir quelles horribles réalités se dissimulent sous les douces hypocrisies de nos systèmes de civilisation et de morale." (*L'Épaulette*, 848). And for Randal, in his clearest expression of a Stirnerian cult of energy, "La vraie démocratie est celle qui permet à chaque individu de donner, en pure perte, son maximum d'efforts de souffrance" (*Le Voleur*, 379).

These moments in Darien's work have given cause to Jean-Pierre Richard to classify him as a "right-wing anarchist." Instead, Darien is more properly understood not in the tradition of "official" anarchism, but as a heir of such marginal and *réfractaires* figures of anarchist history as Coeurderoy and Déjacque, whom I mentioned in the

beginning of this chapter. Their writing reveals the same violence and the same somber desperation that we find in Darien. Both took part in the 1848 revolution, and were to lead the rest of their lives in exile. The idea of a general war as a catalyst for total liberation was a staple of Coeurderoy's thought. In his *Hurrah!!! ou la révolution par les cosaques*, he would zealously call for the unleashing of the redemptive war: "The war against evil is a good war!"⁵⁵ Déjacque, for his part, had fled to New York, publishing from there polemics against Proudhon (whom he otherwise respected) in his journal *Le Libertaire* (financed, managed and written by himself) in the late 1850's. His call to violence was so extreme as to be embarrassing for later anarchists, and when Jean Grave reprinted Déjacque's *L'Humanisphère* in 1899 he had to discreetly excise the more exalted sections. Déjacque also called for the laxing of all moral imperatives in the service of the revolution, and in this sense anticipated the nihilism of a Nechayev (Bakunin's companion for a time, whom Dostoevsky parodied as Peter Verkhovensky in *The Possessed*). Like Darien later, Déjacque conceived of his book as an act: "Ce livre n'est point une oeuvre littéraire," he wrote, "ce livre n'est point écrit avec de l'encre; ses pages ne sont point des

⁵⁵ Quoted in George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (New York: Meridian, 1962) 281.

feuilles de papier. Ce livre, c'est de l'acier tourné en in-8 et chargé de fulminate d'idées. C'est un projectile autoricide que je jette à mille exemplaires sur le pavé des civilisés... Ce livre n'est point un écrit, c'est un acte."⁵⁶ The poet Pierre Quillard wrote of the work of literature as a propaganda by the deed, a bomb thrown to the public.⁵⁷ Darien shared these ideas, and came to increasingly antagonize his audience. In the preface of *La Belle France*, he announced the book to be unreadable, and predicted its fate: "Un pareil livre ne peut pas être vendu, ne peut pas être lu en France. Ce qui l'attend, c'est le silence: c'est le mutisme de la sottise et de la lâcheté; c'est un enterrement, religieux et civil, de première classe" (*La Belle France*, 1161).

Darien was right: silence was the only reaction the book met with, and what was to be the fate of Darien himself in the following years. First the publishers closed their doors to him, followed by the press, and even the anarchist press. No organ could accomodate this impossible figure. Déjacque and Coeurderoy were, like Darien, "des solitaires,"

⁵⁶ Joseph Déjacque, *A Bas les chefs!* (Paris: Champ Libre, 1971) 86-87. Also quoted in Wolfgang Asholt, "Aux Débuts d'une esthétique anarchiste: Ernest Coeurderoy et Joseph Déjacque," *Littérature et anarchie*, ed. Alain Pessin and Patrice Terrone (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1998) 357.

⁵⁷ Pierre Quillard, "L'Anarchie par la littérature," *Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires*, n.25, April 1892.

unique figures without an audience. Their cries found no echo in the night that surrounded them. They all died forgotten and obscure.

* * *

[M.Hugues Rebell] est aristocrate et païen.

Remy de Gourmont

François Richard differentiates the category of right-wing anarchism from the other currents of the movement by tracing its origins to the baroque and the libertine tradition of thought in the 17th and 18th centuries. It is an individual revolt in the name of aristocratism and the rejection of all constituted forms of authority. It recalls the affirmation of the superior individual by Gobineau's heroes, who are "beyond good and evil." I believe a study of the work of Hugues Rebell--whom I see more appropriately called "anarchiste de droite"-- would highlight and distinguish Darien's work from this current. Darien and Rebell share the same temperament and can be united in a community of passions. Yet politically, they find themselves in extremes of opposite camps. *Les extrêmes se touchent-ils?*

Georges Grassal was born in Nantes on October 28th,

1867 in a bourgeois family of ship owners and captains.⁵⁸ Barely eighteen years old, he began a review entitled *Le Gai Sçavoir*, enamored as he already was with Nietzsche who was at this time completely unknown in France (the young Grassal could read German). His interpretation of Nietzsche, like that of so many other men of his generation, was an individualist aristocratism that saw the tragic German philosopher, like Zarathustra, overcoming the antinomies of his time and transcending the abyss of nihilism.⁵⁹

After his father's death, Grassal inherited a fortune of half a million francs and moved to Paris to lead the life of an *homme de lettres*. It was at this time that he adopted the pseudonym of Hugues Rebell. He began collecting *objets d'art* and books; he traveled all over Europe, particularly in Italy, which became his adopted country. His literary output proceeded at an astonishing pace: he would write for weeks at a time in his apartment, without once stepping out.

His collaboration with *L'Ermitage* began in 1892, and his first article "A propos des *Noces de Figaro*" shows his aristocratic disdain for the abased art of his time. But

⁵⁸ The account of Rebell's life are from his biography by Thierry Rodange, *Le Diable quitte la table, ou la vie passionnée d'Hugues Rebell* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1994).

⁵⁹ The complimentary view of Nietzsche was that of a destructor and an anarchist. The Wagnerian Téodor de Wyzewa, for example, wrote of Nietzsche: "Jamais il n'y a eu dans toute l'histoire humaine un aussi parfait tempérament de démolisseur," in "Frédéric Nietzsche, le dernier métaphysicien," *La Revue bleue*, n.48, 1891, 587.

his aristocratism is not the satisfied superiority of a dandy. He is an engaged intellectual constantly at war with his enemies, democracy, socialism, and Christianity. "Le Dilettantisme" (1893) presents the dilettante as "un homme en route pour être dieu."⁶⁰ He is a superior man who lives to experience Beauty. His esthetic criterion: "l'intensité d'expression d'une oeuvre d'art." For Rebell, all great artists are dilettantes: Stendhal, Balzac, Shakespeare, or Michelet. For these men the ideal government would be the tyrannical state of absolutism; not only does it prevent perpetual war between superior men, it allows them the infinite development of their personalities and the exceptional works of art that they could produce: "C'est la liberté des instincts et la tyrannie politique des aristocraties qui ont produit les belles civilisations de l'Antiquité et de la Renaissance." Democracy reduces the dilettante to the status of a common man and imposes on him the logic of specialization: "A la morale chrétienne qui nous diminue, substituons donc la morale du diléttantisme et du libre développement: essayons d'être des hommes complets."

"L'Érotisme et le mysticisme en art" presents a clearer

⁶⁰ Hugues Rebell, "Le Dilettantisme," *L'Ermitage*, n.4, May 1893, 277. In the same issue he translated a fragment of Zarathustra which he presented under the title "l'homme supérieur."

picture of his aesthetic theories.⁶¹ According to Rebell, eroticism is the most accessible form of art. The other category in art, mysticism, is nothing but a reduced version of eroticism. This latter exalts life in its totality and releases rare sensations, whereas mystical art appeals solely to the intelligence. Rebell counters the morals of modern Democracy (which he sees as the triumph of Christianity) with an art of perverse eroticism that is unacceptable to modern puritans (like Stirner, Rebell conceived the modern era as the triumph of protestantism and hypocrisy): "Rien ne convient mieux aux dégoûtés et aux blasés modernes que des tableaux de nature sans perversité, et d'une volupté noble et saine." "La Morale de la jouissance" attacks further the puritanism of modern sensibility: the philosopher is likened to a sophisticated criminal, heedless of prudish moralities and indulging in the life of the instincts.⁶²

For many of the writers of the 1890's, the superman of Nietzsche (whom they had never read and only knew through secondary works) converged with the Unique of Stirner in order to produce, in the words of the Symbolist poet Gustave Kahn: "Le culte de la force, du héros, [de] la divinisation

⁶¹ In *L'Ermitage*, n.5, May 1894.

⁶² Hugues Rebell, "La Morale de la jouissance," *La Plume*, n.89, 1 January 1893, 3: "Ce que vous appelez criminels, j'estime simplement que ce sont des jouisseurs maladroits."

du génie."⁶³ In the same essay Kahn speaks of the curious notion of "le culte anarchiste des hiérarchies," an idea that seems at first glance thoroughly contradictory today. The notion of the artist-genius of Romanticism was sublated into the artist-aristocrat (Henri Mazel combined the two to come up with the concept "aristie") who fluctuated between *engagement* and contempt for society. The journal *La Plume* devoted a special issue to anarchism in May 1893, and one to aristocratism in June 1894. The anarchist writer Adolphe Retté could claim: "Le devoir des poètes est d'affirmer l'aristocratie de l'Idée," and for Remy de Gourmont "anarchie" amounted to the rule of "les Énergétiques" over "les Énergumènes," "ceux qui agissent et ceux qui sont agis (ou devraient être agis), ceux qui détiennent l'Esprit, c'est-à-dire la Force, et ceux qui subissent (ou devraient subir) l'action de l'Esprit ou de la Force."⁶⁴ To the aristocracy of artists everything should be permitted. An absolutist state would be the best protector of artists. Laurent Tailhade, who was an anarchist at this time would write: "L'individu seul existe; les groupes, les peuples n'existent pas, car le peuple n'est qu'un amas ingrat de forces mal

⁶³ Gustave Kahn, "Stirner et l'individualisme," *La Nouvelle Revue*, vol.30, 1 September 1904, 134.

⁶⁴ Adolphe Retté, "L'Art et l'anarchie," *La Plume*, n.91, 1 February 1893, 46; and Remy de Gourmont, "Sur la hiérarchie intellectuelle," *La Plume*, n.120, 15-30 April 1894 (special issue on "L'Aristocratie,"), 251.

éduquées," while calling himself an anarchist. He would pose the problem thus: what can a proud individual become in a society where mediocrity and the absence of an aristocracy have banished all elegance and Beauty from life?

To this, Rebell retorted that the writer must write for an aristocracy of the spirit, to which he belonged. His *Union des trois aristocraties* (1894) pleads the aristocracies of blood and money to finance and secure the work of the aristocracy of the spirit. The book begins with an epigram from Renan which affirms the primacy of intellectual over manual labor, and the necessity of strengthening and sustaining the defenders of the citadel (are these military men or intellectuals? Rebell did not distinguish between the two). But in a democracy, the intellectual elite has no longer any distinct task, no particular audience. Our writers, Rebell complains, are like actors playing in an empty theater, in front of empty seats.⁶⁵ They have become so alienated from their readers that they aspire to nothing but further widening the gulf that already exists between them. But great art cannot be produced in a vacuum. The public is the collaborator of the artist in providing him with the feverish enthusiasm necessary for his production, "[L'artiste] la doit à cette

⁶⁵ Hugues Rebell, *Union des trois aristocraties* (Paris: Bibliothèque Artistique et Littéraire, 1894) 7. Further references to this book will be placed in the text.

multitude de désirs exaspérés mais vagues, à cette aspiration immense d'un peuple à un idéal encore confus, qu'il est chargé, lui créateur, de préciser et de définir," (*Union*, 8). This conception is very close to Proudhon's ideas on the artist and his relation to the community, and both entail a critique of specialization, as we shall see below. Whereas Proudhon demanded the artist to be rooted in the life of his public, that he understood as *le peuple*, Rebell considers the writer's public as a small elite, an aristocracy who has the capacity to appreciate advanced forms of art. The writer cannot accept, Rebell continues, the approbation of "la foule," his only audience in democracies. "Du moment que chacun a le droit de donner son jugement, qu'on en soit persuadé: il n'y a plus de jugement. Liberté de la presse signifie esclavage de la pensée, puissance de tous veut dire oppression des meilleurs." Under these circumstances, "Il serait fou de désirer parler au public puisqu'il n'existe pas" (*Union*, 9).

This reasoning does not lead Rebell to an absolute pessimism, or a withdrawal into the ivory tower of culture.⁶⁶ The intellectual must plunge into the battle, produce his own public, stir them with his words and if not, actions:

⁶⁶ For Remy de Gourmont, there was nothing left for artists to do except descend into the catacombs (*Le Chemin de velours*, op.cit., 218).

S'il leur est impossible à présent de faire de leurs livres des oeuvres, que ces livres soient au moins des actions... Nos écrits seront des mots d'ordre pour des conspirateurs, des signaux de ralliement pour les amis égarés. A l'art qui, à notre époque, est irréalisable, nous allons aplanir les voies: nous voulons nous créer un public" (*Union*, 10).

The call to engagement becomes extreme at times in Rebell's work. Writing being insufficient, intellectuals must turn into revolutionaries (of the Right), take up arms and wage a real battle: "Soyons donc habile: la lyre d'Orphée est impuissante pour le moment à attendrir les viles brutes qui nous entourent; saisissons l'épée ou le caducée; ayons la ruse, pratiquons la violence; nous devons être tour à tour des combattants, des apôtres, des proxénètes" (*Union*, 37).⁶⁷ But the writer's engagement does not only entail these calls to arms; it necessitates a new kind of writing. In his *Chants de la pluie et du soleil*, Rebell realizes that such a task requires new forms, as his "chants" are neither classical verse nor prose poetry, but a

⁶⁷ Or the following call in another book: "O poètes, mes frères, je vous le dis: vous serez tous égorgés./ Parce que nul ne se défie, parce que nul ne sait prendre un couteau, que nul n'a la force de frapper ceux qui l'attaquent... Les Barbares sont là, près de vous; dans leur colère imbécile ils vont renouveler les grands crimes de l'Histoire: ils brûleront les bibliothèques, ils mutileront et briseront les statues./ Ils frappent tous ceux de leurs ennemis qu'ils peuvent faire prisonniers, surtout les nobles, surtout les forts, surtout les beaux./ Pour moi, dès maintenant, j'ai mes armes prêtes: je saurai combattre et mourir pour la Beauté" Chants XIX in *Chants de la pluie et du soleil* (Paris: Librairie Charles, 1894) 36-7. Hereafter referred to as *Chants* in the text.

lyrical prose faithful to all of these:

Contraint de mêler aux pensées de la solitude celles qui naissent durant la lutte, j'ai choisi comme moyen d'expression, une prose d'un rythme spécial, plus lyrique que ne l'est la prose ordinaire et n'ayant pourtant pas la forme précise et musicale de notre poésie. Le vers classique, qui exige la simplification et la synthèse, se fût mal accommodé de la plupart des sujets que j'avais à traiter (*Chants*, 199).

Classical form, superior as it is, cannot convey the ideas that pertain to contemporary exigencies. Rebell's professes an "infidèle fidélité à la tradition." His traditionalism must be distinguished from the academic criticism of a Brunetière (his *bête noire*) that was, in his view, a false classicism devoid of any initiative.⁶⁸ Indeed, his concept of tradition is as closely bound up with innovation as his individualism is linked to authority, both aspects of his right-wing anarchism. Of three of his favorite artists--Robert Sherard, Joseph Sattler and Félicien Rops--he wrote:

"Ils se sont développés d'eux-mêmes et sans subir de servage, car ils ont choisi leurs maîtres."⁶⁹ Similarly, the individualist Rebell could implore a tyrant to come and save the day: "J'attends le Tyran, le Tyran beau et fort qui va venir[...] C'est en vérité l'Homme suprême, l'Homme qui s'élèvera et élèvera les forts comme lui" (*Chants*, 44).

⁶⁸ The quote is from Victor Nguyen, *Aux Origines de l'Action française. Intelligence et politique vers 1900* (Paris: Fayard, 1991) 696.

⁶⁹ Hugues Rebell, *Trois artistes étrangers* (Paris: Tricot, 1901) X.

A simultaneous affirmation of individualism and tyranny, of absolute freedom and despotism: for Rebell, only the elite can enjoy the anarchist utopia.

Rebell shared many ideas with the anarchists, but his aristocratic disdain precluded any engagement with the anarchist individualists, with whom he had much in common. He saw a continuity between primitive Christianity and socialism (and by extension anarchism), all of which, he thought, were based on *ressentiment*, as opposed to the sentiment of "orgueil," which he considered at the basis of aristocratism and true individuality (Darien would have generally agreed). Primitive Christianity had introduced the principles of humility and submissiveness, servility and hatred of the body and of the vital instincts, and just as the culture of Antiquity was gaining ground once again during the Renaissance, Protestantism had stepped in to reintroduce and further sublate the principles of Primitive Christianity: the negation of life, of the passions, and of beauty. This critique, it can be argued, was taken up by Nietzsche directly from the work of Stirner. Rebell tolerated Catholicism, in which he saw certain elements of the religions of Antiquity and the sensuality of Renaissance art. But he never ceased to attack Calvin and "neo-Christianity" for all the ills of the nineteenth century:

Quel jour brûlerons-nous en place publique
l'Institution chrétienne? Quand souillerons-nous
de boue l'effigie de Calvin? Il y a eu un infâme

sur la terre: ce fut le bourreau de Genève. La Suisse, La France, l'Angleterre, le monde entier sont encore empestés de son cadavre... Toute la grande tristesse de ce siècle, c'est toi, Calvin, c'est toi misérable, qui l'as faite! Quand l'humanité commençait à se délivrer de Jésus, à se délivrer de Paul, tu es venu étouffer sa force" (*Chants*, 60-1).

Attacks on Christianity and Protestantism were common enough in France in the early 1890's, particularly among the members of the *école romane*. It was a period of "Nietzscheism without Nietzsche" as Romain Rolland called it in his memoirs: "Nous avons été ainsi nombre de jeunes hommes qui respirions l'atmosphère nietzschéenne, avant de savoir même que Nietzsche existât."⁷⁰ Maurras and the *école romane* interpreted Nietzsche's thought as a call to the tradition of the South and the culture of *latinitas*, countering the "sadness" of the heritage and religions of the North, including their latest manifestations in Ibsenism, Tolstoyism, and the pessimism of a Schopenhauer. They understood Nietzsche's philosophy as a powerful call to energy, conquest, and a return to aristocratic ethics.⁷¹ Henri Mazel, the editor of *Ermitage* (as well as the special issue of *La Plume* on aristocratism) and a friend of Rebell in these years, shared the same ideas: but they tended to

⁷⁰ Quoted in Victor Nguyen, *op.cit.*, 621.

⁷¹ Geneviève Bianquis, *Nietzsche en France. L'influence de Nietzsche sur la pensée française* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1929)12. According to Victor Nguyen, Maurras' Nietzscheism was entirely mediated through Rebell. Nguyen, *op.cit.*, 807.

turn into tautologies and truisms in his thought, without any nuance or contradictions. Mazel's conception of aristocratism was a simple return to the past. He hoped that Nietzsche's popularity in France would expedite the restoration of the monarchy (his response to a poll in the *Mercure de France* on the question of German influence in France in 1902). His attacks on socialism and anarchism as pure expressions of resentment reveal his own prejudice. Such shortsightedness also appears in Rebell's work, by it is tempered and made tolerable by the contradictions and the eccentricity of his thought, the eloquence of his style, and above all, by his tragic life which was the negation of all absolutist principles. In an essay entitled "Menus propos sur les nouvelles utopies," he dismissed anarchism as the naive daydream of half-educated minds whose resentment against superior men is manipulated by dishonest intellectuals: they should not expect happiness out of life, for the goal of the world is not the happiness of individuals, but the production of exceptional works of art (which he understood as a form of struggle): "Pour moi, je me hasarde à croire que ce monde existe pour la réalisation d'une oeuvre de beauté, et cette oeuvre consiste en une lutte éternelle que viennent seulement interrompre parfois des assoupissements et des sommeils."⁷²

⁷² Hugues Rebell, "Menus propos sur les nouvelles utopies," *La Plume*, n.118, 15 March 1894, 100.

Even though he attacked anarchism in "Menus propos sur les nouvelles utopies," we find a very different image of anarchists in his novels. In his last book *Le Diable est à table*, the Sadean tale of five libertines invited to a dinner party to discuss eroticism, the Prince recounts how he congratulated an anarchist who attempted to assassinate him. The anarchist was simply acting out of genuine anger:

"L'envie et la jalousie... sont des passions si naturelles!"⁷³ (Another anarchist threw a bomb in his house and killed two of the servants. No matter, but the Prince is truly grieved by the destruction of his rare edition of Ronsard, surely worth more than two lives).

In another novel, Rebell presents intricate characters whose political attitudes cannot be categorized. The monarchist Monsieur Le Vergier in *La Femme qui a connu l'Empereur* shows more than indulgence for the Communards. "N'accusez pas la Commune," he tells his friends. The Communards were only the naive victims of the opportunist Republicans, who used them as a tool to topple the Empire and then went ahead and liquidated them in turn. In the same novel, the Bonapartist Colonel de Sourdis, respected military man of the Second Empire, becomes a Communard. He was disgusted with the opportunism of the Republicans in Versailles:

⁷³ Hugues Rebell, *Le Diable est à table* (Paris: Société de Mercure de France, 1905) 30.

Le régime qu'il allait servir s'annonçait comme plus funeste que le roi de Prusse et les armées de l'Allemagne. M.de Sourdis se révolta; et le dégoût le conduisit au milieu des insurgés dont le séparaient si profondément ses origines comme ses espérances.⁷⁴

Knowing that the Commune was doomed to defeat, "il se sentait désormais attaché par devoir à une cause perdue. Où fût-il allé d'ailleurs?" He could not return to Versailles now, as he would be court-martialed immediately: "Il était partout hors la loi" (386). An aristocratic *réfractaire*, he fights on the side of the revolution not even believing in it, for no other reason than supporting the *vaincus*. He is shot on the barricades and *le peuple* surrounds him, shedding tears over his dead body. His wavering between Royalism and the Commune is akin to Rebell's own fluctuations between extremes of Right and Left.

For Rebell as for Stirner, revolution can serve as a pretext for the release of the vital instincts, for the affirmation of energy, a struggle for the sake of struggle. The Count in *Le Diable est à table* claims: "La vie est pour les meilleurs une lutte ayant pour butte une conquête" (26).

Accordingly, friendship proves very dangerous, since it is a momentary rest from this constant struggle for power among the elite. Stirner had posed the problem of friendship among the Uniques in similar terms, as a combination of strategic

⁷⁴ Hugues Rebell, *La Femme qui a connu l'Empereur* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions (10/18), 1979) 381.

associations. For the Count in Rebell's book, momentary alliances are allowed, as long as they take place in the context of the struggle against a third party. "La lutte est si naturelle et si nécessaire à l'homme qu'il n'y a, en réalité, jamais de trêve" (27).⁷⁵ Love is another sentiment that presents an occasion for the release of extreme passions. In *La Câlinese*, during a trip with his lover in Naples, the protagonist is pleased to see the indulgence of Neapolitans for crimes of passion. This is understandable, he tells his lover, "[car] je comprends aussi la colère qui peut inspirer les crimes."⁷⁶ Whole domains of crime, the narrator concludes, should remain outside the scope of the law, particularly crimes of passion, because "l'amour comporte des chances de crimes comme les traversés comportent des tempêtes et des naufrages" (197). For Rebell, the main attraction of love is the possibilities of violence that it offers. "Il n'y a guère que l'amour où

⁷⁵ Rebell's friend René Boylesve wrote of the antipathies of the novelist: "C'était en général, tout ce qui s'opposait ou semblait s'opposer à la libre domination d'un homme ou d'un groupe d'hommes idéal...: aristocratie du héros tout-puissants (je n'ose pas dire tous puissants, car comment deux eussent-ils pu l'être?), absolument libres, absolument impitoyables, vivant pour la satisfaction de leurs instincts qui sont par définition magnifiques, et réalisant au dépens de n'importe quoi, de n'importe qui, le règne de la Beauté sur le monde." René Boylesve, *Profils Littéraires* (Brussels: La Renaissance du Livre, 1962) 131-2. This essay was first published in *Ermitage* in 1905, on the occasion of Rebell's death.

⁷⁶ Hugues Rebell, *La Câlinese* (Paris: Éditions de la Revue Blanche, 1900) 138.

civilisation et barbarie s'unissent et concourent si intimement à nos jouissances, où une sensibilité affinée puisse aider, prolonger, embellir nos violences" (281). None of the social or political implications of crime here: it is merely another occasion for the expenditure of energy.

In *Cartouche d'après sa correspondance* (in *Le Magasin d'auréoles*), Rebell ridicules the vogue for illegalism by sarcastically presenting the newly discovered letters of the 18th century brigand Cartouche, many of the sentences of which he seems to have borrowed straight from the autobiography of Ravachol.⁷⁷ In *La Camorra*, the criminal Ascalona has the shades of a revolutionary⁷⁸, but more than this, of an individualist: "Ce que j'aime en vous," his English lover Hélène tells him, "c'est l'indépendance du caractère. Vous ne vous êtes pas soumis à nos lois étroites, ni astreint à nos petites morales. Vous avez

⁷⁷ This seems impossible, since "Les Mémoires de Ravachol" were first published only in 1964 by Jean Maitron, who unearthed them from the archives of the Préfecture (*Ravachol et les anarchistes*, 39-76). But the similarity of Rebell's text to the terrorist's memoirs is undeniable: the tone and the vocabulary are unmistakably the same. Rebell could have read extracts of Ravachol's defense in newspapers or simply have attended his trial.

⁷⁸ He became a camoriste, he claims, "pour soutenir mes frères misérables... et pour défendre Naples opprimée." Hugues Rebell, *La Camorra, roman d'aventures napolitaines* (Paris: Éditions de la Revue Blanche, 1900) 70. References hereafter will be in the text.

gardé intacte votre liberté" (*La Camorra*, 265).⁷⁹ But the intrigues of this vast criminal organization in the world of politics are so complicated that any political coherence is dissolved: all political distinctions are blurred in the fantasmagoric atmosphere of Naples. To this fascination with the characters is added the allure and the exoticism of the criminal underworld, the dark Neapolitan alleys full of criminals and prostitutes, and the extreme, orgiastic violence of the *peuple latin*.

This taste for extremes is not confined to the themes of his novels: it also pervades Rebell's writing. The extreme psychological conditions he describes--jealousy, anger, violence, all suffused with an atmosphere of eroticism--invade the writing itself. "Le trait marquant de l'oeuvre de Rebell est le goût de l'extrême, voire du paroxysme. Cette tension première explique son écriture, où s'affirme la présence d'un individu ou plutôt d'une force, d'une exaltation toujours à la limite entre colère et volupté... Colère, ébullition, éréthisme, cette ambiance est voulue par l'auteur."⁸⁰ Rebell's novels have to be

⁷⁹ Is Hélène a parody of the "salon anarchism" so ridiculed in the period, or a genuine individualist? It is hard to say. She continues thus: "Savez-vous ce qui m'ennuie, dans votre Camorra? C'est que ce soit une société dans la société. On y trouve un maître, une hiérarchie, des lois, une police!" (265).

⁸⁰ J.P.Beaumarchais, Daniel Couty, and Alain Rey, *Dictionnaire de littératures de la langue française*, vol. 3 (Paris: Bordas, 1984) 1880.

distinguished from both Naturalism and its offshoots, as well as the Symbolist novel. The obscurantist language of Symbolism and the influence of "Nordic" literature on it were unacceptable to Rebell. French literature, he wrote, should repel the foreign influences of Ibsen, Strindberg and Tolstoy and build on its own traditions (even here, exceptions could be made for Goethe, Byron and Wagner, since "une union des dieux est féconde en héros"⁸¹). His criticism of Naturalism rested on two points: heroes of books must be extraordinary individuals, and Naturalism chooses the *vaincus* as its subject.⁸² And more importantly, its rejection of plot in favor of everyday events strips the novel of its principal engine, without which the attention of the reader is lost.⁸³ In this sense Rebell goes against

⁸¹ His criticism of Nordic literature can be found in several essays, namely in "Le Culte de l'imbécile," reprinted in Hugues Rebell, *De mon Balcon*, ed. Stéphane Le Couëdic (Paris: Librairie La Vouivre, 1994) 50-55.

⁸² In *La Femme qui a connu l'Empereur*, the Naturalist novelist Joséphin Corvineau presents his theories: "Seule nous intéresse la vie intime, discrète, des plus modestes et des plus humbles. Une intelligence vaste, une passion violente, des faits inaccoutumés, nous répugnent. La démocratie n'a pas besoin d'actions d'éclat ni de grands hommes. Sa littérature doit donc s'inspirer des sentiments qui sont à l'usage de tous--d'émotions douces et attendrissantes. Pour ma part, je compte écrire l'histoire d'une pauvre femme qui passe son temps à laver et à étendre du linge, se reposant de ses travaux en arrosant, le soir, une petite plante... J'ose prétendre qu'une telle oeuvre doit être d'une grande bienfaisance sociale" (*La Femme*, 371). For Rebell, Naturalism is the art of democracy, producing facile sensations for the mediocre masses.

⁸³ Rebell devoted several essays to Naturalism: in Barrès' *La*

the current of the novel which, after Naturalism, devaluates the plot in favor of psychology or language (from Gide to Beckett). He spoke of the necessity of *adventure* in the novel, and besides his interest in "high" art, Rebell also devoured popular novels. His friend Gustave Le Rouge recalled his fascination with the popular novelist Eugène Sue and Rebell's taste for the popular novel: "C'était un érudit... il lisait tout, même les romans de cape et d'épée dont le style et le moins recommandable."⁸⁴ With Le Rouge, he decided to collaborate on a series of books: "Le sujet que nous avons choisi était l'histoire des Flibustiers des Antilles, que devait suivre celle des pirates de la Mer du Sud et enfin, des Corsaires de la Révolution."⁸⁵ The fantastic project never materialized (it was supposed to take up more than a dozen volumes), but the elements of adventure, of an *interesting* and *seductive* story, which were transferred after Naturalism to the domain of the *roman populaire*, are present in all his novels: the colonial, historical (and erotic) tale *Les Nuits chaudes du Cap*

Cocarde (14 October 1895), he attacked Zola in "Un destructeur de Beauté" (this essay is reprinted in *De mon Balcon*, 29-34); another essay on Zola on the occasion of his death is more tempered in tone, reprinted (as well as an essay on Maupassant) in the collection *Les Chants de la patrie et de l'exil* (Paris: Librairie de France, 1929).

⁸⁴ Gustave Le Rouge, *Verlainiens et décadents* (Paris: Julliard) 126.

⁸⁵ Le Rouge, *Verlainiens et décadents*, 131.

français (1902); *La Nichina* (1897), the wildly entertaining (and also erotic) story of a courtesan in Renaissance Venice; and *La Saison à Baïa* (1900), a Petronesque tale of debauchery and intrigue in Rome during the first century a.d., besides the novels already discussed. Accordingly, he criticized Edmond de Goncourt for portraying lives during which nothing happens: the reader needs to be seduced by what he reads, engrossed in the story, fascinated by the characters. An "écrivain de mouvement," as he has been called,⁸⁶ he is at the crossroads of high and low (in an interview he said: "Il vaut mieux écrire pour le peuple que pour les prétendus lettrés"⁸⁷). His writing a synthesis of the popular and the philosophic, the erotic and the historical novels, and yet more than any one of these: "[C'est] une écriture inclassable, séduisante et dont l'étrangeté semble irréductible à tout modèle," lines which would probably have pleased Rebell.⁸⁸ Like Darien, he was against all the literature of his time, a rejection whose primary source is nothing other than the affirmation of his own individuality.

⁸⁶ Régis Miannay, "Hugues Rebell est-il un précurseur?" *La Nouvelle Revue Nantaise*, n.2, 1994 (special issue, "Hugues Rebell inédit") 120.

⁸⁷ Quoted in Auriant's preface to *Les Nuits chaudes du Cap français* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1978) 10.

⁸⁸ *Dictionnaire*, *op.cit.*

Rebell the anti-Dreyfusard, friend of Charles Maurras and collaborator of the *Action française* would have equally unorthodox views on the Jewish question. To the anti-Semitic discourse of the Abbé in *Le Diable est à table*, the Prince answers:

Ne confondons pas... la race juive avec la race d'Israël, et, dans Juda, la caste aristocratique avec la caste vulgaire... Il y a encore chez les juifs deux âmes adverses; je vous abandonne la première: l'âme du iahvisme, de prédicant oisif et du révolutionnaire social [this is, of course, the one that Darien would have defended], mais laissez-moi défendre l'autre, cette âme souple et habile, acharnée au travail et à la conquête, avide et prodigue, produisant avec force, consommant avec magnificence... (*Le Diable*, 202-3).

In *l'Union des trois aristocraties* (24) he equally praised the dynasty of the Rothschilds for its ambition and enterprise. In the same book he pleaded with the aristocracy of money and blood to finance artistic projects, for the writer's dependency on the market would undermine his work. In this regard, Rebell was fascinated throughout his life with the Italian Renaissance, where the system of patronage allowed artists, at least in Rebell's mind, an absolute freedom ("De pareils hommes sont au-dessus des lois," he wrote in *l'Union*, 34). Social hierarchies must ultimately be maintained so that a group of artists and intellectuals can materialize their vision. This does not entail the betterment of mankind, but is a cult of Beauty to which everything must be sacrificed. In this cruel vision

of the world, those who cannot contribute have to gracefully bow out: "Le droit à la vie, c'est la force, c'est l'intelligence, c'est la beauté. Si je ne possède aucune de ces qualités: c'est bien, je me résigne à mourir" (*Chants*, 3). Remy de Gourmont had called such a social organization "An-archie," most favorable to the elite, who can dissociate themselves from the mediocre majority and devote themselves to the production of the only significant thing in life: art.

But Rebell's fortune was quickly depleted, as much in lavish spending as in his refusal to engage himself in its management. By the last years of the century, he was forced to write, under the pseudonym of Jean de Villiot, pornographic novels for the dubious publisher Charles Carrington. This latter would hire other writers who freely added, edited and transformed the texts as they saw fit, and so the books cannot be reliably called Rebell's. His association with this shady publisher estranged his literary connections, and the reviews and journals terminated his contributions. Vallette (from *Mercure de France*) who had so far published Rebell's novels, refused the subsequent ones.

His bohemian entourage (the *other* life he led, recounted by Gustave Le Rouge in his memoirs) continued to squander whatever money he had left. He was framed in a suspicious affair in Naples with a child prostitute, and became the object of blackmail and terror by a gang of Italian outlaws

in Paris. He was forced to sell his art collection, and fleeing his creditors, he took refuge from one apartment to another, only carrying his library with him. After 1900, he disappeared from the literary milieu, and his friends had no more news of him. Paul Léautaud saw him in the street in 1904, and was shocked to see the former dandy who used to glow with health now reduced to the figure of an old man (he was barely 37 years old):

Le Rebell d'autrefois, assez corpulent, avec son visage d'abbé du XVIIIe siècle, était devenu un homme maigre, courbé, avec le masque, tout à fait, du Voltaire de Houdon, la démarche vacillante, s'appuyant sur une canne, sénile et ravagé à la fois. Il avait bien mis cinq minutes pour traverser la chaussée de la Rue Corneille.⁸⁹

When he died from *la misère* in 1905 in Hôtel Dieu of Paris, no one remembered him.

* * *

Had Rebell and Darien read each other? The same themes appear in their work, from different perspectives, from a similar temperament: opposition to Naturalism and Symbolism, the two dominant literary schools of their period; the affirmation of the individual in the face of what they perceived as an increasingly homogenizing world; crime as a means of such an affirmation, though in Rebell crime loses all its social and political dimensions, and is

⁸⁹ The entries of Paul Léautaud's *Journal* on Rebell are reproduced as the preface of Thierry Rodange's biography. The quote is from p.IV.

merely a Stirnerean expenditure of energy. The excess of individualism in both cases goes beyond politics, capable of fluctuating in a delirious frenzy to the right or the left, but dangerous to both camps, to any form of organization or human bonds altogether. Both men embodied an absolute negation of their time and their society, an emphatic NO! to everything it offered, and simply insisted on living an authentic *life*, one that they considered increasingly impossible in the homogeneous world of the triumphant bourgeois society. To the demise of experience in the modern world, anarchists like Bakunin and Stirner reacted with a call to life, the restauration of experience to its authenticity. It was not until the twentieth century that their critique was taken up once again, first by Surrealists, and later by the theorists of everyday life as well as the Situationists. Darien would have agreed with these words written by Rebell: "Je ne suis chrétien, ni païen, je suis ceci simplement: un homme, et je m'enorgueillis. Je n'ai pas connaissance d'un péché, je ne sais pas ce que c'est qu'un crime: je n'ai souci que de vivre."⁹⁰

⁹⁰ *Chants*, 35.

CHAPTER 5

ANARCHIST AESTHETES:
POLITICIZING AESTHETICS
OR AESTHETICIZING POLITICS?

In 1874, Littré's dictionary defined the word "dilettante" as "Amateur de musique, surtout de musique italienne." Barely ten years later, the concept had come to signify a whole range of attitudes and was a social phenomenon. In 1883, in an essay on Renan in his *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, Bourget described dilettantism not so much as a doctrine but a disposition of spirit, "très intelligente à la fois et très voluptueuse, qui nous incline tour à tour vers les formes diverses de la vie et nous conduit à nous prêter à toutes ces formes sans nous donner à aucune."¹ Sympathy does not suffice for such a disposition of mind: dilettantism, according to Bourget, entails a rarefied and systematic form of skepticism, as well as the art of turning this skepticism into *jouissance*. The dilettante does not turn to skepticism because of

¹ Paul Bourget, *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, vol. 1 (Paris: Plon, 1926 (1883)) 55.

doubt, but rather, as a result of an excess of certainty. His temperament and the vast range of his culture are such that he can simultaneously see and accept the truth in many contradictory positions. The seeds of Bourget's later moralism were already present in his *Essais*, and he could not refrain from admitting that dilettantism inevitably saps at social truths and can but be a danger to the cohesion and equilibrium of a stable society, which must be based on a number of established dogmas.

According to Bourget, dilettantism is bound to meet with repugnance in the majority of people, since humanity instinctually rejects uncertainty and is always in search of solid ground. Dilettantism is thus the property of a few privileged individuals, certainly rare and even dangerous to the balance and well being of society. Only six years later, all signs of his earlier ambivalence towards dilettantism had vanished from Bourget's thought. His novel *Le Disciple* (1889) can be seen as a warning against the consequences of dilettantism. In the preface entitled "A un jeune homme," Bourget warned the young against what had become, in his opinion, a "type" of personality in France. This type, Bourget wrote, has only

one religion: "jouir," and sacrifices everything to this end. "Il est si profondément nihiliste à sa manière," he continued, "que l'idéal lui paraît une comédie."² His soul is nothing but a "machine à calcul au service d'une machine à plaisir." For this "delicate nihilist," all religions are true, and yet he believes in none of them. They are merely tools of an "elegant perversity," of a playful imagination.

Pour lui, rien n'est vrai, rien n'est faux, rien n'est moral, rien n'est immoral. C'est un égoïste subtil et raffiné dont toute l'ambition... consiste à adorer son moi, à le parer de sensations nouvelles.³

The equation of the dilettante with the nihilist was common around 1890. Both were said to believe in nothing and everything, and consider the world as nothing other than a source of personal gain and pleasure. In his *L'Aristocratie intellectuelle*, Henry Béranger accused the contemporary generation along similar lines: "Une génération de dilettantes et de pessimistes, une génération à qui l'action et la création parurent également inutiles,

² Paul Bourget, *Le Disciple* (Paris: Nelson, 1937) 7.

³ *Le Disciple*, 8.

une génération convaincue d'une seule chose, c'est que rien dans la vie ne mérite d'être vécu ou pris au sérieux, qu'il faut par conséquent se retirer en soi-même et jouir amèrement du spectacle des choses, comme d'une comédie souvent bien mal jouée."⁴

The years 1889-1890 were the climax of dilettantism, a phenomenon that must be understood in the constellation of other trends of the *fin de siècle* culture in France, namely *beylisme* and anarchism. As early as 1864, in an article on Stendhal published in *La Nouvelle Revue de Paris*, Taine had discussed the "problem" of the superior man in mass society.⁵ In the face of a mediocre world, Stendhal (like the protagonists of his novels) had to use the weapon of hypocrisy and lie in order to protect himself. There is nothing base in hypocrisy in this sense, for it is the only weapon that a noble soul can use to safeguard his sensibility in a vulgar world. More systematically, Léon Blum confirmed Taine's ideas on Stendhal in his *Stendhal et*

⁴ Henri Bérenger, *L'Aristocratie intellectuelle* (Paris: Colin, 1897) 11.

⁵ Hippolyte Taine, "Stendhal," *La Nouvelle Revue de Paris*, 1 March 1864. This essay is reproduced in Taine's *Nouveaux essais de critique et d'histoire* (Paris: Hachette, n.d.) 223-257.

le beylisme. Stendhal, argued Blum, writes for an elite whose existence is no longer tolerated in a mass society. Beylisme, according to Blum, consists of two important principles: first, an individualism based on the search for personal happiness; and second, masquerade and hypocrisy: the superior man must maintain a "mask," an attitude of compromise vis-à-vis the vulgar mob, while retaining his superiority within and searching for individual fulfillment. Blum acknowledged the similarities of *beylisme* with the thought of Nietzsche: "Le Beylisme repose sur une vue analogue à celle de Nietzsche" and the philosophy of will to power.⁶ Like the thought of Nietzsche, *Beylisme* had indeed become a kind of a cult after 1875. Barrès was a passionate beyliste, took part in a study group on Stendhal with the writers of *La Cocarde*, and gave the title "professeur d'énergie" to the author of *Le Rouge et le noir*. Bourget wrote an essay on Stendhal in his *Essais*, saw in him a cosmopolitan and a dilettante, and found him closer to the spirit of *fin de siècle* rather than his own time. The terrorist Émile Henry considered himself

⁶ *Stendhal et le beylisme* in *L'Oeuvre de Léon Blum* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1962) 529.

a Stendhalian. His teachers were the "professors of energy." Barrès praised Henry's beylisme in an article in *Le Journal*, on the occasion of his execution, expressing the admiration that the dilettantes showed for the anarchists.

Around this time, dilettantism claimed anarchism and revolt as one of its themes. It became fashionable in the salons to believe in nothing, to be disgusted with the times, and to sympathize with the workers. "Pendant cette même période, rien n'est plus élégant que de flirter avec les révolutions."⁷ While socialism remained unfashionable, anarchism quickly penetrated the world of Parisian upper classes. Why? Socialism denounced individualism as bourgeois, but anarchism allowed a form of emancipation at once individual and social. It promised the liberation of individual energies and potentials, but not at the expense of others. The phenomenon was soon to provoke passionate responses, both positive and negative. Conservative critics dismissed the commitment of the *littérateurs* as nothing but salon anarchism, a pose, while anarchists were

⁷ Emilien Carassus, *Le Snobisme et les lettres françaises* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966) 370.

alarmed to see an aestheticization of politics that risked to reduce anarchism to a mere gesture.

Meanwhile, anarchism was making headways in the *beau monde*. In an article on Kropotkin, Théodore Randal related a dinner at the house of a famous actress, where along with her distinguished guests, the hostess had invited an anarchist worker. It is fashionable these days, claims Randal, to invite anarchists, as it was to invite the *philosophes* in the 18th century, or the "emancipated Negro" after 1848. After his arrival, the anarchist worker expresses his discomfort at his role as a "white Negro."⁸ The company is not greatly concerned with his unease, and proceeds to discuss, over a magnificent dinner, the moral neutrality of terrorism as well as other anarchist themes. Camille Mauclair identified the vogue for anarchism among the upper classes as one of the primary reasons for his estrangement from the movement:

De là ont pourtant daté mes déceptions. J'aimais réellement le peuple, je le connaissais bien, et la vie m'était difficile. Mais je me méfiais de ces fils de famille bien nourris, bien vêtus, pourvus de rentes et escomptant de beaux héritages, vivant en somme en parfaits bourgeois,

⁸ Théodore Randal, "Si Kropotkine voulait," *Entretiens Politiques et Littéraires*, n.33, Dec. 1892, 258-263.

qui parlaient avec ferveur du droit du peuple et n'eussent pas supporté l'odeur d'un ouvrier. Je flairais le snobisme insincère: et quand ils chuchotaient que la comtesse de Z. ou la richissime Madame X. invitaient à dîner des compagnons, présentaient à leurs invités 'le camarade Untel' en bourgeron, et étaient tout à fait gagnées à 'la cause', je soupçonnais qu'on se moquait les uns des autres dans ce galimatias. Pourtant, ils écrivaient tous dans les feuilles anarchistes. Il était très chic d'être compromis, et recevoir la visite d'un commissaire de police était un honneur convoité.⁹

We can find the salon anarchist as a distinct type in the literature of this period. In Zola's *Paris*, Hyacinthe Duvillard is the spoiled son of a rich banker and financier. He is decadent, homosexual, and anarchist:

Il s'intéressait à la poésie et à la musique, il vivait au milieu d'un monde extraordinaire d'artistes, de filles, de fous et de bandits, fanfaron lui-même de vices et de crimes, affectant l'horreur de la femme, professant les pires idées philosophiques et sociales, allant toujours aux plus extrêmes, tour à tour collectiviste, individualiste, anarchiste, pessimiste, symboliste, même sodomiste, sans cesser d'être catholique, par suprême bon ton.¹⁰

He brought his anarchist friends to the salon of the Princesse de Harth "pour flatter sa [that is, the Princess'] passion révolutionnaire du moment... et se mit à

⁹ Camille Mauclair, *Servitude et grandeur littéraires* (Paris: Olendorff, n.d. (1922?)) 116-17.

¹⁰ Émile Zola. *Paris*. Paris: Fasquelle, 1954, 41.

injurier cette sale bourgeoisie."¹¹ The Princess was greatly amused by this spectacle.

Paul Adam also painted the portrait of the salon anarchist in his *Critique des mœurs*. According to Adam, the "new" anarchist dresses in the English style and is an anglophile; he is a cosmopolitan who is a regular of salons. He can be seen around the roulette tables in the casinos of Monte Carlo and Cannes. He is a Wagnerian, and in his library one can find works by the Decadents and the Symbolists. He likes the workers "en bloc," but cannot stand them as individuals.¹² In the *Cœurs nouveaux*, Adam continued his criticism of the affected anarchism of the salons. His protagonist Karl de Cavanon is another dilettante in search of rare sensations. After experimenting with pessimism, aesthetic titillation, and charity, he is converted to the ideas of Proudhon and Fourier for a time, and organizes a *phalanstère*, not so much out of social ambition, but "par sport, comme d'autres

¹¹ Zola, *Paris*, 273.

¹² Paul Adam, *Critique des mœurs* (Paris: Ollendorff, 1897, 255).

développent le trot des pouliches."¹³ For his part, Edmond de Goncourt denounced "la jeunesse littéraire qui est dynamiteuse par pose, par chic." In his novel *Le Dernier cri* (1895), Maurice Montégut staged a number of "degenerate" and *mondains* characters - perverts, decadents, homosexuals, dilettantes and aesthetes - who sympathize with anarchism. His protagonist Hervé de la Tremblaye plunges into "le nihilisme mondain, au cabotinage révolutionnaire" and even embraces "l'anarchisme neurasthénique"! He approaches a real anarchist and offers to join the movement but is dismissed as a ridiculous figure by the *compagnons*. He nonetheless attends a meeting, is wrongly arrested for anarchist propaganda, and even confesses "par chic, par pose, par snobisme."¹⁴

In Chapter 4, I discussed the aristocratic anarchism of Hugues Rebell. While Rebell's work illustrates the ideological and intellectual sides of the intersection of these two very distinct phenomena, they also came together in the practical world of politics and conspiracy. This has little to do with the anarchism of the dilettantes, but

¹³ Paul Adam, *Coeurs nouveaux* (Paris: Ollendorff, 1896) 33.

shows that anarchism flourished in the aristocratic milieu not merely as a fashion, but contained a political substratum as well. The quintessential figure at the intersection of anarchism and royalist circles, at the extremes of Right and Left, was the Marquis de Morès. De Morès had a hand in the occult royalist financing of the Boulangist movement. He was rabidly anti-semitic and was one of the principal patrons of Drumont's *La Libre Parole*. He killed a Jewish officer, the Capitaine Armand Meyer, in a duel in 1892. In 1890, he was the campaign manager of Francis Laur, a Boulangist deputy. The violently anti-semitic and revolutionary campaign speeches of "citoyen Morès" attracted a strange mixture of anarchists and aristocrats. He also created an "association" by the name of "Les amis de Morès," made up of a motley crew of anarchists, the jobless *lumpenproletariat* and the butchers of La Villette, which would periodically "storm" the houses of stock-market financiers and Jews. De Morès brought anarchism in contact with the anti-semitic branches of Boulangism, while himself conspiring behind the scenes with the Duc d'Orléans and other pretenders to the throne. An

¹⁴ Maurice Montégut, *Dernier cri* (Paris: Charpentier, 1896)

article in *La Nation* on 30 April, 1890 reported his arrest along with two anarchists, the *compagnon* Martinet as well as Charles Malato, a renowned and well-respected figure in anarchist history. They were reportedly planning to sabotage the May-Day festivities when they were arrested by the police. According to his biographer Robert Byrnes, Morès was the first to have attempted to politically fuse the "revolutionary worker" with the "conservative Christian," a project that has won him the title of the "first nationalist-socialist." His biography makes fascinating reading and sheds light on the little understood phenomenon of the convergence of the extremes of Right and Left in *fin de siècle* France.

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But most dilettantes did not go as far as Morès in their synthesis of the extremes of the political landscape. In fact, anarchism and dilettantism did not even appear contradictory in the few years before and after Ravachol's *attentats*. Aesthetic revolt and political revolt

118; also discussed in Carassus, *op.cit.*, 385.

complemented and completed each other. In *Le Mystère des foules*, Paul Adam wrote: "La dissonance sociale outrage ceux qui aiment le beau... nous entrevoyons la société prochaine ainsi qu'une oeuvre à construire, égale dans ses parties, en équilibre sur ses bases de justice, noble sous le fronton d'une élite. C'est le Parthénon que mesurent nos rêves esthétiques."¹⁵ Adam tried to illustrate such a world in his *Lettres de Malaisie*, which recounts the story of a utopian society founded on aesthetic principles. The population is well educated, for "Rien n'est plus beau que produire un être pensant."¹⁶ The population of this idyllic land happily circulates in public places where speakers broadcast the melodious harmonies of Chopin and Liszt. The requisite for beauty, however, takes a sinister turn when we realize that such a society cannot tolerate anything that is not beautiful and casually eliminates them. The old are banished to special places, and "les difformes ne fréquentent pas au milieu des beaux ni des sains. Ils habitent certains lieux voués à leur détresse."

¹⁵ Paul Adam, *Le Mystère des foules* (Paris: Ollendorff, 1895) XXIX.

¹⁶ Paul Adam, *Lettres de Malaisie* (Paris: Éditions de la Revue Blanche, 1898) 35.

For the anarchist writers of the *fin de siècle*, the post-revolutionary society had to be constructed like a work of art, and vice-versa. Words and acts could thus be fused into one realm, as when Pierre Quillard claimed literature to be an instance of "propaganda by the deed." Quillard's argument emerged from his debate with Lazare's conception of *l'art social*. Against Lazare, Quillard claimed that a work of art, by the mere fact that it is beautiful, that it can exist in an ugly world, constitutes an act of revolt.¹⁷ By the same token, the anarchist's bomb thrown at the ugly world constituted an aesthetic gesture, while Mallarmé, in response to a question asking his opinion of the terrorist Vaillant, responded: "La vraie bombe, c'est le Livre!" In his *Psychologie de l'anarchiste-socialiste*, Augustin Hamon completed a study

¹⁷ Pierre Quillard, "L'Anarchie par la littérature," *Les Entretiens Politiques et Littéraires*, n.25, April 1892, 150. It is interesting to recall the diametrically opposite argument Henry James made, from across the Channel, in *Princess Cassamassima*. James' protagonist Hyacinth Robinson is dissuaded from his anarchist faith after a trip to Italy and France, where he recognizes that despite the injustice of present society, it must nonetheless contain a redeeming element, for it has produced great works of art and culture. In other words, while for Quillard the beautiful work of art is a negation of present society, a proof of its inhumanity, for James it is a *justification* of it.

among some two hundred informants, and concluded that both anarchists and artists share the traits of innovation and revolt, that the individual who possesses the critical mental capacities for the practice of art and literature is also predisposed to become an anarchist. Hamon did not go as far as to equate artists and anarchists. He particularly criticized the proponents of the *culte du moi* who put themselves above *le peuple*, and for whom the experience of revolt was nothing but a source of aesthetic gratification.¹⁸

The key work of the confluence of dilettantism and anarchism was in fact Maurice Barrès' *L'Ennemi des lois* (1892). Today, it has become customary to see in early Barrès the nationalist and the anti-Dreyfusard who was to emerge in the late 1890's, and subsequently to ignore what Barrès represented to his contemporaries around 1890. This is perhaps due to Zeev Sternhell's *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français*, which has become something of a classic, running through several reprints since its first appearance in 1972. Sternhell situates Barrès at the

¹⁸ Augustin Hamon, *Psychologie de l'anarchiste-socialiste* (Paris: Stock, 1895) 124.

origin of French nationalism, as the father of the modern Right and what was to take shape in the ideology of the *Action Française* and come to full fruition in the 1930's and finally under the Vichy regime.¹⁹ In order to build this consistent story, Sternhell makes sweeping generalizations which not only overlook finer points of distinction, but make of fascism a phenomenon that englobes extremely diverse positions. This is not the place to dispute Sternhell's thesis. Barrès did in fact profess ideas very much at odds with the nationalist politics in the years before the publication of the trilogy of *Le Culte du moi* (1888-1891). Particularly in the articles he published in *Le Voltaire*, a progressive, Republican newspaper, in the years 1886-88, Barrès reveals himself as a dilettante and a cosmopolitan.²⁰ The article of 5 July

¹⁹ Last year, Fayard republished Sternhell's separate books (*Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français; La Droite révolutionnaire* and finally *Ni Droite ni gauche*, originally dating from, respectively, 1972, 1978 and 1983) as three volumes of a single work entitled *La France entre nationalisme et fascisme* (2000).

²⁰ Barrès' articles in *Le Voltaire* are examined by Pierre-Georges Castex in "Barrès, collaborateur du Voltaire (1886-1888)" *Maurice Barrès. Actes du colloque organisé par le Faculté des lettres de des sciences humaines de l'Université de Nancy* (Nancy: 1963) 51-60.

1887, entitled "La Société cosmopolite," examines with fascination the dilettantes who frequent the salons of Paris, the *litterati* of London, the spas of Germany and spend their winters in Italy. These "esprits sans-patrie, qui veulent adopter les perfections de l'univers et qui sourient des gaucheries de leur race" confirm that "le but de la vie est de sentir le plus vivement et d'échapper à la stérilité d'âme." In another article, this one on Baudelaire, Barrès recognizes in the author of *Les Fleurs du Mal* one of his "intercesseurs," and ponders Baudelaire's definition of Dandyism from *Les Journaux intimes*: "Qu'est-ce que l'homme supérieur? Ce n'est pas le spécialiste. C'est l'homme de loisir et d'éducation générale."²¹ This suggestion is directly taken up in *Sous l'Oeil des Barbares*, where the narrator rejects Renan's advice of "Et d'abord instituez-vous une spécialité et un but" and instead embarks on a life of dilettantism. He (we do not as yet know the name of the narrator in *Sous l'Oeil des Barbares*) abhors specialists and reflects to himself: "s'il faut parfois se résigner à paraître fonctionnaire,

²¹ "Le Caractère de Baudelaire" *Le Voltaire*, 7 June 1887; and Castex, 59-60.

commerçant, soldat, artiste ou savant, il convient de n'oublier jamais que ce sont là des infirmités, et que seules deux choses importent: 1. se développer soi-même pour soi-même; 2. être bien élevé."²²

The first two volumes of the *Culte du moi* are indeed manuals of a nihilistic dilettantism. The principles of morality, ethics and religion, claims Barrès, have ceased to provide a model for the contemporary generation. The only tangible reality in such a world is the self and its desires, which the individual must cultivate and refine. It must be pointed out that Barrès does not approach this problem as had Bourget. The absence of values in the modern world, the rise of the dilettante (and the nihilist) were social and moral problems for Bourget. For Barrès, they constitute a personal question, the dilemma of a tormented individual who is at once enchanted and terrified by the "vagabondage de l'esprit." The first volume, *Sous l'Oeil des Barbares*, presents primarily the attempts of a young man to live the inner life of his *moi*. Everyone outside of his self (and not merely the bourgeois) is a

²² Maurice Barrès, *Le Culte du moi* (Paris: Plon, 1966 (Livre de Poche)) 87, 94.

barbarian, incapable of understanding his delicate self forever in search of intense sensations. "Nous ne sommes jamais si heureux que dans l'exaltation," is the motto of the nameless dilettante protagonist, and the conclusion of the volume will be squarely anarchistic: "Que chacun satisfasse son moi, et l'humanité sera une belle forêt, belle de ce que tout, arbres, plantes et animaux s'y développent, s'élanceront selon leur sève." By the end of the second volume, *Un Homme libre*, Barrès had opted for a Stendhalian solution: to keep intact an inner world, and to maintain a mask in the face of barbarians: "Continuons toutefois à embellir et à agrandir notre être intime, tandis que nous roulerons parmi les tracasseries extérieures. Soyons convaincus que les actes n'ont aucune importance, car ils ne signifient nullement l'âme qui les a ordonnés et ne valent que par l'interprétation qu'elle leur donne."²³

In the third volume, *Le Jardin de Bérénice*, the protagonist Philippe manages to reconcile his contradictory impulses by the recognition of the unconscious energies of *le peuple*, which he seeks to use as a source of personal ambition as well as an object to direct and manipulate. Here is Barrès

²³ Barrès, *Le Culte du moi*, 317.

the Boulangist deputy, already on the path identified by Sternhell towards nationalism.

But it is curious to see in the same year, 1892, the publication of *L'Ennemi des lois*, Barrès' most anarchistic work. His protagonist André Maltère is a disciple of Saint-Simon and Kropotkin. He is arrested and put on trial for his inflammatory writings in anarchist journals. But he is also a regular of salons, a dilettante without a profession, and he can defend himself in such eloquent language as to embarrass the judges (anticipating Fénéon's self-defense in the *procès des Trente* two years later). His line of defense is that of an anarchist: he presents an individualism that is undeniably anti-bourgeois and generous:

Donc vous faites ici moins le procès d'une pensée que d'un instinct... Je m'accuse de désirer le libre essor de toutes mes facultés, et de donner son sens complet au mot exister. Homme, et homme libre, puissé-je accomplir ma destinée, respecter et favoriser mon impulsion intérieure, sans prendre conseil de rien du dehors! Nulle dépendance, une vie aisée, l'entière harmonie avec les éléments, avec les autres hommes et avec notre propre rêve, voilà quel besoin m'agite, et le satisfaire, c'est toute ma conviction.²⁴

²⁴ Maurice Barrès, *L'Ennemi des lois* (Paris: Plon, n.d) 12-13.

Like Des Esseintes, Maltère is the product of a late civilization, but as opposed to the protagonist of *A Rebours*, this lateness is not the source of decadence and exhaustion for him. Instead, the thousands of years of culture of which he is a repository have given him the capacity to regulate himself independently of external forms of constraint, of forms of authority, of laws and regulations.²⁵ Art and culture do not only constitute the basis of his autonomy: he conceives of the society of the future in aesthetic terms. While visiting a museum in Germany, he wonders: "N'y a-t-il pas un rapport certain entre le décor qu'une race demande à ses artistes et l'utopie qu'elle porte en soi?"²⁶ Aesthetic and political debates alternate throughout the entire book, as when the sight of a painting in a museum triggers a rêverie on Marx or Lassalle. In an article in *Le Journal*, Barrès noted: "Il y a ... parmi la jeunesse lettrée, une forte tendance à

²⁵ In the special issue of *La Plume* (n.47, 1 April 1891) on "Éthique de Maurice Barrès," Anatole France joined Barrès to the Decadents and the hypersensitivity of a late civilization.

²⁶ Barrès, *L'Ennemi des lois*, 153.

penser que l'humanité s'achemine vers une société où tous étant élevés jusqu'à l'intelligence (c'est-à-dire en même temps, jusqu'à la bonté), les dogmes et les lois seraient superflus."²⁷

Barrès' individualism was generally understood in the context of anarchism in the early 1890's, and recognized as a variety of the philosophy of Kropotkin and Proudhon. The nationalist elements of his thought did not come to the foreground until the Dreyfus affair, as the break with the *Revue Blanche* in February of 1898 shows. The historical hindsight of a Sternhell was not available to the contemporaries, and risks to play down the novel and complex mix of ideologies and "isms" that characterized his thought in this period. In a review of *L'Ennemi des lois* in *La Plume*, Maurice Kreutzberger recognized an anarchist in Barrès' protagonist.²⁸ In an interview in *L'Événement*, Jean Grave claimed that Barrès had come to Sainte-Pélagie to visit him (Grave was in jail for the publication of his book *La Société mourante et l'anarchie*) and had reassured

²⁷ Quoted in Léon Deschamps, "L'Anarchie," *La Plume*, n.113, 1-15 January 1894.

²⁸ Maurice Kreutzberger, "A Propos de *L'Ennemi des lois*" *La Plume*, n.89, 1 Jan.1893.

him of his commitment to the anarchist cause. Grave seems to have been convinced of Barrès' sincerity at this time, but others were not persuaded. Camille Mauclair saw Barrès' anarchism as an expression of his individualism, and doubted its authenticity. Wasn't anarchism another source of delectation for the hyperactive mind of this aesthete?²⁹ The harshest attack came from Ludovic Hamilo in *L'Art Social*.³⁰ He recognized the superfluous and shallow nature of the social and political debates in the book, but was mostly disturbed by the aesthetic treatment of political ideas, which would freely confuse various doctrines, submitting them to an aesthetic criteria. This, of course, can be said to be the nature of the literary work, which can process and present ideas in a more conceptually mobile framework than, say, a political tract. But from the point of view of anarchists, this was precisely the gist of the problem: the dilettante Barrès had transformed anarchism into a tableau in a museum, a

²⁹ Camille Mauclair, "Sensibilité du sceptique: A propos de Maurice Barrès" *Mercure de France*, n.12, Dec.1894, 360.

³⁰ Ludovic Hamilo, "A propos de *L'Ennemi des Lois*" *L'Art Social*, Dec.1892, 305-309.

work of art to flavor and enjoy. In time, Grave came to agree with Hamilo. In a later article on Barrès, he wrote of *L'Ennemi des lois*: "L'anarchie présentée dans ce livre n'est qu'une anarchie à l'usage des millionnaires: pour s'affranchir des lois, il faut posséder cent mille francs de rente ou épouser une femme qui les ait, quitte à compléter la somme par une maîtresse riche."³¹

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Are aestheticism and politics essentially at odds with each other? In his well-known essay on the mechanical reproduction of the work of art, Walter Benjamin concludes with an enigmatic distinction between the aestheticization of politics and the politicization of aesthetics which, I believe, only opens a whole gamut of questions rather than answering them.³² For if we were to take literally his conclusion, that the aestheticization of politics is a feature of fascism, we would then have to admit that we are

³¹ Jean Grave's column in *Les Temps nouveaux*, 21-27 March 1896.

³² Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969) 242.

presently living, at least culturally, under fascism, for nothing is more characteristic of this aestheticization than American popular culture. This is not the place to enter into theoretical debates about contemporary culture, but one question should nonetheless be addressed: did the literary and political current studied in this chapter introduce the confusion of aesthetics and politics in modern history, the consequences of which are still with us today, unresolved and murky? Such a question should be answered indirectly, and it is perhaps fruitful to turn to the study of a number of writers who sincerely adhered to the anarchist cause while remaining aesthetes, who could, through their individual practice, transcend a dichotomy that seems absolute in theory.

* * *

Among the most extravagant personalities of the Parisian literary world in the 1890's was Zo d'Axa, the editor of the journal *L'Endehors*. In his history of the anarchist movement in France, Jean Maitron found the nihilistic affirmation of the individual in this journal so

extreme as to write: "A vrai dire... elle va au-delà même de l'anarchie."³³ The program of the journal, as announced in its first issue, defined itself thus: "Celui que rien n'enrôle et qu'une impulsive nature guide seul, ce passionnel complexe, ce hors-la-loi, ce hors d'école, cet isolé chercheur d'au-delà ne se dessine-t-il pas dans ce mot: 'Endehors'?"³⁴

Zo d'Axa was the pseudonym of Alphonse Gallaud, who had been born in Paris in 1864. Like Octave Mirbeau, he seems to have been a Royalist and a Catholic for a time in his youth. Contemporaries were astonished by his aristocratic allures, his fantastic dress and gestures as he walked on the boulevard: "Il ne peut circuler dans l'indifférence, tant il est peu semblable aux autres, tant sa fine physionomie d'artiste, qui se doublerait d'un condotierre élégant, s'impose à l'attention."³⁵ In an article in *La Plume*, Jean de Mitty called him a dandy and

³³ Jean Maitron, *Le mouvement anarchiste en France*, vol. 1 (Paris: Maspero, 1975) 137.

³⁴ *L'Endehors*, 12 May 1891.

³⁵ Victor Méric, *Zo d'Axa* (Herblay: Éditions de la Revue L'Idée Libre, 1921) 3.

an anarchist.³⁶ But his anarchism, Mitty continued, is not dogmatic, nor does it constitute a system. "C'est l'affirmation de l'individu - l'exaltation de son univers." Victor Méric similarly remembered how Zo d'Axa reproached the staff of *L'Endehors* for an excessive and naive belief in the anarchist ideal. D'Axa sought to continuously undo any fixed position that may entangle him. He was an anarchist who would attack anarchism, and individualist against individualism. He wrote in *L'Endehors*: "C'est en dehors de toutes les lois, de toutes les règles, de toutes les théories - mêmes anarchistes - c'est dès l'instant, dès tout de suite que nous voulons nous laisser aller à nos pitiés, à nos emportements, à nos douceurs, à nos rages, à nos instincts - avec l'orgueil d'être nous mêmes."³⁷

What were the consequences of the dilettante's subjection of politics to the conceptual mobility derived from literature? It must be recalled that the majority of the writers of the 1890's had come to anarchism not due to a profound social and philosophical reflection, but through

³⁶ Jean de Mitty, "Zo d'Axa," *La Plume*, n.158, 15-30 Nov.1895, 505.

³⁷ Zo d'Axa, *Endehors* (Paris: Champ Libre, 1974) 123-124.

literature. In some cases, as that of Mirbeau and Lazare, subsequent sociological and philosophical studies came to reinforce their belief in anarchism. Others never bothered with such a labor, and their social engagement was the extension of their literary battles. During the Dreyfus Affair, Zo d'Axa launched his own dreyfusard paper entitled *La Feuille*.³⁸ Victor Méric remembered that Zo d'Axa "fut un de nos maîtres - le Maître des Maîtres - aux alentours de l'Affaire Dreyfus," and that his paper contributed much to the dreyfusard camp. Resuscitating again the convergence of the pen and the bomb, he wrote of *La Feuille* and d'Axa's writing: "C'était un brûlot propre à incendier les intelligences, un pétard à la mélinite bon pour faire sauter les consciences, quelque chose comme un éclair foudroyant dans l'abîme opaque des ignorances."³⁹ Yet there was the troubling irony in Zo d'Axa's language, the refusal to take sides:

³⁸ *La Feuille* ran between October 1897 and March 1899. It was literally a "sheet," with Zo d'Axa's text on one side and illustration on the other by such notable artists of the day as Steinlen, Maximilien Luce, Hermann-Paul, and Willette, among others. The journal is today avidly sought after by bibliophiles and is an extreme rarity. Each sheet or issue runs between 10 and 15 thousand francs.

³⁹ Méric, *op.cit.*, 5.

Pourtant, cette *Feuille* déroutait les esprits. Elle n'était pas tout à fait dreyfusarde comme nous l'aurions voulu. Elle se souciait peu de l'innocence du Capitaine et des péripéties du roman-feuilleton offert à tous les appétits... *La Feuille!* Zo d'Axa! Je l'ai lu, parfois, avec colère. Je ne comprenais pas. Je ne voulais pas comprendre. Qu'est-ce qu'il demandait, ce pamphlétaire fulgurant, qui n'était ni dreyfusard, ni anti-dreyfusard, ni ceci, ni cela; qui échappait à toute classification; qui se plaçait en dehors des partis, des groupements, des chapelles?

The dilettante escapes fixed positions, refuses identification, mediation, representation. Here is indeed a common ground between dilettantism and anarchism, the affirmation of the unique, the safeguarding of the individual, which nonetheless does not preclude his political commitment. Zo d'Axa is not an André Maltère, for whom politics is nothing but a work of art to contemplate and relish in the comfort of an armchair. *L'Endehors* may have been characterized by a multiplicity of positions that at first may seem contradictory. "Nous sommes tous ici trop librement et trop amicalement en perpétuelles divergences de vues littéraires et sociales pour solidariser nos opinions. Nous sommes des Endehors, aussi bien en dehors les uns des autres qu'en dehors de tout le monde... le journal n'a pour ligne de conduite que

l'indépendance absolue de ses collaborateurs qui vivent ici dans l'anarchie réalisée."⁴⁰ This multiplicity derives from the individualist's (whether dilettante or anarchist) rejection of not only identification with the other, but of language's capacity to unproblematically re-present the world.

Roinard's lines quoted above were written during a polemic with Jean Grave, the editor of *La Révolte*, on the subject of style in literature. Roinard had attacked Grave's article "La Société au lendemain de la Révolution," as conventional in style, and therefore trapped in categories that, *due to its form*, it could not transcend. Grave answered the criticism in an article in *L'Endehors*. We must write for the people, he argued, and it is not through obscurantist language that we can reach them. "Ce n'est pas en s'abaissant au niveau de la masse qu'on élèvera son goût esthétique, mais bien en lui faisant aimer le *Bien* et le *Beau* tels qu'on les entrevoit." Grave thus dismissed the charge of not being "aesthetically refined," and stressed his belief in Realism as well as his

⁴⁰ Roinard's response to Jean Grave, in *L'Endehors*, n.12, 21 July 1891.

indifference towards formal questions: "Personnellement, l'art pour l'art ne me dit rien. Le livre, le tableau, la musique doivent évoquer une idée, des sensations chez ceux qui les regardent, lisent ou écoutent." For Roinard, by contrast, it was language and form that take precedence over meaning. He criticized Grave's notion that the Idea is beautiful in itself, and that it can be straightforwardly represented as such. The debate underscores the extent to which certain strands of anarchism were influenced by the literary and cultural currents of the 1890's, namely aestheticism and Symbolism, and shows how influences were mutual and not exerted in a unilateral direction.

But *L'Endehors* was not a dilettante's organ. It took sides and fought for concrete issues. Zo d'Axa could attack the workers one week, and fervently support the right to strike the next.⁴¹ Anti-militarism and violent criticisms of the army were a staple of the journal (long

⁴¹ For example, in an article entitled "Vierge enthousiasme" in *L'Endehors* (n.1, 5 May 1891), Zo d'Axa wrote: "Après l'aristocrate, le bourgeois, après le bourgeois, l'ouvrier; mais tous aristocrates, bourgeois, ouvriers, tous autoritaires, tous, au fond, ennemis intimes des rêveurs anarchistes que nous sommes."

before the Dreyfus Affair). In 1893, the government reacted when *L'Endehors* started a fund for the families of anarchists in jail: the journal was shut down, Zo d'Axa arrested and imprisoned. He subsequently skipped bail and fled to Belgium, an escape that was only the beginning of a long, impoverished and miserable exile that took him to Greece, Constantinople, Jaffa, among other places.⁴² He was finally arrested in Jerusalem and extradited to France, to serve prison terms and pay large fines. The sincerity of his commitment is beyond doubt.

Another one of the notorious anarchist aesthetes of this period was the Parnassian poet Laurent Tailhade. Born in Tarbes in 1854 (and thus slightly older than the poets of the Symbolist generation), Tailhade moved to Paris in 1880 with the fortune he had inherited from his father. He was a dandy, an art collector and an extravagant personality who frequented the worlds of bohemia as well as the *salons*. He was a regular of the *Chat Noir* cabaret in Montmartre, and was a companion of the *zutistes*, particularly Verlaine and Moréas in the bohemia of the

⁴² He recounted his period of exile in *De Mazas à Jérusalem* (1895), reprinted under the title *Le Grand Trimard* the next year.

quartier Latin during the early 1880's, but was also regularly seen at the *salons* of Mme de Broussac and the Princesse de Laskoy.⁴³ His lavish dandyism exacerbated some of his contemporaries, who complained that "le soin de sa barbe lui est une préoccupation, le noeud de sa cravate lui est une étude."⁴⁴ Already in his first volume of poetry, *Le Jardin des rêves*, he showed his absolute mastery of form, a gift that perhaps remained one of his greatest handicaps, since the lyrical elements were always subordinated to it, and hence kept him forever under the Parnassian umbrella. The volume was in fact prefaced by Théodore de Banville, who appreciated the "délicatesse [à la fois] la plus raffinée et la plus excessive, et le paroxysme, l'intensité, la prodigieuse splendeur de la couleur éblouie."⁴⁵ The volume remains an interesting example of late Parnassian poetry, traditional in its form as well as its ideas, and is little read today.

⁴³ Fernand Kolney, *Laurent Tailhade, son oeuvre. Étude critique* (Paris: Éditions Carnet-Critique, 1922) 14.

⁴⁴ Alcide Guérin, "Laurent Tailhade," *La Plume*, n.56, 15 August 1891.

It was not until the publication of *Au Pays du Mufle* in 1891 that Tailhade found his distinctive style. While remaining Parnassian in its form, the collection of poems is an intense invective attacking the bourgeois, the philistine -- the Barrésian barbarians -- as well as the poets and novelists of bourgeois literature, or rather what Tailhade considered bourgeois writers, which included almost everyone, what Tailhade called "le mufle." The notion of *le mufle* is as literary as it is political: we can discern Flaubert's Homais as well as Gautier and Baudelaire's diatribes against the bourgeois in it. Besides the bourgeois and the philistine, Tailhade also attacks political institutions, particularly the two that were the favorite targets of the anarchists: the Church and the Army. Tailhade was a man of vast erudition and could recite, at will, an enormous number of classical as well as modern poems. His own poetry is full of neologisms - and against those who attacked him for inventing too many words and thus being incomprehensible, he defended himself by saying that all the vocabulary he used could be found in

⁴⁵ Théodore de Banville's preface is reproduced in the appendix of *Les Oeuvres de Laurent Tailhade*, vol. 2 (Paris: Mercure de France, 1923) 173.

the classics. No one escapes his venom: Drumont is a "larbin dont les femmes en mal d'enfant craignent l'approche;" of the church and the priests he wrote:

Ils lèchent les derrières,
Les pattes meurtrières,
Les sabres dégainés
Des galonnés.

The army soldier is "une hure de porc ceinte de verts lauriers."⁴⁶ For Barrès and Coppée he reserves his harshest judgment:

Nous sommes sans talent, sans honneur et sans sexe.
Le bourgeois nous admire et déguste, perplexe,
Nos mélanges savants de fiel et de saindoux (II:77).

Zola falls under the category of the *mufle* in 1891, but in the editions published after the Dreyfus affair his name is replaced with that of Bourget, Loti and others. Tailhade remained a committed anarchist throughout the Affair and must have felt a new appreciation for the author of *J'accuse!*

The only two groups who escape Tailhade's furor are the poor and the anarchists. *Résurrection* envisions an anarchist Christ returning to earth to find the Church

⁴⁶ In *Oeuvres*, II:37. References to this edition will be hereafter placed in a parentheses in the text.

corrupt, the *honnête gens* crooked, the politicians depraved and the whole of society debased. And the poet urges the prophet:

Viens avec nous, avec le Pauvre qui t'aima!
Viens goûter avec nous l'espérance infinie[...]
Retourne aux insurgés, aux souffrants, aux bannis,
Anarchiste! L'amour brode sa villanelle.
Viens, te mêlant aux chœurs des hommes rajeunis
(II:97-8).

In a poem dedicated to Ibsen, a similar hope is expressed for the coming anarchism to save the world:

Vienne ton jour, Déesse aux yeux si beaux,
Dans un matin vermeil de Salamine!
Frappe nos coeurs en allés en lambeaux,
Anarchie, ô porteuse de flambeaux!
Chasse la nuit! écrase la vermine
Et dresse au ciel, fût-ce avec nos tombeaux,
La claire Tour qui sur les flots domine! (I:145).

Tailhade is remembered today for his notorious statement on the evening of the explosion of Vaillant's bomb in the Chamber of Deputies on 9 December 1893. To Jules Huret's question about his opinion on terrorism he reportedly answered: "Qu'importe la mort de vagues humanités, pourvu que le geste soit beau et si, par elle, s'affirme l'individu!"⁴⁷ The conservative press was scandalized and recounted the event as the worst example of

⁴⁷ André Billy, *L'Époque 1900 (1885-1905)* (Paris: Jules Tallandier, 1951) 425.

the proliferation of anarchism among the intellectuals and writers, and the decadent disregard for humanitarian values among this clique. In a letter to the editor of *Le Temps*, Tailhade later tried to defend himself, and explained that his statement was made only a few hours after Vaillant's attack, at a time when the exact nature of the event was not yet clear. What he really intended to say was that "pour nous contemplatifs, les désastres de ce genre ne sauraient offrir d'intérêt en dehors de la Beauté qui parfois s'en dégage."⁴⁸ Tailhade's statement underscores, once again, the equation (or confusion) of aesthetic and political acts that was characteristic of this period, associating the gesture of throwing a bomb with the writing of poetry (André Billy spoke of "le terrorisme intellectuel... qu'exerça un certain temps Laurent Tailhade"⁴⁹), both of them at once aesthetic and political and therefore beyond the reach of morality.

⁴⁸ Madame Laurent Tailhade, *Laurent Tailhade au pays du mufle* (Paris: A.Quignon, 1927) 113.

⁴⁹ André Billy, *Les Écrivains de combat* (Paris: Les Oeuvres Représentatives, 1931) 104.

While the incident brought Tailhade's name to the attention of the public and gave him a degree of notoriety among the literary milieus of the *fin de siècle*, it also associated him with salon anarchism and thus tended to discredit him as an aesthete for whom anarchism was merely an expression of his individualism.⁵⁰ But Tailhade's commitment to anarchism lasted significantly longer than the majority of the writers of the 1890's, and when he did renounce it in 1906, it was a broken man who rejected his past faith, much like Oscar Wilde had done after his imprisonment. It is in this sense important to examine the economic conditions of Tailhade's life. According to his wife, he had inherited about 200,000 francs from his father in 1880 (a considerable fortune), a sum that he placed as investment in the Panama and the Union Générale enterprises. The story of the two scandals is well known, an affair that reduced Tailhade to penury overnight. His wife recalled that his anger was boundless at the corrupt politicians who had engineered this fiasco: "Attendez-vous, toutes les fois que vous parlez de ces gens-là, à me voir

⁵⁰ Billy, *L'Époque* 1900, 425.

trembler de colère."⁵¹ His violent anti-clericalism predated his anarchist period (he had been educated by the Jesuits); the two financial scandals that robbed him of his wealth were enough to push him to radical social ideas. After a period of lavish living, Tailhade was forced to make do with a small income earned from journalism.

Shortly after the Vaillant affair, in April 1894, while dining at the restaurant Foyot, Tailhade lost an eye to a terrorist bomb whose perpetrator was never found.⁵² The conservative press gloated, but Tailhade refused to relinquish his earlier statement about Vaillant's bomb. He remained an anarchist after the campaign of police terror in 1894-5, and throughout the Dreyfus Affair. His violent temper often involved him in duels, and he fought Barrès during the Affair. The duel left his left hand maimed,

⁵¹ Madame Tailhade, 83.

⁵² Joan Ungersma Halperin's claim in her book *Félix Fénéon. Aesthete and Anarchist in Fin-de-Siècle France* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1988), that Fénéon was at the origin of this bomb has been generally dismissed in France (particularly by Philippe Oriol in *A Propos de l'attentat Foyot*). Most contemporaries, including Tailhade himself, were convinced that the bomb was the work of a police agent *provocateur*, as the explosion had occurred in the midst of the legislation of the unpopular *lois scélérates* for which the government desperately sought more justification.

which together with his glass eye was a reminder of the toll the battle had taken on this refined dandy.

But the last straw came in 1901, on the occasion of the Tzar's visit to France for the celebration of the Franco-Russian alliance. The association of the Republic with Russia, the stronghold of reaction in Europe, was a source of intense indignation among intellectuals and writers on the left, who saw in it the definitive proof of the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie and the Third Republic. It is worth quoting a long passage from Tailhade's article "Le Triomphe de la domesticité" from the anarchist paper *Le Libertaire*, in which he encouraged the poor in no ambiguous terms to assassinate the Tzar:

Quoi, parmi ces soldats illégalement retenus pour veiller sur la route où se piaffe la couardise impériale, parmi ces gardes-barrières qui gagnent neuf francs tous les mois, parmi les chemineaux, les mendiants, les trimardeurs, les outlaws, ceux qui meurent de froid sous les ponts, en hiver, il ne s'en trouvera pas un pour prendre son fusil, son tisonnier, pour arracher aux frênes des bois le gourdin préhistorique et, montant sur le marchepied des carrosses, pour frapper jusqu'à la mort, pour frapper au visage et pour frapper au coeur la canaille triomphante, tzar, président, ministres, officiers et les clergés infâmes, tous les exploiters du misérable, tous ceux qui rient de sa détresse, vivent de sa moelle, courbent son échine et payent de vains mots sa tenace crédulité? [...]

Le sublime Louvel, Caserio n'ont-ils plus
d'héritiers? Les tueurs de rois sont-ils morts à
leur tour?⁵³

The government pressed charges on the grounds of incitement to murder, and Tailhade was convicted of a year in jail and one thousands francs in fines. It was also the end of his career as journalist, for when he was released after a year in jail the doors of the *grande presse* were closed to him. The income from the anarchist press was pitiful, his long addiction to morphine had also taken its toll: it was a defeated and broken man who, in 1906, finally accepted an offer from Arthur Meyer, the editor of the conservative paper *Le Gaulois*.⁵⁴

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⁵³ Laurent Tailhade, *Imbéciles et gredins* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1969) 227.

⁵⁴ I will not discuss the case of Félix Fénéon, dandy and committed anarchist, in this chapter. Halperon's book, which I mentioned above, as well as Jean-Pierre Bernard's "Félix Fénéon ou l'anarchie considérée comme l'un des beaux-arts" (in *Littérature et anarchie*, ed. Alain Pessin and Patrice Terrone (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1998) 155-170, have ably discussed the place of anarchism in Fénéon's life and work.

We can consider the phenomenon of salon anarchism as part of a larger trend of the last quarter of the nineteenth century in France, in which the lower depths of life gained a new aura of exoticism. By restructuring the city from its former "vertical" nature (where different classes lived in the same building and the same neighborhoods⁵⁵) and banishing the working classes to the peripheries of the city, Haussman ushered in a new typology of urban life whereby the new working class quarters became an object of fascination for the bourgeoisie. Mme de Marelle, Georges Duroy's lover in Maupassant's *Bel Ami*, for instance, insists on being taken to shady working class dives, a proposition that the opportunist *arriviste* Duroy finds quite inconvenient. Similarly, the Princess Cassamassima in Henry James' novel of the same name is fascinated by and wants to know *le peuple*. The phenomenon had its proponent in dandysm in the outlandish figure of Jean Lorrain, who re-invigorated the dandy by opening him up to the *bas-fonds* of life, to the pleasures offered by plunging (if only for a brief and often erotically charged

⁵⁵ On the "horizontalization" of Paris, Edmond Texier, *Tableau de Paris*, vol. 1 (Paris: 1853) 65.

visit) into the world of crime, poverty and misery.⁵⁶ In his *Monmartre du plaisir et du crime*, Louis Chevalier has shown the new status of Montmartre in the 1880's as the site of crime and pleasure for the bourgeoisie and the upper classes. The memory of the Commune, of Paris streets soaked in blood and the cadavers of tens of thousands of workers was still too recent in the 1880's to be reclaimed as a fashion and a pastime by the upper classes. By the next decade however, the *révolté* had become a salon type, and nothing like the sentence "Crève donc, société!" could incite approving nods and sarcastic smiles from aristocrats and financiers at a fashionable *soirée*. Was this incorporation an expression of the fear of the ruling class at the real possibilities for change that anarchism held, or was the romantic and hopeless gesture of the bomb thrower so inefficient a protest against capitalism that it could be reconciled with the ideology of the unique

⁵⁶ Tailhade, who had written of the author of *Monsieur de Phocas*: "Jean Lorrain dont la ménopause a des chloroses" (*Oeuvres*, 54), also criticized Lorrain's fetishization of the *bas-fonds* in a poem entitled *Troisième sexe*:

"Et le poète Jean Lorrain de Normandie
 Accordant pour leur loi sa syntaxe hardie
 Les célèbre en vers faussé, avec étonnement."

In later editions, Tailhade replaced Lorrain's name with "Untel."

individual defying the vulgar philistines so dear to the dandies and the dilettantes? It is difficult to say, but by the late 1890's, the Dreyfus Affair had put an end to the fashionable attraction of anarchism by formulating the struggle in terms of patriotism versus anti-patriotism.

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