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A CONFRONTATION, 1919-1939.

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SUZANNE M. NOVINS

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**FRENCH HUMANISTS AND SOVIET COMMUNISM:
A CONFRONTATION, 1919-1939**

by

SUZANNE M. NOVINS

A dissertation submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Comparative
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Abstract

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The First World War forced responsible men to examine their civilization and search for ways to prevent another such cataclysm. This dissertation studies six French writers who left their Ivory Tower to involve themselves in social and political matters and who specifically went to the Soviet Union to examine Communism as a potential means that might assure a peaceful world and a more just society. They are Jules Romain, Georges Duhamel, Luc Durtain, André Gide, Romain Rolland and Jean-Richard Bloch.

Each chapter analyzes one or more writers to determine the degree of their commitment, their assessment of the results of the Revolution in the Soviet Union and of the desirability of Communism for France. Each chapter also studies the effect of their commitment on their art.

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INTRODUCTION

The First World War was the catalyst that forced responsible men to examine their civilization, to look for the causes of such a cataclysm, to search for ways to prevent it from ever happening again. The magnitude of the destruction and the degree of hatred left many bewildered but in some it fortified the ideal of the brotherhood of man which they saw as the only means for a return to sanity. The League of Nations, Panhumanism, Communism were all offsprings of the same vital desire to create a harmonious world in which peace would be assured. The period 1919 - 1939 was one of searching and commitment to ideals, when intellectuals gave priority to solving the pressing problem of peaceful coexistence. The following chapters will present six French writers who turned toward Communism as the possible answer. With the exception of Jules Romains, all the others, Georges Duhamel, Luc Durtain, Andre Gide, Romain Rolland, and Jean-Richard Bloch travelled to the Soviet Union Between 1919 and 1939 and brought back reports of their visit.

The choice of writers has been to some extent arbitrary, leaving out, for example, the well-known figures of Aragon and Malraux. Aragon had close ties with the Soviet Union. He was married to a Russian writer, Mayakovsky's sister - in - law, Elsa Triolet. He had been involved with the

Surrealist group led by André Breton who advocated a radical departure from convention in the arts and directed the attack against the hated bourgeoisie. For a time they supported the Communist Party but Aragon broke with them after his 1930 trip to the Soviet Union. An editor of the Leftist journal Commune since its inception in 1933, he also founded, together with Jean-Richard Bloch, the newspaper Ce Soir in March 1937. Some of his creative works reveal his commitment to the Communist cause and the inspiration he received from it. They included poetry, Hourra l'Oural (1934), the novel Les Communistes (1949-1951) in six volumes. He has also written a History of the U.S.S.R. (1962). His case was studied by M. Adereth in Commitment in Modern French Literature. André Malraux while he did visit the Soviet Union to attend the first congress of Soviet writers in 1934, did not write about his visit. He did present Russian revolutionaries in his novels, Borodine, Katow and others but, on the whole, his fascination was with the Asiatic Far East and subsequently with Spain.

Those writers chosen for this study represent a reasonably wide spectrum of views and reactions to the Soviet Union, its efforts and achievements. It is important that they did share a common ground that makes a comparison significant: four of them were born around the same time, the mid-1880's, and had thus grown up in a similar political and intellectual climate. Rolland, born in 1866, and Gide,

in 1867, that is fifteen years or so earlier, did belong to a different generation but both proved to be very influential figures in the 1920's and still had prestige in the 1930's.

Each of the six writers included will be studied at length, individually, to determine the particular background and their formative experiences so as to offer a total picture of the man. By means of psychological analysis, interpretation of such published statements as articles, pertinent creative works, diaries, letters, and taking into consideration comments by friends and critics, a profound motivation for the interest in Communism will be made evident, as will the character and extent of their commitment. The pattern of the study can be summed up in the following questions: what did they know about Communism before their trip and what was their attitude toward it? why did they undertake their journey? what did they expect to find? did the reality meet with their expectations? did their reports convey their reactions truthfully? what did they say or not say? and, finally, how were they affected by the comparison of ideals of the Soviet Revolution and the Soviet reality?

* * *

If the catalyst to active social concern on the part of the intellectuals had been the First World War,

the direction that some took toward embracing Communism as panacea had its roots before 1914. The Dreyfus Affair, mainly a conflict between the military and its supporters, the royalists and the clergy and the republican and liberals, began in 1894 with the unjust conviction of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jew, for the alleged sale of military information to the German military attache in Paris at a time of strong anti-Semitic feelings aroused by Edouard Drumont's violent book La France Juive (1886). Until his final exoneration in 1906, it brought forth social and political problems that involved men in ideological battle. It split them into factions: the Right represented by Barrès and Maurras called for social order while the Left defended liberty and human dignity. Out of it emerged the writer as intellectual - the denouncer of the "bad conscience" of society. The term "intellectual" itself is relatively new in French vocabulary. It did not appear in the Littré of 1865-77; Victor Brombert, in his book The Intellectual Hero: Studies in the French Novel 1880-1955, suggests that it first came into general usage during the Dreyfus Affair. The Affair also led some, Emile Durkheim, for example, to study the psychology of crowds and of society itself; for it had received much publicity and aroused intense emotions.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the development of socialist theories as well as artistic works of sensitivity and pity for the humble also had an impact on

the young. The theory of "art for art's sake" was more and more forsaken as translations of Russian novels those of George Eliot and the plays of Ibsen became available. Already Romain Rolland was working toward creating a people's theater and Tolstoy's teaching of brotherhood, pity, love and justice inspired him and Jean-Richard Bloch directly.

The First World War, during which Duhamel, Durtain and Bloch were at the front lines, profoundly affected all the writers studied here emotionally and intellectually. It provided a turning point in their lives and thoughts.

All of them, artists first and foremost, entered the social and political arena. Some, like Rolland and Bloch, sooner than the rest, rebelled against the "art for art's sake" doctrine exemplified by the Parnassians, later by the Symbolist group. They were not innovators but the followers of a tradition set by the Romantic poets (such as Alfred de Vigny and Victor Hugo) who called themselves "apostles". That renewed vision of the writer's role made them leave the security of the ivory tower. Both had expressed the need to serve as guides for humanity along the road to Progress. The novelty now was the turning to the Soviet Union for answers. France had been the champion of the people since their Revolution of 1789. It was ironic that in the twentieth century France should look to the country that had been so backward and for which Diderot

had, in 1774, proposed some constructive changes in existing institutions. In a collection of his thoughts on the subject entitled Mémoires pour Catherine II he had noted many of the negative features against which Duhamel, Durtain and Gide would speak out.

The question for the six writers now was: would France follow the new leader or would she turn to her own institutions for answers? The answer in turn will reveal their evaluations of Soviet society and their judgments about the desirability of Communism in France. The trip which five of the writers undertook was more, therefore, in the tradition of Montesquieu and Voltaire, designed to allow them to learn and evaluate, to criticize and change.

* * *

As an ideal, Socialism began in France with Saint-Simon (1760-1825) and Fourier (1772-1832). During the 1848 revolutionary movement in France, Marx was allied for a time with the French Communist leader Blanqui. The slogan "dictatorship of the proletariat" was already in use. The implantation of Marxism in France followed the disaster of the Commune (1871). Jean Jaurès, slain in 1914, epitomized, for Bloch at least, the ideal socialist: historian, philosopher, apostle and saint.

Socialism became a politically significant philosophy in the early 1890's. The founding Congress of the Inter-

national had taken place in 1889, one hundred years after the French Revolution and had, as joint presidents, a Frenchman, Edouard Vaillant and a German, Wilhelm Liebknecht. Their slogan was: "Workers of the World, Unite" and their aim, the abolition of private property and the redistribution of the world's goods to provide everybody with enough. Collective ownership of the means of production was the answer, Marx had concluded, to the nineteenth century economic dilemma that capitalism was creating, namely, the greater the material progress, the wider and deeper the resulting poverty. His doctrine of "Verelendung" (increasing misery) and "Zusammenbruch" (collapse) produced a schism among Socialists because some, like the German Eduard Bernstein, believed that if reforms were introduced into the existing order, the necessary collapse could be prevented and a revolution avoided. Following him, Romaine, Duhamel and Bloch came to believe that a world-wide Revolution would not occur. The French Party's Congress, which met in Paris in 1899, ended in a split on that very issue. There were those who would not compromise with the bourgeoisie and who were committed to the destruction of capitalism and those, including Jean Jaurès (a deputy of the French Worker's Party elected in 1893 at a time when Socialists won an impressive electoral victory), who did not favor overthrowing the state but preferred to have the workers struggle together with the middle class for reforms.

During the years 1893 to 1898, Socialism received wide publicity in France. Debates and speeches were reported in the newspapers and it entered into the mainstream of French life.

* * *

Meanwhile in Russia, at about the same time, a few years before the end of the century, liberal movements opposing the absolutist regime were inciting the masses and the growing popular discontent had been steadily gathering momentum. The imperialist policy of the Tsarist government in the Far East that led Russia to war with Japan was the spark that set off a mass demonstration. "Bloody Sunday", in January 1905, was the first of a number of demonstrations that were to follow. The Tsar's manifesto issued in October of the same year promised the people a constitution, an Imperial Duma (parliament) based on universal suffrage and civil liberties and seemed to have overcome the crisis. Reaction, however, set in when the government dissolved the Duma in 1907, arrested the Social Democratic deputies and exiled them to Siberia. The Bolshevik Party, which would take over the leadership later in 1917, then went underground. The economic problems and the scarcity of food caused continual strikes. When, on February 26, 1917 the Tsar dissolved the Duma once again, it rebelled. Ignoring his order it remained in session

and the next day constituted an executive committee which assumed dictatorial power: the road to revolution had thus been entered upon - but not in the way Marx had predicted.

This executive committee became the Provisional Government and was led by Chkeidze, a Georgian Menshevik, and Alexander Kerensky, a lawyer. Meanwhile another body, which sprang from the Socialist opposition, constituted itself and severely limited the power of the government. Known as the Executive Committee of the Workers' and Soldiers' council, it was composed of Social Revolutionaries, Mensheviks and Bolsheviks.

Since the February Revolution confusion reigned in the Bolshevik Party. It was split into a right and left wing. Then Lenin, who had been inciting the people to fight against merciless exploitation since 1895-96, had returned from Europe on April 3, 1917 and attempted to enforce his will on the Party, ordering first of all a breach with the Provisional Government. He proposed a program of action known, appropriately, as the April theses which was to win the masses, mobilize them and use them to put the Bolshevik Party into power. It was not until the September elections and after Kerensky had lost much of his prestige and authority that the Bolsheviks obtained a majority in the Saint Petersburg soviet. And so Lenin was convinced the time was ripe for the overthrow of the Provisional Government and for the seizure of power by the Soviets

(or the proletariats), which would be followed by that of the Bolshevik Party. The movement against the Kerensky regime began on October 21 and during the night of October 25-26 the government capitulated. On October 26, the first Soviet government, called Council of the People's Commissars, was constituted.

The first decrees of the new Soviet government dealt with the most pressing problems of "war" and "land". The treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918 concluded separately with Germany at a great territorial loss to Russia, did allow her nevertheless to withdraw from the war. The land question involved the liquidation of private ownership of land with immediate redistribution to peasants and workers. Another urgent task that faced them was restraining the opposition and obtaining full control. To do this, they instituted the sure method of Terror. Freedom of the press was curtailed and a secret police established, then known as the Cheka. Terror and dictatorship thus were an integral element of the Bolshevik government's practice from the very beginning. From then on the government would continually struggle to survive by compromising between Marxist theory and the needs of reality. It would justify these policies as not deviating from the Marxist doctrine, as necessary for achieving the goals of Communism. Each step in the development of Soviet history would require such compromise leading

it further away from the world-wide revolution,* the dictatorship of the proletariat and the withering away of the state to what has become a national totalitarian regime.

In 1921, to cope with severe economic problems that threatened the survival of those in power, Lenin introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP). A mixed economic system in which socialized concerns would compete with private enterprise, it indeed proved an effective measure for a while. Lenin's death in January 1924 brought about an internal struggle for power with Trotsky and Stalin as the most bitter rivals for political leadership. Trotsky opposed the growing bureaucratization of the Party apparatus, the appointment from above rather than election from below of Party secretaries which, he felt, put more value on the importance of the machinery over the vital force of the Party. Stalin, on the other hand, insisted on a monolithic and homogeneous Party. To Trotsky his own theory of permanent revolution, that is of constant agitation until a socialist revolution unfolded on the international scene, was crucial because, like Lenin, he could not accept socialism within national limits alone. Stalin, the practical politician, countered with his idea of "socialism in

* A resolution was passed during the second Congress of the Third International (Comintern) in June 1920, to set up secret Communist centers in every country which would work for the proletarian revolution.

one country". He feared that the prospect of world revolution receded further into the future and the Party might become tired of waiting forever, so he embarked in the direction of nationalist communism and quickly transformed it into dogma as he did every one of his programs.

A realist, Stalin knew that if socialism were to succeed, he would have to impose forcefully a program that would transform Russian society. He was aware too that the greatest obstacle was the Russian peasant whose love of private property and of the soil would not make him cooperate willingly. Furthermore, Marx had predicted a revolution in a highly industrialized country whereas Russia was economically backward and still primarily agrarian. He had therefore to speed up industrialization and force collectivization. The way he would do it was to develop a strong totalitarian system using terror to enforce his plans. The first and second five-year plans, 1928-1932, 1932-1937, would be periods during which many changes occurred inside the Soviet Union.

The French writers who went there brought back reports of what they witnessed as foreigners coming from a country with its own traditions at a time of socialist construction in the Soviet Union and of great uncertainty at home. They went looking for reassurance that a better future was in the making.

CHAPTER I

THE "ABBAYE" WRITERS

This chapter will study three writers who belonged to the same generation, who knew each other, underwent similar formative experiences, were exposed to the same intellectual and political climate and were also affected by the events in the Soviet Union. They are Georges Duhamel (1884-1966), Luc Durtain (1881-1957) and Jules Romain (1885-1972). Duhamel and Durtain visited the U.S.S.R. and wrote about their travels while Romain did not. He did however, depict in a novel the Frenchman's reactions to the Revolution. A fourth writer, Jean-Richard Bloch (1884-1947), also of that same generation could have been included here, but because of his particular ideas and unique contribution both to literary and political life and because he was an official member of the Communist Party, his role will be discussed in a separate chapter devoted solely to him.

These men were all first and foremost creative writers even though this was not their only occupation. Duhamel and Durtain were both medical doctors and Romain involved himself actively in political life. They shared a devotion for literature as an art form. After the First World War their writing went beyond the creative expression of their imaginations and became a means of serving the

public through manifesting their views and convictions about real and immediate problems, about life in contemporary society. Each one of them had been either amongst the dwellers of the Abbaye or had participated from the outside in its endeavors. Founded by Charles Vildrac and René Arcos for the purpose of bringing together artists in a communal living and working environment, it was to have been: "un lieu de rendez-vous des esprits libres du monde".¹ Enthusiasm and idealism were not enough to sustain the young members and the venture aborted in 1908. Yet as an experiment in communal living it was of lasting value to all its participants especially in the face of Russia's later efforts in that direction. Many years later Duhamel could comment in his reminiscences that "l'Abbaye nous a dégrisé: nul de nous ne pense à quelque nouvelle aventure de la sorte dite collective".² Some of the reasons for their failure were the material problems that beset them. Conflicts were also created by too much freedom, a lack of discipline aggravated by each one's strongly developed sense of individuality. Nevertheless, while it lasted, the group produced artistic works which, in spite of the writers' differences of personality, reflected a unity of thought and belief, a similarity of tone, that was the result of

¹M.-L. Bidal, Les Ecrivains de l'Abbaye (Paris: Boivin & Cie., 1938).

²Georges Duhamel, Le Temps de la Recherche, Vol III of Lumières Sur Ma Vie (Paris: Paul Hartmann, ed., 1947), p. 142.

the experiment of the Abbaye. All were in search of living a full life in communion with other men. In art they were all protesting against the cult of art for art's sake doctrine of the Symbolists, their esoteric writings, their incoherent spirituality as well as reacting against Naturalism and scientific determinism of the late nineteenth century writers. They aspired to create works that would mark a return to reality and reproduce the particular characters of their time. Some attempted to substitute a more complex image of the inner life of man by delving into the soul of its mysteries rather than simple depicting the individual as a subject whose behavior, actions and reactions were caused by particular external stimuli. Henri Bergson was the influential factor in this movement even more than Dostoevsky whose main impact was felt later (around 1913) as the serious study of his works and thoughts then began in France.³ Duhamel's creation of Salavin in the series Vie et Aventures de Salavin (1920-1932) specifically testified to Bergson's influence and, by then, to that of Dostoevsky. His high regard for both of them was no secret and he admitted that his aim was to be a "réaliste de l'âme".⁴

³F.W.J. Hemmings, The Russian Novel in France: 1884-1914 (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1950).

⁴Duhamel, Chronique des Saisons Amères: 1940-1942 (Paris Paul Hartmann, ed., 1945), p. 34, and Le Temps de la Recherche, p. 137.

The movement toward depicting reality and probing into the human soul was accompanied by a concern for the "humble" ones of this world with a stress on a particular attitude toward them, that of pity. This trend, in contrast to the objective and scientific approach of the Naturalist and the complete neglect by the Symbolist, had been introduced into France by writers from other countries at the end of the nineteenth century: Tolstoy's teaching had a great impact in France as did the works of Gerard Hauptmann, Maurice Maeterlinck and Walt Whitman. The development of socialist theories at the turn of the century guided them in a similar direction and aided in concentrating and channeling the energy and talent of these writers toward a general concern for man and especially to the ideal of a brotherhood of man.

The grim reality of the First World War shattered illusions and ideals. It mobilized the thoughts and endeavors of these sensitive humanists to the immediate problem of survival, both physical and spiritual. Out of brutal war-time experiences there emerged an imperative to develop a morality which would discourage such destructive behavior. An urgent need was manifested to examine and question existing values. They projected both their fears and hopes in an uncertain future and sought within themselves and the various philosophies and social forms around them for some answers.

The trends away from the ideal of art for art's sake, that began before the War, and toward the new one of presenting the individual in a real and contemporary world became a duty in the minds of intellectuals. Their choice of the one or the other became moral choices. Should one withdraw from the world or participate actively in it at a time of confusion and instability? Those who decided to use literature to teach, as a way of contributing some answers or insights to pertinent problems, did not intend to vulgarize or debase it. For them the justification of art was still essentially that it be beautiful but, as Duhamel expressed it, speaking for many, it would be of greater benefit to the reader if it also contained a lesson.

We shall now examine, separately, how each of these writers, Romain, Duhamel and Durtain, dealt with these problems and how they viewed the Soviet Revolution and the new Soviet society.

Part 1

Jules Romain: Confronting
The Revolution (1922)

Louis Farigoule, better known as Jules Romain, never visited the Soviet Union but was keenly interested in its social, political and economic revolution. He was a concerned and influential intellectual, deeply involved in the problems of the society of his time and the future. Widely known and respected as an author, his works accurately recreated the social and political atmosphere of France between the two World Wars.

The nineteenth volume of Les Hommes de Bonne Volonté is of special interest to us for it has as its central theme the Soviet Union and its Revolution. In it, characters drawn from several levels of society in Paris of 1922 give their appraisal of the Revolution and the new life in the Soviet Union. These characters also represent several generations. There are teachers and craftsmen; writers and emigrés; World War I veterans and the bourgeois who profited from the War; an old, retired professor and a young man starting out in life. We are witnesses to a post-War Europe where Communism and Fascism had become the two dominant political forces exerting pressure on the masses. In Romain's Paris, however, it was Communism that held center stage.

Born in 1885, Jules Romain was 49 years old when the first two volumes of this monumental 27-volume work appeared and 56 when volume 19, Gette Grande Lueur a l'Est, was completed. He belonged to the same generation as Georges Duhamel (born in 1884), Luc Durtain (born in 1881) and Jean-Richard Bloch (born in 1884) but was younger than both André Gide and Romain Rolland. By the time the First World War erupted, Romain was already an artist with a reputation.¹

He began his career in fiction very early. At the age of 14, under the influence of Schiller, Goethe and Victor Hugo, the young lycéen produced a political drama entitled The Tsar which was performed in 1899. His interest in history and politics was also aroused at an early age.

At the lycée Condorcet, Romain made lasting friendships. Georges Chennevière (real name Léon Debille) and André Cuisenier were among the best known. With Georges Chennevière he would later write and publish the Petit Traité de Versification.² André Cuisenier, whom he called "le compagnon fidèle de toute ma vie",³ wrote Jules Romain et l'Unanimisme, the most complete exegesis of Romain's work explaining his "vision nouvelle de l'homme, des groupes

¹Some of the works published before 1914 were, poetry: La Vie Unanime (1908); novels: Le Bourg Regeneré (1906); Mort de Quelqu'un (1911); Les Copains (1913); drama: L'armée dans la Ville (1911).

²This book was written as a result of a course Romain had taught in 1923 at the theatrical school of the Vieux-Colombier on "technique poétique".

³Jules Romain, Amitiés et Rencontres (Paris: Flammarion, editeur, 1970), p. 230.

humains et du monde pour laquelle lui-même a forgé le terme d'unanimisme".⁴ This new vision formed the underlying unity of Romain's work.

"L'Unanimisme" was a new term for a new literary concept. Jules Romain introduced it himself in an article which appeared in 1905 in the journal Le Penseur. He was offering, he said, "une école poétique nouvelle" to express "le monde des sentiments unanimes et des êtres collectifs".⁵ He had felt, he said, a need for something new to fulfill or reflect the hopes of man at the turn of the new century. In literature, the members of the dominant existing school of poetry, Symbolism (carried on by Mallarmé and his disciples), deliberately turned their backs on the world of reality and on the future, preferring to live in the artificial environment they produced. Romain and other young poets sensed it was time to recover their mental health, meaning that it was time to return to earth and face reality. They recognized that the poet now had to "prendre une conscience fraîche et autonome de la réalité. Et la seule réalité dont il pût avoir le contact direct, l'expérience originale, était la réalité présente".⁶ No longer would there be borrowing from old books and from past civilizations of sensations, images,

⁴ André Cuisenier, Jules Romain et l'Unanimisme (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, éditeur, 1935), I.

⁵ Bourin, p. 131.

⁶ Jules Romain, Ai-Je Fait Ce Que J'ai Voulu? (Paris: Wesmael-Charlier, 1964), p. 53.

vocabulary, ideas, visions. . . . No longer would there be what he called an "orgie du passé". It was this distinct conception of the function of a poet that provoked and justified his break with the Symbolists, with the few surviving members of the Parnassian school of poetry and the past in general.

The key note in the arts had to be the emphasis on the future and new times required new accents. In spite of his veneration for the masters of the past, especially Victor Hugo, the "divin aieul", Romain and others realized that the world had moved onward, times had changed and reality had to be perceived anew. They were not unlike the poets of the Pléiade in the sixteenth century who, though they looked to the ancient Greek and Roman authors and those of the Italian Renaissance with admiration and wished to learn from them, did attempt to create a new and original body of work which would express their own times, the modern world, their own national temperament and, at the same time, aspired to producing great literature. "Sens à part, oeuvre à part" Ronsard had cried.⁷

In 1904 Romain, Chennevière and other young poets, Duhamel and Vildrac among them, began to meet regularly to discuss and exchange ideas in an effort to produce something new. All agreed that now, poetic language had to aim at facilitating communication but on other technical matters

⁷Abregé de l'Art Poétique (1565).

they were deeply divided. Finally, because they took literature too seriously, the group split. Duhamel, Vildrac and Arcos turned away from Jules Romains and his followers, "les Unanimistes", because they could not reconcile themselves with their poetics. Writing about this period, Duhamel said that Romains wanted to exert a powerful effect on his times and, to do that, he had to be the leader of a movement, work out a doctrine, publish programs and hold a growing number of disciples in line.⁸

It is true that Romains offered a new poetics and gave it a name. He proposed to "penetrate the modern world through poetic intuition".⁹ "L'Unanimisme" was conceived as that intuition and it became the name of his new poetics,

The origins of "l'unanimisme" according to Romains were many. They go back to ancient spiritual traditions as well as to recent "ensemble de faits et d'idées", mainly though, to "la tendance actuelle des peuples à s'accumuler dans les villes".¹⁰ Social life had become a powerful force to be reckoned with because of the heavy concentration of people in urban communities who were unavoidably subjected to it much as they had been by other forces of nature. "La vie sociale . . . s'est manifestée non . . . comme un cadre inerte mais comme une force . . . comme une des forces dont

⁸ Georges Duhamel, Biographie de Mes Fantomes, Vol. II of Lumière Sur Ma Vie, p. 143.

⁹ Bourin, p. 133.

¹⁰ Cuisenier, I, p. 9.

l'action s'exerce avec le plus de continuité sur chacun de nous. On a donc été amené à assimiler cette action a celles des autres forces de la nature, à l'insérer comme l'a fait Taine, dans un universel déterminisme".¹¹

Romains did not invent the idea of "l'unanimisme" as such, nor did he deliberately seek it out. It came to him unexpectedly. One day, as he was walking in the street, he experienced "l'intuition d'un être vaste et élémentaire dont la rue, les voitures, les passants formaient le corps et dont lui-même . . . pouvait dire la conscience".¹² He suddenly felt as though he were a cell in a human body, a leaf in a tree. Instinctively he realized that he was in fact part of a greater whole. This experience of universal communion, not unlike Romain Rolland's, as we will later see this mystical perception of a unity in the universe, moved him to act upon this new knowledge. "A moi de capter tout ce que la rue contient de vie . . . de l'amener à la lumière de la conscience".¹³ These feelings had been and could be brought about through contact with other men wherever they were assembled, a sense of intimate union with others. To these feelings Romain gave the name of "unanimes".

Why was it important for a writer to "prendre conscience de la réalité"? This was his function as Romain conceived

¹¹Ibid., p. 14.

¹²Ibid., p. 16.

¹³Ibid., p. 17.

of it. Literature was the means by which he revealed his vision. Great literary works by their very nature helped the masses to see clearly.

The writer was endowed with a gift of greater perception, an ability to see into things, an intuition that was unlike the rational methods used by philosophers or scientists in their investigations. Through this "prise de conscience de la réalité la plus secrète" the writer could and should also "susciter des existences nouvelles",¹⁴ especially of groups. It was on this point that Duhamel and his friends separated from Romain. They did not see that because society was acquiring new form, was becoming a collective, more urban, that the object of the writer was to "saisir par intuition directe, la vie psychique des groupes".¹⁵

The group, for Romain, became an essential entity of central interest, and together with it and as a result of it, the relations between man and the street, the city and the urban environment in general became increasingly important. This was the reaction against the cult of the self, against the individual considering himself as the center of the universe, which Romain diagnosed as the cause of modern man's illness, his misery and torment.

¹⁴ Jules Romain, Souvenirs et Confidences d'Un Ecrivain (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1958), p. 23.

¹⁵ Romain, Ai-Je Fait . . ., p. 37.

Romains was deliberately renewing the content of literature and also its form, prosody, narrative technique and dramatic art. He published poetry, plays and novels, all expressing new thoughts in a new style. Around 1911 he seemed, indeed, the leader of a new school of literature, and of the young generation. Other literary groups also existed such as the Abbaye de Créteil and a group headed by Max Jacob and Apollinaire.¹⁶ Romains tried to unite all the disparate movements by setting up weekly dinners known as the "Dîners de Valois" (after the name of the street). He did not succeed for long but not because of any internal dissension. However diverse these talents were, they might have been united in a single movement had they had at their disposal a common vehicle to publish their works and express their views. Unfortunately no funds were available to found their own journal. The existing ones such as La Nouvelle Revue Française (started only in 1909) and Mercure de France divided up the writers between them and, by dispersing the writers, prevented the possibility of any new movement from developing.

The War was another factor that scattered the artists and intellectuals with far more devastating and irreparable consequences than their desire to publish had. Some were sent to the front to fight; some, the doctors, to heal the wounded;

¹⁶Romains, Amitiés et Rencontres, p. 184.

and others to positions connected in one way or another with the war. Romain, having completed his military service in 1906, was given administrative duties during the war but in 1916 he returned to teaching philosophy in a lycée.

He devoted a decade or so, 1920-1930, primarily to the theater. His plays Knock, Finlande and Dictateur were very successful throughout Europe and he had the opportunity to travel widely to the opening of his plays (Berlin, Vienna, Budapest, etc.). When André Bourin was preparing his book about him,¹⁷ Romain accurately reminded him that between 1923 and the triumph of Nazism he was in fact the most produced French playwright. He inevitably was a voice to be considered, a voice that had a wide public and, as such, was influential.

Immediately after the armistice of 1918, Romain decided that he would be neither just a spectator nor an anchorite but an active participant in bringing about a new era.¹⁸ Clearly, the duty of a writer as he saw it was to uphold the causes of freedom of thought and a free world. He expressed these convictions around 1930-1932 when Europe sensed the approaching peril of the loss of liberty: "Il s'agit," he wrote, "de sauver notre civilisation contre à la fois un nouveau conflit et l'étranglement de la liberté".¹⁹

¹⁷Bourin, p. 197.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 212.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 198.

At this time Romain Rolland involved himself far more deeply in political life; he began to meet with men in politics both in and outside France.²⁰

As early as 1915, Romain Rolland had shown an awareness and a concern for political matters. He had called for the unification of Europe in an article entitled Pour Que l'Europe Soit. The article, however, was not published until 1922²¹ and so his ideas were not heard by the people at the crucial time during the war, that is, at a time when it might have moved some to action. Its purpose, Romain Rolland emphasized, had not been to philosophize for a few dilettantes but to have an effect on a great many people. His objective in that article had been to propose the creation of a spirit of "européisme" which would serve to unite Europe. This was not the same thing as "internationalisme" he explained. "Internationalisme" was defined in opposition to nationalism while "européisme" was a more specific designation for the unification of Europe. It is possible that Romain Rolland was indicating that his idea was new and original and not to be confused with Romain Rolland's appeal for the creation of a "Panhumanism".²² He was quick to point out that before this article was written there had never been any question of opening the way to a unification of Europe. Even socialism

²⁰Ibid.,

²¹Published in an American journal Our World.

²²See chapter III, p. 200.

had not really sought the unity of Europe as an end in itself, only as a means for its own interests, to achieve its own goals. Socialism failed in its endeavor because it frightened away too many people, he said, and, to succeed, it needed the help of everyone. The problem was how to get help from all peoples. Romain put his hopes into the League of Nations.

This concern for bringing about peace, the attempt at formulating and providing ideas in order to prevent further conflicts, Romain held in common with the intellectuals of his generation, such as Rolland, Duhamel, Bloch. The First World War brought these men, who were first and foremost artists, into the political arena as responsible citizens and humanitarians offering their talent and influence to inform the masses and to transform society. It will become clear in this and the following chapters that all six writers had faith in ideas and believed in the perfectibility of man.

The P.E.N. Club, a federation of writers (Publicists, Essayists, Novelists) was born because of the war. It was the result of the concerted effort on the part of intellectuals and artists to act in favor of a "bonne entente et du respect naturel des peuples"²³ as well as, later on, to

²³Cuisenier, "Notes Biographiques," Hommage à Jules Romain pour son 60^e Anniversaire (Paris: Flammarion, 1945), p. 15.

defend the freedom of thought. It was but one example of the writers' involvement in political matters.

Romains became president of P.E.N. in 1936 having, since 1923, been an active member travelling to annual congresses held in various capitals of Europe, attesting to his faith in Europe as an entity and his will to preserve it. His primary interest, however, was always France. The developments in Europe during the early thirties, the economic difficulties and their possible consequences for France led him to speak out and expose them. He called to the attention of politicians that there seemed to be only two possible ways to a solution: one was fascism, the other, marxism. The specific problem facing them was how to satisfy both an unhappy middle class and a discontented proletariat. Both fascism and marxism proposed ways for dealing with these very problems. The Soviet solution had been to eliminate the middle class. However, their middle class had been a tiny one. In Europe it represented a large number of people who, furthermore, were educated and would never allow themselves to be destroyed. Their discontent, Romaines speculated, could only lead to a dictatorship, that is, to fascism.²⁴

If the proletariat was left to its misery, a misery created

²⁴It must be noted here that these thoughts were articulated in 1932 just before they proved to be correct. Hitler shortly afterward came to power and indeed imposed a dictatorship on the middle class.

by unemployment, reduction in wages, then only a violent revolution, such as Marx had predicted, could be expected. What a choice: fascism or revolution!²⁵

Romains' objective was only to expose the problem, to diagnose the ill, discuss the possible solution but to leave the prescription for a cure to the politicians. Still it was evident that he was attracted neither by fascism nor marxism although the latter was for him the lesser of two evils.

After the triumph of Hitler's dictatorship in Germany, Romaines focused his attention on a new problem, and that was the question of the survival of Marxism. Hitler intended to destroy it. In an article written in 1933 and entitled "Crise du Marxisme", Romaines attempted to discuss in a calm and objective manner, he said, the outcome of events that had just occurred and, specifically, to evaluate marxism as a doctrine and its possible value for France. Was it suitable for France? Would it work? Has it indeed come to making a choice between one or the other?

Romains was one of the few writers studied here to have taken Marxism to task and, although his analysis was by no means an in-depth work of a scholar, neither was his aim that of a politician involved in propaganda. He showed that he had read and thought about the central doctrine of

²⁵Jules Romaines, "De la Misère a la Dictature," Problèmes Européens (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, éditeur, 1933), p. 136-7.

a new society in a critical way.

His first objection to Marxism was that it was old and outdated. He also felt it had failed as a rational doctrine. It had never intended to deliberately impose a particular direction on events but by its very nature it expected the right moment in the spontaneous evolution to occur; at that moment the Revolution would break out. This never did happen. Why? Since, according to Marx, society developed along economic lines, his provisions in formulating his theory had to be concerned with a particular phase of economic evolution and specifically that of a concentration of capital in the hands of fewer and fewer people while the proletariat increased in number. At one point he saw that it would not be difficult to transfer the riches from the hands of a few to a collective. Yet this was not how things turned out and the "revisionists" of the 1890's, Bernstein and Jean Jaurès were proven right. In fact, the revolution had taken place where it should not have according to the law of concentration and did not where it should have, that is in the United States. The United States was the most highly industrialized society at the time and not Russia, still primarily agrarian. Thus, Romain concluded, Marx had not taken into account, or failed to foresee, certain vital factors in the development of the economy which prevented the revolution from erupting in a capitalist state. One was the formation of a third estate a new group that shared

in the profit and thereby prevented a concentration of capital in the hands of a few. They were shareholders and managers, lawyers and architects all of whom were a necessary part of the task force and without whose help the capital could not be concentrated in the first place. Instead of a rich few and a vast proletariat there evolved an unforeseen segment of society made up of specialists indispensable to leaders of industry and who continually drained any capital that was concentrated. These people were not like the old bourgeoisie who lived off their rents; they served not only the wealthy but the public as well and, since they worked, they felt no guilt for accumulating wealth.

Specialized people in any society would necessarily be wary of the concept of "dictatorship of the proletariat" for it created a vision of the inexperienced and uneducated in decision-making positions such as reorganizing education or heading a factory. Romaine suggested that this could not but seem unreasonable and unjust.

Fascism and Marxism through different means and with more or less success should at least be applauded for attempting to bring to an unhappy people a sense of collective euphoria. Fascism failed but the Soviet Union seemed to have achieved a measure of success. Did this mean that the only way to bring about a collective euphoria was through a revolution? According to Romaine, certainly not. France should

not renounce its democratic way of life. It should instead learn from the lesson learned by the Bolsheviks; find out why they succeeded in the East and failed in the West. By putting together the best of the present type of government in France with the lessons learned they could come up with a democracy that would offer people euphoria without having to sacrifice any of the liberties of man. In a very chauvinistic conclusion that undermined the objectivity of discussion he promised, the disinterested view of the question, Romain evoked the grandeur of France's past and urged his country to regain its rightful place as a leader of the world: "nous redeviendrons ce que nous fûmes tant de fois: les guides des autres peuples et les institutueurs de l'ordre le plus nouveau".²⁶ Unlike Romain, Romain Rolland's calm and reasonable voice, had, with justification, recalled France's great revolution, its role in paving the way for others. It had given the example for others to follow but Rolland did not call for a renaissance in leadership and a new order. Rolland acknowledged philosophically that the end had come for the bourgeois order and that a new one had been wrought; that it was France's turn to follow the example set by another people. In Romain's view, France could not accept anyone else's doctrine but her own. She must not be led but must lead. She had a glorious past to live up to and

²⁶Romain, "La Crise du Marxisme," Problèmes Européens, p. 186.

it was up to her now to solve those social problems facing her without sacrificing that for which her people had made a revolution - namely, the liberties of man.

As a writer Romaine made public his beliefs and his understanding of the events of his day in articles and speeches; as an artist he filled his works with these idealistic preoccupations,²⁷ concerned himself with the present, contemporary society which is at the heart of his novel Les Hommes de Bonne Volonté. In it he proposed to "saisir d'abord la vie et le mouvement de la société en elle-même, des groupes dont elle se compose, des courants psychiques qui la traversent et la modifie."²⁸ In it he used the contemporary world as the general background of the vast work and intended to express as "fidèlement" and "largement" as possible all the "secteurs de réalité". It is not a series of novels as is Balzac's Comédie Humaine or Zola's Les Rougon-Macquart, rather a single novel in many volumes depicting a particular time in history.

In volume 19 of the novel, entitled Cette Grande Lueur à l'Est, published in 1941, he portrayed the Paris of 1922. In it Russia and the Revolution "cette grande lueur à l'Est" dominate all. Did the "Lueur" represent the break of day, a great dawn, a new hope or was it a fire, a destructive force?

²⁷Problèmes Européens, p. VII.

²⁸ Madeleine Berry, Jules Romaine (Paris: Classiques du XXe siècle, 1959), p. 42.

Whichever it was, the author did not reveal it here but only developed the attraction it generated and exerted on the people.

Russia served as the unifying factor and the central theme. The characters came and went, characters not particularly necessary to the work itself, for often they would have no connection with each other in this volume, and many could have been left out without any loss to the plot. The composition of this part could be seen as simply a series of "tableaux" in which characters exchanged their thoughts and opinions about the politics of the day had Romain not introduced an intrigue which broke up the monotony of the structure and theme. He introduced a conflict that was emotional in nature and which should have provided a little contrast to the intellectual aspect of political discussions. Still the rationale dominated. The intrigue involved one of the principal characters, Laulerque, a Swiss resident, who returned to Paris on a visit and to make arrangements to go to the Soviet Union. In Paris Laulerque met an old friend, Clanricard, who had married one of his former girl-friends, Mathilde. Seeing her again stirred up old memories which prompted Laulerque to invent a strategy to resume the relationship. He suggested to Mathilde that her husband was probably having an affair with his secretary, a young Russian girl and that it was only fair for her to have an affair of her own. This set off discussions

of loyalty in marriage with examples given of both perverse behavior, that Laulerque had experienced, and of situations where exchanging husbands or wives, as it occurred in the Soviet Union, did not seem wrong. A new morality in the new Soviet society was considered wrong in the old European world. Here too, even love-making served the purpose of a discussion of ethics. Again the rationale dominated and the characters, as a result, seemed one-dimensional, representing models used as concrete examples illustrating the author's ideas. It is not a satisfying novel because particular intellectuals are studied in depth through their social or political problems (seeing it from many points of view) they are not humanized, the work is cold and dry, of interest mainly to the sociologist or historian. This could have been avoided had the subject been approached as a vital part of an individual's life, that is, an individual whose inner life has been known to us, his feelings and sensations as well as the thoughts he uttered. But then, of course, it would have been a novel à la Duhamel and not in the "unanimiste" tradition.

Still, for our purposes it is useful and interesting to study this volume, Cette Grande Lueur à l'Est, precisely because of its approach: a discussion of a problem of contemporary society and, specifically, social and economic problems related to the Bolshevik Revolution and to the Soviet Union. What did the Soviet Revolution mean to the French people of various walks of life during its turbulent beginnings and

at a given time in French history, 1922, that is, post-World War I.

Cette Grande Lueur à l'Est began on a note of uncertainty and bewilderment. Some things have changed since the war: men and women looked alike; the pace of life has quickened, everyone seemed in a rush. Where was everyone going? Better yet, where did everyone stand? How could one characterize the state of affairs at the time? It was not as important to judge a situation as to be aware of it and what it might mean.

Circumstances appeared not to have changed much since before the War. Most importantly, hope in the future was not dead and neither was courage. But, everywhere, in the streets, subways and meeting places, courage and hope existed side by side with hopelessness and with despair. One was not expected to see the current situation with great clarity, comprehend it completely, only to perceive a little of the meaning of the present. During the war one at least knew who and where the enemy was. Now things were not so simple. New elements appeared to disorient the people. First there was the new pace to keep up with. Profits depended on the speed of transactions of buying and selling and, consequently, there was no time to enjoy the fruits of labor. Fortunes were made as quickly as they were lost.

Values were changing. While in Russia the proletariat was apparently all-powerful, ("il n'y en a paraît-il, que

pour les prolétaires. Dictature des ouvriers et des paysans!"²⁹), in Paris, manual labor was looked down upon by a new breed of workers. There were those who transacted business over drinks in a bar, made deals quickly and earned commissions. They were never seen handling money and never appeared to be working. Anyone who worked a ten- to twelve-hour day, and that included doctors and engineers as well as functionaries, was looked down upon because such work "déclasse un homme".³⁰

And the lot of the French peasants and workers? They had profited from the war: they had sold the food; they had made the ammunition, the tools of war. They had indeed been well paid for their labors. Today, their life-style had improved considerably and the agitators who were inciting them to revolutionary action were faced with resistance. The workers were told they had the right to everything, that it was their duty - as Jaurès, the French socialist leader had urged - to become the masters in order to improve a society ruined by the bourgeois. "Les salauds de bourgeois, eux, . . . ils se moquent pas mal que la société soit fichue comme quatre sous du moment qu'elle leur rapporte."³¹ They were told it was up to them to remake society, to insure everyone happiness amidst peace and abundance especially now that a

²⁹Romains, Cette Grande Lueur à l'Est, Vol. XIX of Les Hommes de Bonne Volonté (Paris: éditions de la Maison Française, Inc., 1941), p.23.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., p. 26.

precedent had been set: the Russians had nearly succeeded in realizing a more just society. The Communist Party was ready to provide the formula for anyone who wanted it. The workers were not willing to act. There were significant deterrents to drastic action. They realized that theory was one thing, reality another; Jaurès had promised a bloodless Revolution, Lenin's turned out bloody. Then there was another significant matter to consider: the Russians were a different breed of people, their problems were different. Finally the most effective deterrent was the improvement by 1922 in the workers' situation. It had not been bad enough for them to want to change it. Their standard of living had improved to such a degree that they were reluctant to bring about change. As one expressed it:

"Dommage en un sens qu'on ait désormais sur le dos toutes ces préoccupations, toutes ces responsabilités. Maintenant qu'on quitte l'atelier de bonne heure, il y aurait des moments tranquilles à passer, en parlant de choses et d'autres, autour de l'apéritif".³²

While the workers had made gains, the bourgeois, who used to be able to live off their income, without having to work, could no longer do so. The gap between the worker and the bourgeois narrowed considerably. Both classes had to work continuously to earn a living.

³²Ibid., p. 27.

The Soviet Revolution thus had been introduced as the model, the example and incentive for the proletariat of the world to take over. It was considered with seriousness by the French workers but without enthusiasm because, ironically their lot had been improved by the War.

Not only were workers concerned about changing the society, intellectuals too had been involved with socialism. Their interest, of course, was less practical and more idealistic, more altruistic even. They looked to forming a more just society for the benefit of the poor and the ignorant.

"Le petit noyau" headed by Sampeyre, a now retired professor, was a group that dated back to 1908 or 1910. Regular meetings were held to discuss and exchange ideas, about socialism amongst other matters, in a free and spontaneous manner. Now, after the War, Sampeyre, much older, felt left behind by the fast-moving events and attended the meetings only for the sake of continuity and keeping the group alive. The younger men who joined since the War, were of a different metal. Their discussions lacked spontaneity, independence of thought and, instead, the atmosphere "suait le conformisme".³³ All of them shared in the knowledge of certain specific facts, all used the same terminology which smacked of a lesson well-learned. Their interests were petty: the day-to-day progress of the Communist Party in France. These were not intellectuals; these were indoctrinated puppets used by the Party.

³³Ibid., p. 73.

In contrast to them the older members, Laulerque and Clanricard, for example, were far more critical in their discussions, delving and probing into the problems at hand and particularly, in this segment of the novel, with those relating to the Soviet Union. These men, not satisfied with talk alone, were contemplating a trip, eager to examine at first hand the ideology at work.

What attraction did the Soviet Union hold for them? In 1922, French socialists looked to the U.S.S.R. as the land where a miraculous regime was functioning. It became the unmistakable land of "hope". As Clanricard expressed it:

"Si l'U.R.S.S. n'existait pas là-bas,
même avec ses erreurs et ses illusions,
le monde lui semblerait . . . encore
plus vide d'espérance".³⁴

Laulerque put it this way:

"J'ai l'impression que c'est tout de
même là-bas que quelque chose d'autre,
et de meilleur, se fabrique avec des
ingrédients dont plus d'un est peut-
être assez répugnant. Oui même si c'est
le chaudron des sorcières, il m'attire".³⁵

³⁴Ibid., p. 110.

³⁵Ibid., p. 111.

For both Laulerque and Clanricard it was the experience of the War and the hopelessness it had engendered that led them to look toward the U.S.S.R. for answers. Clanricard feared there would be no refuge left for man (the individual) in the modern world. If priests had been drafted to fight on the front, how would ordinary people live according to their beliefs and desires? Modern society therefore would have to be founded on justice and tend toward being as reasonable as possible. Only then did the individual have any chance for personal protection. Presumably, the Soviet Union was based on a rational doctrine, on a scientific theory whose important feature was the inevitability of historical evolution and that certain ideals would be realized. It was not the Revolution as such that attracted them, but a society that promised and could not fail to live up to the promise of freedom for the individual and economic stability.

Sampeyre, the oldest man in the group, dreamed of the ideals and goals socialism stood for at its inception. Oh, had he lived in the days of Louis-Philippe! Then, as yet unrealized, socialism represented utopia and gave birth to a real hope for a better world for mankind:

"Il y avait le socialisme tout jeune . . .
dans sa forme . . . la plus chargée d'idéal
. . . avant qu'il n'eût pris cette figure
sombre, pédante, tyrannique . . .".³⁶

³⁶Ibid., p. 103.

There was a mystique surrounding the term and all that it stood for; the end to poverty and misery, the conquering of ignorance, fraternity, a renaissance of the arts, and all of this shared by the greatest minds.

In spite of Sampeyre's pessimistic view of present-day socialism, the mystique was not dead. It still attracted many and many wanted to go to see for themselves how it was working.

Jerphanion, a principal character in the novel (the other being Jallez), said: "je suis attiré au sens que je suis très avide de voir . . . par moi-même".³⁷ He also gave an insight as to why others, non-communists, were so eager to go: "ce qui m'attire, moi," he said, "c'est l'idée qu'il se dépense là-bas une force de renouvellement, de création, un enthousiasme, une foi en l'avenir de l'homme, un héroïsme, parmi peut-être des excès terribles. . . . J'ai envie malgré moi d'en approcher, d'y participer."³⁸ "C'était là-bas que cela se passait",³⁹ "Oui, cette grande lueur . . . C'est peut-être une aurore; c'est peut-être une incendie. Mais ceux qui croient à l'aurore comme à l'incendie se mettent en marche".⁴⁰

Going simply to see was not the same thing as believing that socialism was a suitable regime for France. The main

³⁷Ibid., p. 283.

³⁸Ibid., p. 285.

³⁹Ibid., p. 286.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 287.

argument against socialism centered around the problem of the difference between "them" and "us". Some of the typical reactions were the following: "C'est très bien pour eux",⁴¹ "nous ne sommes pas des moujiks . . . Il ne faut pas confondre"⁴² and "il y avait surement autre chose, qui aurait pu être le monde nouveau, à notre façon à nous . . . et moi, je m'y serais bien mieux reconnu".⁴³

There was a feeling of strangeness about Soviet socialism not because the ideal of socialism was alien to them but because this ideal did not follow the French tradition, that is arise from the writings of those French writers they were familiar with, Michelet, Hugo, Quinet.

The different social conditions in France and differing national ideals and needs, dissimilar temperament of the people did play a role and did call for something else. The differences between the Russians and the French were stressed by all the characters in the novel and discussed at length by those of the "petit noyau de Sampreyre".

Laulerque spoke of "la race slave"; Sampeyre explained what that meant. The people of Russia were unlike the French because of the images in their consciences. These had been acquired since childhood, developed and reinforced by society.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 235.

⁴²Ibid., p. 237.

⁴³Ibid., p. 247-248.

Besides, these images formed a residuum of hundred of years of collective life.⁴⁴ The Russian world also shaped the habits of the mind. Referring to the Soviet concern for shaping a new man, they pointed to a central problem: to do so they would still have to use those very same Russian minds and the outcome would still be a Russian, that is, one who retained Russian characteristics.

The argument is a clever one and can be amplified. The new society itself in the Soviet Union is what it is and as successful as it is because it answers the need of the Russians. Although the Revolution occurred in Russia, its goals were nonetheless universally appealing.

How did the French visualize the Russians? What were some of their characteristics? Romain gave examples of the various misleading or stereotype notions the French held either as the result of hearsay or a brief chance encounter, all of which indicated, and this is what the author was trying to demonstrate that the only way to find out the truth was to see the people for oneself, preferably in their own environment.

Jallez, a writer and the other principal character in the novel, meeting with the Bolsheviks at a conference in Italy, was surprised to see them quite civilized: "on les regarde en s'étonnant qu'ils sachent porter une jaquette . . .

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 91.

manager au restaurant. . . . Ces bolcheviks qui jouaient les diplomates et les gens du monde m'inspiraient un peu, le même malaise que des singes habillés. . . ."⁴⁵ There is a feeling here that he would probably find them different at home. He also noted: "Je les trouve à la fois insolents, charmants, désinvoltes, bavards, secrets, furtifs."⁴⁶ "Secrets" and "furtifs" certainly do not make knowing them any easier.

Laulerque too had formed an image of the Russians in his mind from comments heard here and there. "On nous a tant parlé des aristocrates de l'ancienne Russie, de leur vie dissolue, en tout cas de leur inaptitude à faire une besogne astreignante et sérieuse. Même leur charme était lié à leur anarchie intérieure, à leur nonchalance, à leur coup de cafard".⁴⁷ Then he met an emigré cab driver:

"Je le trouve épatant. Il ne joue pas la grandeur déchue. . . . Il se contente d'être parfaitement aimable. . . . Aucune déchéance, ni extérieure, ni intime. Cela suppose de la discipline, de la maîtrise de soi, du courage tranquille, tout le contraire de cet ancien régime veule et pétrifié dont ils ne sont pourtant que les débris projetés au loin."⁴⁸

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 155.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 156.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 50.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 51.

As it turned out, the cab driver was captain of the Imperial Guard. What an irony that the "débris" of the "veule et petrifié" regime gave such an impressive demonstration of discipline and courage. What Lauferque supposed was the contrary to what he witnessed. How dangerous it was to have stereotyped notions, how misleading they can be!

This was but one example of an emigré. There were other types. Lauferque had met some in Switzerland. They felt sorry for themselves. Of them he said:

"On s'apitoyait sur eux, tout en les trouvant bien agaçants et en se disant que si la Russie des Tsars avait eu des classes dirigeantes de cet acabit, il n'était pas étonnant qu'elle eût fait la culbute."⁴⁹

Besides these few particular cases, Lauferque and Sampeyre spoke more generally of a "mentalité slave", of certain "habitudes d'esprit" characteristically Russian which had taken hundreds of years to form. Even if some Frenchmen were prepared to go to the Soviet Union as observers of the new society, as Lauferque and Jallez in particular intended to do, there were insurmountable difficulties involved in understanding those people because, as Lauferque pointed out:

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 49.

"révolutionnaire ou pas, bolchéviks ou pas, ce n'est pas la façon dont ils ont le crâne bâti . . . ou le nez . . . qui les distingue de nous . . . c'est que tous ils ont reçu . . . certaines habitudes d'esprit qui font partie du milieu russe."⁵⁰

Language was a very real obstacle. And so was the fact that they had not known old Russia. Neither of the would-be travellers spoke any Russian and, as a result, "n'ayant pas connu la Russie ancienne, ne connaissant point la langue, vous serez exposé à vous méprendre souvent."⁵¹

The emigré Poliapoff warned Jallez:

"vous ne serez pas dans les bonnes conditions pour les juger. Vous verrez des choses affreuses dont ils (les bolchéviks) ne sont pas entièrement responsables. Ce que je voudrais, c'est que vous voyiez les choses dont ils sont entièrement responsables. Il est bien vrai qu'ils ont terrorisé les paysans, qu'ils les ont dépouillés de leurs provisions et jusque de leurs

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 91.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 209.

semences,. . . . Mais il s'est produit
 une sécheresse sans pareille . . . Ce
 n'est pas tout à fait la faute des
 bolchéviks . . ."⁵²

Yet they would go. Jerphanion expressed the feeling of many when he said: "Je verrai peut-être peu, et mal. . . . Mais n'est-ce pas, voir! toucher!"⁵³ Their enthusiasm and eagerness are clearly communicated by these words.

Why were these men so eager to go, see and participate in the revolutionary effort? Would the Revolution not be possible in France? Was it not desired?

Part of the answer, once again, lay with the make-up of men. Clanricard found the French far too cynical to take politics very seriously.⁵⁴ They also lacked the two vital ingredients necessary for a successful Revolution: enthusiasm and purity. Enthusiasm, the impulse to act had to be present. A certain eagerness too. The lack of enthusiasm could take away from the cause. This was the particular weakness of the League of Nations, the group working toward a unification of Europe. It had not provided the necessary stimulus or impulse, in spite of its high ideals and noble end, for eager and effective action. A motive was simply not enough. Lauferque, for one, was looking for inspiration, a certain warmth that it did not provide: "Justement," he said,

⁵²Ibid., p. 208-209.

⁵³Ibid., p. 283.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 63.

"ce que j'irais chercher en Russie, si j'y allais, ce serait une chaleur."⁵⁵

It was this enthusiasm and atmosphere of creation, of a coming-into-being that drew many to the Soviet Union. All were prompted by a curiosity to see for themselves, to witness that which they heard so much about - the realization of the social ideal of a new and better world (the world of the future) in which ignorant, semi-enslaved men were uplifted to the status of citizens enjoying the full rights of free men.⁵⁶ Again it was the enthusiasm together with faith and heroism that tempted them to join in it, to participate in it.⁵⁷

The author likened the Revolution to a light and it is indeed an appropriate as well as a convenient metaphor because it can be used to represent the various reactions to it. Some were inspired, others menaced by it; to some it meant a positive beginning, to others a destructive one. Light or "lueur" could be either "une aurore" or "une incendie".

Romains does not himself tell us the nature of the light. He left it for time to tell, for each one to discover for himself.

This part of the novel, volume 19, Cette Grande Lueur à l'Est, used the Russian Revolution as a central theme

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 114.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 284.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 285

exploring its meaning in terms of Frenchmen, the possibility of it happening in France and some of the reasons why it would probably not happen. It showed the extent to which intellectuals and workers alike were interested in the phenomenon, attracted to it because of what it stood for, attempted to accomplish or claimed to have accomplished already. It did arouse the curiosity of men, revived ideals and gave an impetus and desire to act, to join in. It urged responsible men at least to go and observe the new world in the making. Propaganda was not the cause of their decisions to go. It was a cataclysmic force, the power of creation, the coming-into-being, the birth of the future of mankind and the atmosphere of enthusiasm and faith that surrounded it, all of which were lacking in post-War France, that spurred the French on. Those were factors that engendered the creative spirit in man, infected him with the will and power to do and that were so attractive.

Romains' book is interesting because it recreated a time in history, an atmosphere, in which a particular social and political problem came to life. It is truly a microcosm. He brought to life the very real situations, discussions, feelings, and views of the time relating to the Soviet Union and its Revolution. No one in that part of the novel actually went to the Soviet Union and brought back factual information. We only listen to discussions on various levels, by many dissimilar characters who examined the Soviet Revolution in

social, economic and personal terms, probed into its desirability for France and speculated on the probability of it occurring there.

The problems brought to light by Romaines were and are significant ones. They are those of ideals and hopes for creating a better future, the difficulty of knowing other peoples and therefore the danger of misunderstanding and misinterpretations. All of these points are closely tied in with the central issue of the writers who did travel to the Soviet Union and all have to be taken into consideration when evaluating the reports they brought back home. In the following pages we will study those writers who did go to examine the new society and analyze their reactions.

Part 2

Georges Duhamel: The Pilgrimage (1927)

In spite of a difficult childhood, poor health, a bohemian father who could not hold down a job for long which forced the family to move from place to place, Georges Duhamel showed surprising inner strength, stability and decisiveness in his own life. He did not succumb to his weak constitution but with great will power and determination worked his way through medical school and still found time to devote to literature. His war experience as an "autochir" (a surgeon on front lines), as a witness to the atrocities he would later write about, did not leave any bitterness in him. Astonishingly free from neuroses, hatred and self-pity, his writings reveal a man who was not temperamental or unstable but consistent and hard-working as well as honest and sincere. He appeared as the ideal father figure, mature, dependable and understanding. Interest and concern for human beings and their fate come through his writings and the best way to describe him would be as a wise and kind teacher.

Duhamel had decided to study medicine not only to follow in his father's footsteps, nor solely out of his natural concern for man and a passion for healing but mainly out of a strong conviction that art, his other vocation, must not be used for material gain. Art was his mission, his sacred duty.¹

¹Georges Duhamel, Le Temps de la Recherche, Vol. III of Lumières Sur Ma Vie (Paris: Paul Hartmann, ed., 1947), p. 42.

A prolific writer of fiction and non-fiction, he had published poetry and plays before the war which earned some praise and, critics agreed, showed promise. It was not until the publication of works composed during the war, Vie des Martyrs (1917) and Civilisation (1918), for which he was awarded the Goncourt prize, that he achieved widespread recognition. Duhamel used his daily war time experiences to create immensely moving works about the victims of the war, that were neither diaries nor chronicles but artistic transformations of actual events which reproduced an atmosphere of unending pain, helplessness and terror. The characters were patients entrusted to his care, some fatally wounded, others disfigured or crippled, all suffering mental anguish from the knowledge that death was at hand. The doctor and the artist saw in them the tragic waste of war and the account, clinical at times in the accurate, detailed description of the horrors, was always imbued with human compassion. These works, written to move and inspire the reader with pity and sympathy, were meant primarily as a memorial and to prevent further acts of barbarity which led to such brutal, unnecessary and inhuman slaughter.

The experience of the war shaped Duhamel's thinking and the formulation of his values. He emerged as a writer whose major concern would be to preserve civilization by acting to prevent another similar conflict. He would guide man along a better road that led to Progress. All of his significant works would revolve around problems which he

summed up as moral ones rather than political or religious, He declared himself to be against political commitment, which required choosing sides among conflicting parties; he had faith in no religion ("agnostique désespéré"²); he believed only that it was his mission to somehow explain the incomprehensible world and to console people, especially the young. He described it in the following way:

"Un religieux amour, une très fervente passion et c'est de voir un jour . . . mieux défendue contre ses maîtres de hasard, contre elle-même aussi parfois, cette humanité dont je viens pendant plus de quatre années de panser les plaies et de bercer les tristesses. Un immense désir de comprendre le monde et l'homme au milieu du monde. Un véhément besoin de dire ce que j'ai compris, de peindre ce que j'ai bien vu, de faire acte de connaissance et donc acte d'enseignement."³

Henri Massis, a severe critic of writers who exerted an allegedly harmful influence on the reading public, especially the young, praised this effort of Duhamel's because

²Duhamel, Les Espoirs et Les Epreuves: 1919-1928, Vol. V of Lumières de Ma Vie (Paris: Mercure de France, 1953), p. 10.

³Ibid., p. 12.

in his view, that of an ardent Catholic, there was a need at that particular moment for such an attitude. How did Duhamel propose to express his understanding of the world and man in it? The answer to this question lies in one of his original contributions to literature: he would do it through what he called "littérature de témoignage". In a speech given on January 13, 1920 at La Maison des Amis des Livres, he explained that the time had come for works that would be a "peinture du réel".⁴ This differed from journalism and historical writing in that the writer had to be an artist, he said, and at the same time a witness, that is, someone who described what he actually saw, but selected and ordered his material to produce an effect on the reader and create an organic whole. In addition, he would have to draw a lesson from it, in other words, he would teach. As an artist Duhamel conceded that the justification of a work of art was its beauty but like Horace he believed that if it were also capable of benefiting man by contributing to his welfare, it would be an even greater work.⁵ No longer than are we in the sacred realm of the impassive, objective artist but in the presence of an active participant in his time who because of his experience and knowledge could counsel and guide. The word "témoin", derived from the Latin testimonium,

⁴Duhamel, Guerre et Littérature (Paris: Mercure de France, 1920), p. 29.

⁵Ibid., p. 51.

implied action and was opposed to a mere onlooker, a "spectateur pur", one who "ayant souffert et joui . . . parle non seulement pour lui-même mais encore au nom de ceux qui ne savent pas manifester de manière frappante et durable leur souffrance ou leur félicité."⁶ It was not enough to be a writer, one had to also be a witness and a champion for his fellow beings. Talent was not the only qualification for such a task, one had to have experienced life and to have learned from it. This was a significant new emphasis in the concept of a writer's role:

"Jouer son rôle dans l'événement, guider une foule hésitante . . . proposer des solutions aux conflits humains, voilà un devoir admirable."⁷

Antithetical to it was the "spectateur pur" Duhamel had depicted in Le Club des Lyonnais (1929). Max Aufrère's attitude in life - that of merely observing was deplored by his creator.

"Je me sens très faiblement solidaire de ce qu'on appelle l'humanité, admitted Aufrère, "Je n'entends . . . ni la corriger, ni la réparer, ni la défendre contre elle-même. Je me contente de la regarder."⁸

⁶Ibid., p. 13.

⁷Duhamel, Délibération (Paris: Les Cahiers de Paris, 1925), p. 45.

⁸Duhamel, Le Club des Lyonnais in Vie et Aventures de Salavin (Paris: Editions Classiques et Contemporaines, 1959)

Aufrère is not "un homme complet"⁹ meaning someone who was both an artist and a man of action. The days of the ivory tower intellectuals were gone, Duhamel was saying, and he called for a particular type of man whose mission and duty were to contribute to the progress of mankind.

The war had disturbed the mental and material balance of the world and of literature; it was now necessary to create some sense of stability. He was answering his readers' requests when he formulated his literary theory of transposing real events into fiction and he knew too that literature affected the reader far more than dry and factual accounts, reports, documents or letters, because it could reveal the essence of anything, the human soul or an event.

The role of "littérature de témoignage" then was to have been a double one: to offer the reading public artistic works that would be meaningful and educational on the one hand, and, on the other, would preserve the memory of the War so that future generations reading about it would be moved to prevent the possibility of another one.

As someone who had experienced life, who proposed to deal with moral problems, what were his own values and in what direction was he leading his readers? A philosophy of life was born out of the traumatic days of the War. La possession du Monde (1919) formulated the ideal to live for. It was

⁹Duhamel, Pesée des Ames, Vol. IV of Lumières Sur Ma Vie (Paris: Mercure de France, 1949), p. 247.

a simple one - happiness. Simple but remarkable because after all the atrocities he witnessed and lived through, he was still optimistic about the future, still believed strongly that happiness could and should be the goal of life. Happiness, in his thinking, was a matter of the soul and love had much to do with it. No matter what our material condition, we would be poor without it. "Possession" did not mean riches in the worldly sense but, it had the spiritual meaning of love and of knowledge. This idea of "knowledge" is what Luc Durtain called his "conquête".

Happiness then is the most significant aspect of life and should be examined in relation to the idea of Progress. It too, in Duhamel's thinking was a matter of the heart and the soul rather than of the intelligence or reason. Reminding us of Bergson's teaching, he said that intelligence alone was incapable of comprehending life or, for that matter, happiness.¹⁰ These convictions must be discussed here in order to understand Duhamel's criteria for judging a culture and a society. A technological and industrial civilization was founded on intelligence and that was why he condemned it, suggesting that man find salvation instead in one that was moral (based on the "heart" or feeling), "seule capable de nous exalter, de nous assouvir, de nous protéger, d'assurer l'épanouissement réel de notre espèce".¹¹

¹⁰Duhamel, "Essai sur le Règne du Cœur", in La Possession du Monde (Paris: Mercure de France, 1919), p. 208

¹¹Ibid., p. 209.

Progress and individual happiness were intimately related, not Progress and Science. Progress was a matter therefore of the heart rather than reason or intelligence alone. Man must not be considered simply as a rational being but one with feeling and intuition and he must make use of those qualities. Thus it comes as no surprise that Duhamel expressed his unreserved preference for Pascal rather than for Descartes.¹² Neither was it an egotistic or hedonistic philosophy that he was expounding. He was advocating an emphasis on feeling because through it alone could man communicate with other men and know them. The quality which would save him was "sympathy", that which gave him the ability to reach others. It also was a means by which Duhamel himself learned about others and judged his own time. He set out to explore the world, to write and criticize what he saw so that he could offer his insights to others.

Thus he travelled not only in Europe but to North Africa, the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. He always wrote about his travels, endeavoring to relate his experiences in terms of his preoccupations and to act as an intermediary between his own country and the one he was exploring. He understood and tried to evaluate and explain what he observed for the benefit of mankind. This earned him the title of "critic of civilization".¹³

¹²Duhamel, Confessions Sans Pénitence.

¹³Louis C. Keating, Critic of Civilization: Georges Duhamel and His Writings (Ky.: University of Kentucky Press, 1965).

It was Duhamel's conviction that civilization was the result of tradition and education. This explained his emphasis on the need to revive and continue the values of the past; those at least which he believed would contribute to Progress. He never tried to dissimulate his pride in France and her history or his belief, which he shared with Jules Romains for one, that his country should serve as the leader in cultural matters. This prejudice is the objectionable side of the intensely nationalistic bias that colors the perceptions of this otherwise sensitive and very compassionate writer. He too frequently informs his readers that he sought, in the traditions of France, the principles that made up his ethic, his criteria for judging contemporary society and his hopes for the future.

As a critic of civilization, he most vehemently spoke out against modern industrial culture, especially in Scènes de la Vie Future (1930). He exposed the evils of American society in which the assembly-line culture was stifling the soul of man, in which also the worship of machines, he feared, would reduce man to a robot.¹⁴ A mechanized civilization, he predicted, would kill real culture, that of the individual, for it would lead to conformity and put an end to freedom of thought.

Invited by the Académie des Sciences Artistiques, Duhamel and Durtain who accompanied him and whose book,

¹⁴Duhamel, L'Humaniste et l'Automate (Paris: Paul Hartmann, ed., 1933).

L'Autre Europe: Moscou et Sa Foi, we will discuss in part 2 of this chapter, accepted. Reminiscing many years later, Duhamel characterized the undertaking in the following way:

"j'étais allé en pèlerin aux lieux saints
du Communisme".¹⁵

The use of religious terminology is not usual, though it should be noted. Amongst some of the time there was a particular attitude toward Communism: it was the Messiah that would save mankind. This is precisely what Duhamel was trying to convey. The very title of the account of his experiences in the Soviet Union - Voyage de Moscou - implied, by his use of the preposition "de" instead of "à" the idea of Moscow as Mecca.

Duhamel also considered his pilgrimage from a more realistic and practical point of view, as the exceptional opportunity to examine and reflect on the results of the social experiment, "cultiver son opinion sur la conduite et l'avenir de l'espèce",¹⁶ and inform the public. Once in Soviet Russia, he played the role of a scientist about to analyze the result of a bold and far-reaching experiment in a particular environment. This environment caused more problems for him than the experiment itself! A Westerner unable to shed the European in him, he could not penetrate the new atmosphere and he was

¹⁵Les Espoirs et Les Epreuves, p. 231.

¹⁶Duhamel, Voyage de Moscou (Paris: Mercure de France, 1927), p. 9.

at every moment conscious of being in an alien society. They were so un-Western. This is perhaps the reason why Duhamel failed to be truly impartial. He attempted to report his observations objectively but his impatience and intolerance at times belied his good intentions.

Before his departure, he had never considered the Soviet Union as Utopia, nor had he formulated any notions as to what he expected to find. In this respect he was free from prejudices and illusions. His mission was to witness at first hand what very few Frenchmen had seen until then and relate his findings, evaluate the success or failure of Communism and speculate on its possible application to the Western world.

The book itself was not written in any systematic way but was composed as a collection of impressions. Santelli, who studied Duhamel and his works, was too kind when he said that in spite of the lack of descriptions of crowds, and a lack of statistics, we could nevertheless catch a glimpse of what life in Soviet Russia was like. It is true that statistics are not necessary to convey an atmosphere faithfully; still the book does fail to bring us into direct contact with the people and, as a result, we do not get a feeling for the Soviet spirit. Instead, we are at all times confronted with the overbearing presence of a well-meaning observer who is forever interfering with our contact with the society through his eyes as he constantly gives his opinions,

evaluates and judges for us instead of sketching representative people and describing the differences to show us what behavior makes up a Russian. The reader is not given a chance to think, at least occasionally, for himself. Another reason why the book is not satisfying is that nothing in it is of prime importance. Minor details, insignificant facts take up as much time and space as matters of great consequence. For example he spent at least two full pages to express his disgust at the use of abbreviations the Soviets are so fond of, such as for example, VOKS, short for an All-Soviet society for foreign cultural exchange,¹⁷ which he foresaw would create a problem of communication and therefore was a "menace" to the language. Then he brought up the subject of the carpet. First, he was dismayed that an item of luxury should still be used in the Soviet Union; then, he justified its use by saying that in a cold climate it really was not a luxury at all; then he commented on its unhygienic aspect and finally predicted its natural death through wear. It is these trivial comments that damage our confidence in the observer. These interludes were not even intended as comic relief because the author is very serious. The tone of the book is monotonous, which does not help arouse the reader's curiosity. Nothing seems remarkable to him and nothing angered him either. At the outset it had been his overwhelming desire to

¹⁷VOKS: Vsesoiuznoe Obshchestvo Kul'turnoi Sviazi S Zagranitsei.

find a changed society. After reading this account, we are left with the feeling that Russia is the same as it had always been, that granted the temporary setback in economic policy (NEP), the Revolution had not really changed things very much at all.

To be fair, it was not entirely his fault for not emphasizing the contrast between the new Russia and the old. We must remember that the date of his stay in Moscow was 1927, the last year of a relatively stable and calm period of the New Economic Policy that had begun in 1921. Not until the following year would Stalin overthrow the Right opposition, and take over the governing powers. Duhamel did not witness the intense collectivization or the dictatorship of one man, the cult of personality, the effects of the Purge. At the time he saw only old Russia dominating the efforts of the Revolution: conformity was not yet the order of the day.

"A les (les Russes) regarder, je n'oublie certes pas l'extraordinaire aventure qui vient de bouleverser leur existence; mais je sens bien que cette existence est soumise à des lois millénaires qui échappent, parce qu'elles sont humaines, aux révolutions qui ne sont que sociales et politiques. . . . Alors la Russie bolcheviste? Sans doute, mais la Russie d'abord, la Russie tout court."¹⁸

¹⁸Voyage de Moscou, p. 21.

Thus he minimized the effects of the Revolution and instead saw perpetuated the traditions of the past, its habits and customs. The Revolution did not imply, for him, as it did for others, that awesome force for radical change, nor did it hold a grip on his imagination, although he acknowledged that its aim to bring about universal justice was morally good.

It might be profitable to examine his works in terms of the facts and themes Duhamel chose to describe or discuss and his own attitude toward them, then use his findings and impressions to compare with the other writers included here.

It came as no surprise that Duhamel was greatly interested in the role of the intellectual in the new society. After the initial strain between the traditional *élite* and the masses who, in their ignorance had misunderstood their noble intentions to alleviate their misery, the intelligentsia had now been reinstated to work together with the new generation in the building of a just society. This was a particularly sensitive subject in France where they were mistrusted by the Communists.

The negative side had to do with the fundamental activities of the intelligentsia and with the formation of the future generations. For example the right and freedom to criticize was curtailed or suppressed. Duhamel sensed the danger in this policy and warned that stifled too long,

the critical sense would seek its revenge.¹⁹ Diderot had already perceptively noted for Catherine II in the eighteenth century: "les nations policées ne se révoltent point: elles souffrent",²⁰ Duhamel did not take into account the extent of the power of the secret police. Nevertheless he wisely recommended a policy that would allow for greater liberties and called for the abolition of censorship: loyalty should be freely offered to the revolutionary cause.²¹ Otherwise it would, of course, defeat its very purpose.

Ill-disposed to any type of biased teaching, whether it be religious or political, Duhamel was disturbed by the indoctrination to which the school children were subjected. He compared this harmful policy to the religious training of the French parochial schools. It was wrong to subject children to so many hours of political study. It could have an adverse effect, a revolt. In fact the result was counter-productive: a deep rift was created between the younger and older generations and children who informed on parents, relatives and friends.

In searching for signs of change brought on by the Revolution, he examined other aspects of society and the Soviet man. He unfortunately did not go into the arts except to note the innovations in the drama. It appeared

¹⁹Ibid., p. 79.

²⁰Denis Diderot, Mémoires pour Catherine II.

²¹Voyage de Moscou, p. 85.

though that they only affected the technical side of the production. The works performed were still those of the classical writers such as Chekhov. The physical form had changed but not the substance, not the "substantifique moelle" as Rabelais would have put it. Transformation in that area would have meant a true revolution.

Man had not been transformed either. The people he met were basically the same as they had been before. He noticed though that efforts were being made to alter their behavior. In a discussion about some posters depicting the good peasant, hard working and thrifty, and a lazy one who was throwing his earnings away on drink, an optimistic Russian guide explained that in the future there would be no "bad" peasants. Duhamel, more learned and far wiser in this matter, perceived the problem differently: it was right to teach the peasant to be thrifty, but this lesson in economics contained in it, paradoxically, the seed of capitalism. The important action to take would be to correct nature, to get to the core of the ill by imposing limits to its passion for profit.²² Thus he implied as Bloch would do, that a radical change in the nature of man could not occur. Man would always strive in that direction and it was society's duty and responsibility to restrain him.

Whether or not he believed that a New Man would be born, it is clear that at that time all the old characteristics,

²²Ibid., p. 149.

those "vieux pechés slaves"²³ as he liked to call them, remained. What were they? Unhesitatingly, precisely, like a torrential rain the grievances poured out:

"Cette lenteur, cette incertitude, ce fatalisme, ce besoin de rejeter à plus tard toutes les choses qu'il faut accomplir sans délai, ce goût du marchandage, cette fièvre de rêveries, cette passion de projets dont on sait bien qu'ils ne seront pas réalisés . . . cette impuissance à mesurer le temps avec une juste économie, tous ces traits qui nous paraissent . . . parfois agaçants et parfois aimables, ne s'inscrivent-ils pas lourdement dans la destinée du peuple russe?"²⁴

This enumeration leaves much to be desired: we are given no concrete examples to back up those characteristics. We have just his word for it. It would have been far more forceful and credible had Duhamel illustrated these "sins" with personal experiences or anecdotes to show them at work. The reader never sees or feels the people so that his list is not very effective. As it is, his formulations have to be taken for granted as being accurate. However, even on the abstract level the vast generalization seem an over-

²³Ibid., p. 187.

²⁴Ibid., p. 189.

simplification and many of the faults he lists are human universal frailties. A scientist whose mind and habits were disciplined, well under control, Duhamel could not accept the Russians as they were. The combination of features that made them "slaves" were not attractive to him and their perpetuation meant that a true revolution had not come about because it would have altered the Russian:

"la vraie, la profonde révolution celle
qui fierait en quelque mesure la substance
de l'âme slave, n'est pas encore accomplie."²⁵

Someone would attempt to transform the Russian man, who would put an end to the propensity for haggling over prices, who would use their love for projects by creating and enforcing the five-year plans. He would produce outward results. What would Duhamel think of Stalin, and his methods to make the Revolution work? His only comment, made a quarter of a century later in his reminiscences, although laconic, was underscored by a sincere feeling of compassion and sorrow; he slipped in that the Russian must have suffered a great deal.²⁶

Meanwhile he noted other signs of failures, one especially that was marked by the presence of the Red Army. It seemed then that the Bolshevik victory had to be enforced and

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Les Espoirs et Les Epreuves, p. 203.

sustained by a military machine. The Red Army itself, he was quick to reassure the Western readers, was not as they had been led to believe, a disorderly, but well-disciplined, clean and quiet. While it may have saved the Revolution, he accurately predicted that its perpetuation as a force would kill its very spirit. The Army constituted a hierarchy in which the officers represented power. They could claim privileges, which, because of their power, would have to be granted. "Hierarchy", "privileges", reasoned Duhamel, added up to a new class - anathema for a classless society.

On the positive side, the Bolsheviks themselves were described as firm and orderly. They were not disorganized or confused as misinformed Westerners again imagined them to be. Duhamel criticized them on different grounds. In his judgment they were on the road to establishing a dictatorship by the great amount of time devoted to political indoctrination by carrying out such policies as capital punishment for political crimes, and police surveillance of citizens. This led to a fear-filled society of informers.

He was most severe in his criticism of the repressive measures of military justice equating it with the Terror that had followed the French Revolution. This he could not tolerate. The only too well-known names of Marat, Robespierre and Saint-Just were not admired. The use of any means was a criminal act no matter how noble the end. The too long a list of political assassinations was proof enough that the Russians were

guilty. Duhamel could not agree with those who believed that in order to accomplish a great deed for the benefit of a whole nation the sacrifice of a few human lives should not have to be taken into account.

How did Duhamel judge the new regime as a whole? First of all he said: "il ne faut pas juger le nouveau régime sur ces erreurs qu'il a si vite abjurées . . . mais sur ses ouvrages."²⁷ His evaluations in general were based on a double standard, one for Russia and another for France. For example in speaking about abortions he decided that he favored it for Russia but not for France: "elle amènerait chez nous des catastrophes."²⁸ It is therefore necessary to keep in mind that the judgements were made by a Western observer conscious of national differences, and always in terms of the relevance to the French public. He also distinguished between Communism as a regime and Revolution as an ideal.

It was apparent to Duhamel that Communism had failed for the obvious reason that it had not spread throughout the world as it was supposed to have done. He did not share in the Marxist belief that Revolution was the inevitable feature of historical evolution. He did not foresee a European Communist Revolution as imminent and asserted that it could be avoided entirely if proper economic measures were taken, that is, if reforms were instituted that would benefit the

²⁷Ibid., p. 204.

²⁸Ibid., p. 207.

working classes. However, he warned, if those in power could not contain their personal ambitions at the expense of the masses then the people would rise up to fight for their rights especially since they were aware through propaganda and published reports from Communist travellers that a better life did exist and that it was possible for them as well. Then Communism would immediately seize upon the opportunity to violently impose its iron law.

Duhamel attacked Communism on its fundamental aspect: it was an economic system which claimed the right to direct the life-style of human groups. Duhamel, for whom the spiritual life of an individual is sacred, that which is most important to safeguard because through it he can attain fulfillment and happiness, could not accept a system that did not take into account either feelings of passions or the needs of the soul, that was not a psychological one. Here was its greatest weakness. It sacrificed the individual at the expense of the collective. He showed thus he had no faith in the Marxist concept that the substructure would change man as well as institutions and he made it evident in Le Club des Lyonnais: One Revolutionary was trying to convince Salavin that by changing the structure of society, man's conscience would be changed little by little too. Salavin refused to believe him; at the end, he leaves his wife to try and overcome those qualities he despised in himself.

At the same time, he approved of it because it endeavored to redress the grievances and injustices brought

on by the old society. This had been the Revolutionary aim. While he rejected Communism as a system primarily on the grounds that it unfavorably recalled his own youthful experiment in communal living, because it emphasized the collective at the expense of the individual, and because it was an economic system rather than a psychological one, he praised its noble ideal of justice for all.

Duhamel thus came away with mixed feelings: the confidence inspired by the scholars and poets he had met with was offset by the distrust and the aversion for all that had to do with politics. Much later he would write that it was impossible to establish a stable regime "sur la délation, l'arbitraire, la prison, l'exil, la torture, la puissance des ténèbres".²⁹

Why didn't he speak out against it immediately after his return? It was the importance of his role as a writer that determined his behavior:

"A mon rôle de témoin, pouvais-je me dérober et, si j'avouais tout de suite mes appréhensions, n'allais-je pas contribuer . . . à précipiter une rupture, à ruiner l'une des changes de cette paix qui était ma pensée obsédante?"³⁰

²⁹Ibid., p. 231.

³⁰Ibid., p. 230.

In his reminiscences, the volume concerning the post-War period 1919 to 1928, Les Espoirs et Les Epreuves, he confessed that for twenty five years Soviet politics had been revolting to him both as a moralist and a human being. The Moscow trials, the war with Finland, the pact with Germany, the anxiety of the Second World War contributed to his disillusionment and sadly, the teacher who had proposed to draw a lesson from events, said: "qui peut tirer leçon de quoi que ce soit dans le monde?"³¹

When Voyage de Moscou did come out in France in 1928, it brought him criticism from both the extreme right and the extreme left. The Soviet Union reacted negatively: it stopped the translation of his works and forced his Russian friends to privately cease communication with him and publicly denounce him.

In 1933, Duhamel found himself at odds with the governing powers of the Soviet Union as he and other campaigned successfully for the release of a Belgian-born Communist, Victor Serge, who had freely chosen to live in the U.S.S.R. because of his great faith in the Revolution. Ironically, instead of making life easy for him to encourage others to commit themselves so wholeheartedly, at least as an example, he was imprisoned for his Trotskiite leanings. When Serge was put away without a trial by the secret police (GPU), Duhamel reacted swiftly with a series of articles. Among those who joined him was Luc Durtain.

³¹Les Espoirs et Les Epreuves, p. 233.

Finally Serge was let out of the country but it was this affair that prompted Duhamel to comment that Communism had taken on, little by little, all of the characteristics of old Russia from the days of Ivan the Terrible: intolerance, horror of freedom, fanaticism, arbitrariness, coercion. Always an enemy of anything that could enslave the soul, he became by extension, an enemy of Communism.

While we are disappointed by the superficial observations, his failure to bring back a human story, one that would shed light on the spirit of the Revolution, on the soul of the Russian, it was after all, one of the first attempts at an impartial account of the new society. Duhamel's main contribution was to have informed a public who had confused notions about features of the Soviet society; until then, only prejudiced or biased reports had been available. It was a laudable effort to create an understanding between the two nations and thereby ensure continued peace. Even though he did not produce a memorable study, Duhamel still represented an outspoken critic of civilization, a teacher informing, explaining and judging for his public with their best interest in mind.

Duhamel produced a more interesting account of the ferment that the Soviet Revolution caused when he kept his own counsel and did it in artistic form.

In the Club des Lyonnais, Duhamel gave a vivid portrayal of the kind of impact the Soviet Revolution had in France and offered explanations for the existence of Communist

cells: what kind of people participated in the effort and why. It may be recalled that during the Third International, a resolution was passed to set up such cells to spread the revolution. Underlying it all was Duhamel's own understanding of human nature, namely that individual needs, hopes, despair govern their behavior and explain the actions of each one, that there is, for example, no single reason that would commit one to Communism nor a single type that it would attract.

Salavin, the principal character, was introduced to a circle of socialists who gathered in the shop of a shoe maker, Père Legrain, situated in the rue des Lyonnais. Why were the men he met there committed to the Revolutionary cause? Père Legrain, the most human and paternal type, moved by the words "brotherhood" and "humanity"³² hoped it would bring about a more just world. Personal and pathetic reasons made him join in underground activities. His young daughter was dying in a hospital because living in a poor environment had destroyed her health. "Ce n'est pas juste", cried the father, "il faut que ça change . . . il faut que tout le monde puisse respirer et voir le soleil au moins de temps en temps."³³ Père Legrain was a "révolutionnaire intéressé". Once men achieved happiness on earth he would cease his revolutionary activities. There were others though, who were "révolutionnaires désintéressés", "parfaitement purs". For them revolution was not a means but

³²Club des Lyonnais, p. 353.

³³Ibid., p. 365.

an end. Once their goal was achieved, they would throw themselves into other causes. On a different level were the functionaries of the Revolution, "des gens ternes, sans relief, sans venin . . . tombés dans la révolution mais qui auraient pu se trouver tout aussi bien dans les postes télégraphiques".³⁴ This was the way Duhamel described Stalin's entourage.

There were the intellectuals: Beauvoisin for instance, who described his own role in the following way: "je suis communiste par raison, par devoir, et je le reste par constance".³⁵ Then he added a curious note: "je suis malgré tout, individualiste, comme tous les intellectuels qu'ils s'appellent Maurras ou Lounachardky".³⁶ This conflict would prevent him from witnessing the Revolution, he explained, not because it would not occur but because he would be killed the first day defending the Louvre, that which stood for tradition and a culture that was also part of the bourgeois society.

The issue Duhamel brought up in Voyage de Moscou, of the New Man, he used as a theme in the novel and there too repeated the same conviction. Salavin who knew nothing about politics, was simply looking for a solution to his own problem - to change himself. As an outsider his views

³⁴Ibid., p. 353.

³⁵Ibid., p. 370.

³⁶Ibid.

differed from those of the members of the Club. Salavin felt they therefore could not change anything. "Vous pouvez tout changer;" he said to them, "si vous ne me changez pas, moi . . . eh bien! Vous n'aurez rien changé du tout".³⁷ Salavin would not accept the Marxist answer that as the structure of society transformed itself, so too would man's conscience. Like the prodigal son, he set out to seek his own way.

Salavin's farewell letter to his wife gives us the core of Duhamel's own assessment of men. They were unhappy, incomprehensible and did not know what they wanted. They did not understand what they said or did. Gide would say this was the reason why so many converted to Catholicism, not out of faith but out of emotional need. The fate of the men he met deeply affected Salavin: "je ne peux t'exprimer la pitié qu'ils m'inspirent,"³⁸ and he then decided that it was no longer for himself alone that he wanted to find a new self but for the sake of others because he now realized how miserable they were and were in need of solace that Communism did not offer.

The categorization of types is similar to the one in Romain's Cette Grande Lueur à l'Est but while the latter remained on an intellectual plane, Duhamel had succeeded in humanizing the situation as he probed into man's fate, his

³⁷Ibid., p. 367.

³⁸Ibid., p. 410.

misery and filled the reader with the pity he felt himself. Père Legrain, a widower, a good, hard-working man lost his only daughter. When friends tried to comfort him and encouraged him to go on living for his ideas, he uttered pathetically: "Vous êtes sûr? Vous êtes bien sûr?"³⁹

Salavin had lived the best day in his life when he discovered he was needed, when he experienced the fulfillment of friendship. No sooner did he find happiness than he lost it: his friend cut his own throat. This was when Salavin decided to leave home. He abandoned his wife, leaving her to listen to the silence of an empty house.

The novel transcended the mere depiction of a particular group in the society of the day. It studied the individual, showed a variety of temperaments and how each life was affected by another and the universal, basic human emotions which always remain the same.

A doctor who cared for people, who had a passion for healing, a writer who delved into the soul of man, Duhamel brought these qualities to all of his endeavors and he lived up to his responsibility, performed his duty to mankind. True progress, he said, was in the heart and each had to find it for himself.

Part 3

Luc Durtain: Moscow Examined

Although Luc Durtain never resided in the Abbaye itself, he had been an active member of the group, shared their beliefs and ideals. After its dissolution, he continued the friendships begun there and, in particular, remained a life-long friend of Georges Duhamel. Durtain had always represented for Duhamel "un homme complet"¹ which the latter defined as an intellectual who could be at the same time an artist and a man of action.² Indeed, Durtain, whose real name was André Nepveu, was a professional, a practicing medical doctor who was also a writer involved in the literary world of his day, and a world traveller as well. At a time when the world seemed to shrink, the continents to close on each other, he felt that a writer could no longer afford the luxury of inventing lands and customs without some factual basis to support his vision. Furthermore, the events of the late 19th century and early twentieth, such as the Dreyfus Affair, World War I and the Russian Revolution brought social problems to the fore and broadened the scope of concern from the self, the individual and his personal problems, to humanity as a whole and to its destiny. Someone had to

¹ Georges Duhamel, La Pesée des Ames, Vol. IV of Lumières Sur Ma Vie (Paris: Mercure de France, 1949), p. 247.

² Ibid.

investigate and explain the changes. Durtain set himself a task, which he was by nature and by training well prepared to attempt, namely to "connaître la réalité".³

Man had always been the subject matter for the writer but now it was from a different vantage point that he would be examined. For many, and especially for Durtain, the War had marked a definite break with the past. Traditional and conventional ways of viewing the world were no longer acceptable and so he set out to search for a new knowledge of reality and to gain insight into the new human truth. He called his goal: "la conquête du réel".⁴ It was a writer's duty to explain the world to others. He proposed to achieve this by rediscovering the world anew, exploring various nations and their civilizations in terms of the new experiences and new problems that faced mankind. He intended to bring back accounts of what he saw that would be "true". He set out on his mission as an explorer, equipped with the necessary tools - knowledge and methodology, the ability to collect data and analyse it - and, most importantly, a particular attitude:

"La conquête du réel exige de l'attention,
de la patience, de la soumission aux faits,
de l'amour des hommes. Il faut toutes ces
qualités-là pour accomplir cet acte rare:

³M.-L. Bidal, Ecrivains de l'Abbaye (Paris: Boivin & Cie., 1938), p. 156.

⁴Luc Durtain, D'Homme à Homme (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1932), p. 166.

un vrai voyage. Et il faut encore y
joindre le courage pour obtenir cet autre
acte, plus rare encore: un témoignage
fidèle."⁵

The specific difficulty that faced the observer in the Soviet Union was obviously the danger of partisanship both on the part of the writer and the reader. It was imperative to free oneself from sectarianism he cautioned which could easily distort any attempt at impartiality and thus render the information invalid. He emphasized the need for courage to tell the truth no matter what the consequences might be.

There had been very few accounts of Durtain's type published on the Soviet Union before 1927. That which had appeared in print was unreliable because of the apparent biased and prejudiced views. Not until André Viollis⁶ and Georges Duhamel, Durtain pointed out, had there been reports "de véritable observation".⁷ When Duhamel's Voyage de Moscou was attacked by Fabre-Luce in his own Russie 1927, Durtain came to his defense protesting against what he considered to be unfair remarks and insisting that it was in fact "un magnifique témoignage d'impartialité et de sagesse".⁸ One has to remember that such high praise came from a critic who was defending

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 164.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Durtain, rev. of Russie 1927 by A. Fabre-Luce, Europe (April, 1928), p. 423.

his friend. He also predicted that the book would grow in importance with time when it would gain historical significance as a valuable document which truthfully reflected and appraised the times realistically. Although their experiences had been similar, Durtain's own work was not a repetition of Duhamel's account. His own approach was precisely as he intended it to be far more thorough and complete than his companion's had been and, as a result, of greater interest and value to the reader of his day.

Durtain had visited many countries besides the Soviet Union. Much of his published works since 1926 were based on his travels, such as those about the United States: Quarantième Etage for which he was awarded Le Prix de la Renaissance in 1928, Quelques Notes d'U.S.A., Hollywood Dépassé and Captain OK which dealt with the problems of the Blacks. He had visited many other nations, including countries in South America and Asia and Islamic lands. It is his visits to the Soviet Union that interest us primarily and his experiences there, as recorded in L'Autre Europe: Moscou et Sa Foi⁹ (1928) and in five chapters of Le Globe sous le Bras¹⁰ (1936), will be discussed here.

An immense and heterogeneous country at the crossroads of Europe and Asia made Russia difficult to write about.

⁹Durtain, L'Autre Europe: Moscou et Sa Foi (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1928).

¹⁰Durtain, Le Globe Sous le Bras (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1938).

Furthermore the recent political and social upheaval compounded the difficulty and made it a test for any writer. He had to have ability to understand and the courage to be dispassionate and independent of political bias. The main objective in his first book on the Soviet Union was to capture the "spirit" of the new civilization by recreating an atmosphere that would convey it to the reader rather than filling pages with what he felt would be less meaningful elements such as statistics and percentages. Would he be completely impersonal, impassive in his account? No. Even the scientist in his laboratory, admitted Durtain, was motivated by respect for his subjects and hope for the success of the experiment.

A writer-traveller, Durtain told us, should choose his subjects of investigation because he believes them to be of consequence. While observing and writing, the author should be conscious of pitfalls and impose restrictions on himself. Once completed and published, the work itself should be approached just as cautiously by the reader who must keep in mind and respect the author's intentions. In his introduction, Durtain warned his readers that those with extreme political inclinations, or whose political commitments would distort the reading of the material were not welcome to delve into his book. He wanted the kind of readers who had sincere desires to learn, to look for factual information and actual aspects of the life and character of the people, and who

could maintain an open mind that is free from personal value judgement. He made his position very clear in order to distinguish himself from those whose writings were tainted by their prejudices and also to protect himself from biased criticism. Durtain added that his own opinions, when given, could easily be disregarded without any reduction in the value of the factual content the primary function of which was to explain the little-known and even less understood new society.

Durtain's thoroughness of observation, his sober cheerfulness and orderly account were in contrast with Duhamel's impressionistic and superficial report. He communicated to the reader some of the excitement of discovery by beginning at the very beginning with his arrival in Russia describing the first contacts, those that revealed the most striking differences between the old world and the new to the eye that was still fresh.

During those first contacts, the most obvious and easily accessible subjects to report on were the exterior aspects of life: streets, crowds, shops and restaurants. It is at this early stage of getting acquainted that Durtain perceived and resolved in his own terms the old Russian argument of the Westernizers and Slavophiles as he recognized and reformulated its essential dilemma:

"cet amalgame, unique au monde, de nouveauté
hardie et d'habitudes archaïques, l'étendue,

la diversité d'un pays qui, détaché des autres civilisations par l'étrange abîme de ses frontières compte cent cinquante millions d'habitants et occupe un sixième des terres émergées."¹¹

Situated between the modern West and the ancient East, Russia sought and combined elements of both cultures. In the nineteenth century, disputes had arisen among her intellectuals as to whether they should form part of Western culture or seek out in Russia herself a civilization all her own. While this argument was never resolved, Durtain as a foreigner perceived a country so vast and isolated by its frontiers that it had, in spite of itself, a character all its own. To him it was quite distinct from both Europe and Asia. First, because of the people. Some features belonged to the East, some to the West but the Russian soul was mainly characterized by the many contrasts: intelligence and laziness, passion and listlessness. Then, the huge expanse of territory and great number of people in it justified altering geographical concepts so as to create an independent continent, a sixth one. He went even further and made it into a new political entity to which he gave the name of "L'Autre Europe" - the Other Europe. This was Durtain's original contribution.

The new designation served to solve two problems: first, it classified Russia as not entirely Asian yet not

¹¹L'Autre Europe . . ., p. 54.

completely Western either, and, second, he eliminated the need to refer to it as either the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or as Russia thus quelling possible arguments and antagonisms that could arise were he to use the one or the other. It was also an effective means of dramatizing Russia's peculiar situation.

The first glance into the streets of Moscow produced in him the least expected of reactions, a heretical statement of similarity between Capitalism and Communism! The private shops, banks and stock exchange, though temporary intrusions of the New Economic Policy inaugurated by Lenin in 1921, explained the resemblance between those "Siamese twins". Durtain did not condemn the capitalistic features. NEP had not been imposed arbitrarily by the government, he said, but was called for by the times, and was the result of a historical process, answering the needs of a particular period of development that a Revolution did not eliminate. At that time, in order to survive economically, it had to proceed along capitalistic lines.

Yet it was a mistake to formulate any conclusions about Russia at this precise point because it meant seeing her immobile, fixed in time, as an exceptional case miraculously suspended half in the future, half in the past. It would be more accurate to consider her dynamically, diachronically, examining certain manifestations in the society that would make possible speculations about its future, evaluating the

changes that had occurred and perceiving their trend.

To survive Soviet Russia had to abandon "les conséquences extrêmes du marxisme et les survivances d'un despotisme oriental."¹² Actually it appeared to him that it was only advancing toward the modern era, still catching up with the present and not ahead. Throughout his book he will show that the Russian past is still very much alive and evident in the character of present day society in spite of the Revolution.

Durtain masterfully organized his material to encompass all areas of life by classifying his observations into several specific categories. Thus he was able to bring out the distinctive qualities in each of them and indicate the changes that had occurred. He reported on the cultural and intellectual life that involved all citizens; he described the customs and social institutions such as the family, marriage and divorce. Political matters were also discussed. His concluding remarks and final characterization of the new society were based on the observations and information presented to the reader, on facts not feelings and impressions.

The first glimpse of the slogan on banners "Prolétaires de tous les pays, unissez-vous!"¹³ the ever-present portraits of the founders and leaders of the new order (Lenin, Trotsky, Marx and Engels . . .), the sound of foreign words: "dva

¹²Ibid., p. 88.

¹³Ibid., p. 19.

stacana chiau"¹⁴ made the visitors immediately aware of a different space and time zone. During the "first contacts" they found out about NEP and Russian hospitality, the pros and cons of the former and the never-ending "rasgovor" or talk that was part of the latter and was for the Slav "nirvana". The "nirvana" of the Slav he described was: "néant où subsiste à jamais l'inquiétude."¹⁵

The question which most preoccupied Durtain was the fate of the "haute culture" after the most complete overturning of society that ever was. In a section of his book under the general heading of "Intelligensia" he proceeded to examine step by step all that was connected with culture: museums, libraries, schools, science and literature. His conclusions were two-fold: first, extreme contrasts existed in every area of endeavor such as for example the magnificent service on the one hand and archaic procedures on the other, in the field of medicine; the great number of of publications available but only one point of view; abundant foreign literature in translation yet a strict censorship of native writers; secondly, a religious character pervaded everything. This was one reason for his critical attitude toward the institutions of learning. The dogmatic nature of their system, the emasculation of the curriculum which suppressed nearly all of past

¹⁴Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 101.

history, excluded dead languages, the so-called useless areas of science, would necessarily have a devastating effect on Soviet culture. The teachers' attitude was just as dogmatic and thus predicted Durtain, would certainly lead the students to rebel. This was a Frenchman speaking. Used to thinking for himself, he could not believe that others would allow themselves to be suppressed for long. He could not measure the effectiveness of dictatorship. He did however make comments that showed a deep understanding of the situation without excusing it:

"demander aux maîtres du Soviétisme de faire à l'esprit critique sa part; n'est-ce pas proposer au directeur d'une école de missionnaires la création d'une chaîne d'exégèse biblique?"¹⁶

What had seemed to him at first glance an apparent booming intellectual life was only an illusion. True, libraries were open to the public, translations of current European literature were available, numerous newspapers and journals reached out to factories and faraway villages. At first he prophesied that:

"un avenir prochain verra se former en Russie tout un peuple de lecteurs qui . . .

¹⁶Ibid., p. 143.

par le goût subtil et par les qualités de hardiesse et de profondeur propres au génie slave, sera peut-être le plus important de tous ceux que pourra toucher un livre."¹⁷

Behind this promising appearance he learned that the daily newspapers were all of communist persuasion suffering no competition from a dissident press; that all books published by Soviet writers had to be submitted to a strict censor. In fact, the author of any work judged dangerous for the Party had to make a public recantation. How could such an ancient and religious custom be invoked by revolutionaries? Such practices reminded Durtain of the Spanish Inquisition which weakened both the country and religion, instead of strengthening and protecting them. He warned the Soviet leaders, "à cette foi, comme à toute autre, les hérésies ne sont-elles pas nécessaires?"¹⁸

The social upheaval had produced real and progressive changes in the customs especially beneficial to women and children. The Revolution had been instrumental in liberating women more rapidly than anywhere else in the world, considering that they had been kept in the middle ages as far as their status was concerned. Subjected to beatings, left in ignorance, they now enjoyed complete legal and political equality of sexes. Far in advance of other countries, the Soviet women

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 153.

played a large role in the intelligentsia: They constituted one third of the student population in universities, they were doctors, laboratory technicians, they were active in publishing and in art.

The Party needed man-power and it also needed Party members to insure a future of loyal Communists and so a major effort was directed at the child. It was the child that affected the future of society and therefore the State took great care to protect first the expectant mother then the future citizen by creating child care centers, nurseries and kindergartens. In spite of the political indoctrination they would receive, Durtain, taking a historical and practical perspective did not condemn its actions entirely:

"quelques ces dogmes puissent être, un Etat qui débarbouille les enfants, les instruits, les sort d'une vie animale, vaut mieux qu'une famille ignorante et malpropre."¹⁹

Marriage and divorce had been made easy but remarkably enough free unions of long durations were admittedly preferred by the young. Comparing the situation to that of the United States, first to emancipate its women, it was a far more moral society in terms of sexual relations because it was more open and frank. In the United States extra-marital affairs were frequent but hidden behind a façade of faithful-

¹⁹Ibid., p. 209.

ness and so he judged society to be morally dishonest.

In examining the function of the regime itself, in a section specifically devoted to it, he realized what an outstanding irony it was that a political form existed whose omnipotent character, strengthened and enforced by the Army, Justice and the Police, extensions of itself and by which it ruled, was so far removed from the marxist ideal of the withering away of the state. The Revolution had been beneficial for the old sores, it did much good for the masses by providing for the health of the nation and care and protection of the young; why then, he wondered, did it not pursue this ideal direction of serving the people and relax its relentless and harsh persecution of what it considered to be heretics, that is, enemies of the state. This policy, he noted, was particularly detrimental to the regime both at home and abroad. The one curious factor he pointed out, was that these dictatorial powers, evil as they were, could not have endured unless there had been a tacit consent of inner forces, namely the masses. As one Communist explained it to him, whatever form the government took on, there was a complete communion of feelings and action between the citizens and its leaders: "un fait d'ordre mystique".²⁰ Durtain predicted that this mystical bond would not last, that it would fade as soon as the voters required some concrete guaranties of

²⁰Ibid., p. 270.

their rights. How wrong he was to be!

Whatever its character, however, loudly its enemies proclaimed its imminent failure, the fact remained that the Revolution had survived for ten years and was still existing. True it had enemies on both sides, the Right and the Left, but, Durtain warned, another Révolution, another civil war would destroy Russia. After the "operation" she had already experienced, what she required now was time to recuperate.

In the ten years many changes had occurred in institutions both positive and negative, but what of the human element? The violent transition from rigid class structure to the equality of all was a noble ideal that, given time, would have been achieved by natural evolution and at a less costly price. This price was indeed a heavy one to pay from the point of view of those who had enjoyed privileges accorded them by the arbitrary factor of birth or talent and who had lost them. Durtain was one of the few travellers who sensed in the "contemptible bourgeois" a condition worthy of pity and, in the following passage he brought out the tragic quality of the historical process for a particular group:

"Les visages ont été patiemment usés par la longueur du temps; les tics du désespoir ne sont plus que de simples rides; les regards ont cessé d'interroger le destin pour soupeser avidement l'acheteur qui passe. . . . Beaucoup de vieux, poil gris ou blanc; tant de visages

où le menton est trop près du nez: on n'a pas remplacé les dents, meubles coûteux. Parfois, dans ces faces, restes de tyrannie ou d'égoïsme point très beaux, et c'est là misère de plus!"²¹

With a few expressive strokes, Durtain captured the atmosphere in human terms: the end of an era and its implications not for those who had been suffering, the masses, but for those who had been the privileged ones. His observing eye, so understanding and so full of compassion was devoid of any suggestion of superiority or judgement. The passage of time, the pain were now marked by wrinkles; all hope had been given up for a return to the old ways. Now they lived in a poverty which, unlike the rest of the population, they had not known before. Unable to exercise their authority as of old, this privation heightened their misery, making them the real victims of the Revolution, the sufferers and as such, pathetic beings. Because of his sincere compassion for mankind Durtain understood pain regardless of class. Durtain took it upon himself to examine impartially the lot of those people considered enemies of Communism and therefore, odious by Revolutionaries. It was indeed painful and pitiful to see the odds and ends, that attested to their lost past and wealth. The remaining possessions such as field glasses, samovars, icons and laces evoked this comment from him:

²¹Ibid., p. 234.

"Restes d'objects, restes d'années, restes de vie. Ruine de ruine. . . . Ici sous chacun de ces vaincus, on imagine un lot de tombes."²²

"Restes", "ruine", "vaincus" and "tombes" spelled a vanquished group of people. Was this just? Was this right? Durtain raised the moral issue of the Revolution and his answer implied that he believed it was due to the natural evolution of time; it was unjust but as natural but as natural as the "terrible dialogue de l'hiver et du printemps."²³

Another group hated by the Revolutionaries because they chose to leave the Mother country, and whose lot Durtain examined, were the expatriates. They had survived imprisonment, pogroms, misery and poverty of the dark years and "vis à vis de ces malheureux," he wrote, "les sarcasmes sont inhumains".²⁴ When he reproached Soviet playwrights for making fun of them in their plays, he was told that the antagonism between the Russians abroad and at home was a purely family matter and strangers were not to interfere. Durtain perceived the problem differently. He felt that the role of an impartial witness was needed here to stop the vain exchange of recrimination. In this battle, typically, he observed not enemies confronting each other, but men who were "les uns et les autres

²²Ibid., p. 235.

²³Ibid., p. 237.

²⁴Ibid., p. 246.

`a jamais égarés et souffrants."²⁵ This had been Salavin's discovery in Le Club des Lyonnais. This is what Gide thought of those friends of his who were converting to Catholicism. Durtain came to the conclusion, the bitter truth that the situation illustrated, that men could not love each other.

The Revolution had been unjust for some, it was hated both at home and abroad by many, but nonetheless it was a very active principle that shaped the lives of all Soviet citizens and even created a new and opposing element in the temperament of the Slav. Transformed from a likeness of the fictitious character Oblomov who suffered from a sickness called "oblomovshchina", neglecting himself and all around him, living in a dream world, he was now filled with good will and zeal. The principle that caused the change Durtain characterized as religious and not political. It was a new faith.

In the final chapter where he made this statement, the reader realizes that he had been led to this conclusion all along and to this characterization of the new society: "ce n'est pas une révolution, c'est une religion nouvelle".²⁶ Durtain had shown that in all areas of life the attitudes were best described as religious: the teaching in schools, relationship of the masses to its leaders, the cult of Lenin, a session of the Council of Soviets, the public repentance required of heretic writers, etc. For the first time people

²⁵Ibid., p. 247.

²⁶Ibid., p. 329.

had come to believe that only through Marxism and science could the development of man be insured and those things he longed for, knowledge, justice, health, comfort could be acquired. "Telle est," he concluded, "l'innovation profonde de la foi nouvelle."²⁷

To characterize more clearly the Other Europe, Durtain compared it to the U.S.A. As complex as the American society was, he found that it was possible to compare the two from a religious point of view. The American was a bewildered man torn apart by two opposing cults: one of high values and the other made up of fetiches and the idolatry of mechanical objects such as cars, radios. . . . He did possess the highest level of physical comfort in the world with which the Russians could certainly not compete having just come out of a series of cataclysms. Yet the latter's enthusiastic and wholehearted faith in Leninism made them far happier in their convictions of better things to come while the American was suffering from confusion, not knowing what it was really all about. The significant question was, of course, which of the two economic systems would survive? Durtain turned to the sixteenth century for an answer, to a period of revolution and religious ferment, an age when catholicism had to face the heretics of the Reformation. Then, as now, each side was sure it would overcome the other but, in fact, the world appeared large enough to contain both faiths. As they each took over one of the Americas,

²⁷Ibid., p. 332.

they learned to coexist. Now too, he believed, both systems would learn to live side by side.

Eight years after that initial trip to the Other Europe, Durtain returned with another friend of the old Abbaye group, the poet Charles Vildrac, to observe any new features that might have evolved in the interim and to report on any new achievements. This progress report appeared in his book Le Globe Sous le Bras (1936) and confirmed his initial prediction that the Soviet Union would survive.

The outstanding difference that struck him was the growing similarity between the people of features and dress, an equalization that was breaching the gaps so evident in 1927. Class distinctions were still visible: the worker and the intellectual could still be told apart just by outer appearances. However, these differences were the slightest of anywhere else in the world. Whereas once the passers-by could have been easily classified according to their age as pre-Revolutionary figures or as the beneficiaries of the Revolution, the "time" barrier that had created an abysmal gap between them had been closed. It was now clearly a worker's world and a world of workers. The standard of life was improving but this did not mean that their sole concern was to attain more comforts. In this planned economy collaboration was the determining factor of success or failure. From this perspective it is understandable why Durtain agreed with the Soviets that individualism, a concept so dear to the Western

world, with the implied freedom of movement and thought, could be damaging to the Soviet system because of its anarchic qualities away from the trend toward cohesion. Individualism in a negative sense meant "travailleurs, migrants sans motif qui voudraient sans cesse changer de besogne, changer d'espace".²⁸ With specific goals to be fulfilled for the sake of the society at large, such an attitude could not be acceptable and must be overcome. In the positive and best sense of the term "individual" should imply a concern for others:

"Individu: seule réalité humaine à condition . . . d'y voir un ensemble chez lequel autrui doit occuper la part essentielle de la pensée et de l'acte."²⁹

Work had now been given a very special value and it assumed priority over such considerations as personal comfort or material gain. Virtue resided in effort and thus a new morality was born. Because it was the work being done that the future depended upon, it had become a source of joy for the workers. This was a misinterpretation on Durtain's part. Work well done had its compensations of reward and recognition and this is what they strived for. The magnificent result he mentioned that was already manifest: the exploitation of man by man by the modern means of salary was eliminated from

²⁸Globe Sous Le Bras, p. 276.

²⁹Durtain, "Présentation," in Vladimir Pozner's U.S.S.R. (Paris: Les Oeuvres Representatives, 1932).

one sixth of the planet, was again inexact. His concept of exploitation was replaced by a new one, Stakhanovism. Stakhanov was a Donets miner who, by rationalizing his task and organizing a system of cooperations had been able to greatly exceed his assignment, Stalin had chosen him as a model for others to emulate. "Stakhanovites" or record-breakers were honored by having their names displayed on factory boards for example. They also received monetary compensations. "Stakhanovism" became the term that signified a more efficient means of production and it created a new social type: "l'intellectuel-manuel" or the thinking worker as the Soviet newspapers called him. This type symbolized for Durtain the New Man in Soviet society:

"sur la terre comme dans les usines, l'oeuvre la plus remarquable de l'U.R.S.S. c'est la qualité de ses nouveaux hommes."³⁰

He did not speak of the conflicts that were thus created between the Stakhanovite and the factory worker which resulted in crimes (sabotage, even murder).³¹ Very much like Gide, Durtain was greatly impressed by the enthusiasm of the young people, their joy and self-assurance, their knowing where they were going. Like Gide, he saw the young people as "chargée d'être heureuse pour toute notre planète, d'être jeune pour

³⁰Globe Sous Le Bras, p. 299.

³¹A. Harborn, "Le Mouvement Stakhanoviste," in La Nouvelle Revue Française (Jan. 1936), pp. 75-95.

elle."³² They lit the way to the future.

From this account in Le Globe Sous le Bras the reader gets the impression that people were happy in the Soviet Union, that it was in fact the best of possible worlds: there was no unemployment, the standards of living while not up to those of the West, were improving and, at any rate, the Soviet workers were far less interested in personal comforts than in working toward a common goal. Most importantly, the exploitation of man by man, by means of a salary had been abolished. Everyone it seemed, bowed down to the ideal of a future when the dictatorship of the masses would no longer be needed and man would be free, when "la loi du travail récompensé par soi-même, par la beauté de l'effort; l'union de toutes les vies individuelles associant leur rythme . . ."³³

Life had indeed improved and the effort that had attempted to "introduire l'ordre et les lois de la pensée, dans ce qui est ailleurs livré au hasard et aux circonstances"³⁴ had been heroic. Like Jean-Richard Bloch he saw in this a benefit for man by offering some stability and security in life.

There were, however, some areas, just as there had been in 1927, that still needed changing: the system was still a repressive one and the bureaucracy was hampering the function of government. Instead of arresting adversaries of the regime,

³²Globe Sous Le Bras, p. 301.

³³Ibid., p. 305.

³⁴Ibid.

Durtain suggested that an attitude of tolerance and mercy would be a far wiser policy to adopt because it would bring the respect of the world. He interpreted the current policy of coercion as a system of repression inherited from the past and which would be repudiated in the future. The Revolution needed time to rid itself of all the negative aspects, those relics of the past. His hopes that they would disappear seemed well-founded in the light of the new Constitution which had been called for on February 1, 1935 although the draft only appeared in May, 1936. At the time he was writing Durtain could not predict how Stalin would amend the Constitution.

It was the encouraging achievements of the heroic effort to bring justice to all people, the positive changes that had occurred in the psychology of the Russian, the joy and enthusiasm of the young that filled Durtain with optimism in the success of the new society and prevented him from taking a harsher and more critical view of the negative aspects, from bearing down on their potential danger. His conclusions in 1935 were the same as those he had expressed eight years before:

"C'est la première fois qu'un système adopte pour dieu l'être humain. Innovation profonde apportée par cette foi nouvelle. Une nouvelle morale. Un heroïsme nouveau . . .³⁵

While Durtain may have been mistaken in his prediction for the success of the new society along democratic lines, he

³⁵Ibid.

did observe all of its aspects carefully and systematically. His reports were informative, impartial and correct in so far as they depicted what he saw. He did explain a new civilization to others. It was in the evaluation of the effect of the new Constitution and of the true nature of Stakhanovism that he went astray. The positive achievements so far outweighed the negative, undesirable features which he saw that these were overshadowed in his mind by what seemed over-all the direction toward progress and a just and equal life for all.

His reports were meant to enlighten the French public about the new world in which it was living. When L'Autre Europe . . . appeared, critics hailed it as an impartial, truthful and complete account that was a real contribution to the understanding of the new civilization and, as one of them put it: "je ne crois pas qu'on ait écrit un meilleur livre sur la Russie moderne."³⁶

³⁶Ramon Fernandez, "L'Autre Europe: Moscou et sa Foi," Europe (Sept.-Dec., 1928), pp. 267-270.

CHAPTER II

ANDRÉ GIDE: THE FERVENT QUEST

André Gide (1869-1951) went to the Soviet Union in 1936 and came back to make public his reactions, impressions and experiences in the book Retour de l'U.R.S.S. He was a well-known intellectual and unquestionably influential since the early part of the twentieth century. As such he embodied the role held by French intellectuals as leaders of thought whose views were to be respected and considered seriously. Gide's Retour de l'U.R.S.S. stirred a great interest since, having first professed his hope and faith in the Soviet Union, he now confessed that his expectations had remained unfulfilled. As a result it became the subject of much debate and aroused a storm of criticism.

This writer-traveller had been called many things by many people throughout his lifetime: a perverter of the young, a spiritual director, an immoralist, a humanist. Articles entitled "Jugements" and "Hommage" reflect the divided opinion of him held by his contemporaries. The voluminous works of a Jean Delay (Jeunesse d'André Gide) or Daniel Moutote (Journal d'André Gide et les Problèmes du Moi: 1889-1925), dealing with only a short span of his life or of only one aspect of it, point to the complexity of their subject. Numerous studies and biographies have been written about Gide and of course there is some truth in all of them since he generously and purposely

supplied the documentation. Interpretation then is the one factor that makes the various studies valuable and different from each other, but interpretation itself should in turn be "interpreted". Those who knew him, depending on their political, religious, moral or literary view would like him or not, approve of him or not.

One clue to understanding Gide lies in the following comment made by Jean Delay:

"pour lui, à la fin de la 25e année, les jeux étaient faits. Tel qu'il était, alors, tel il demeura . . . la personnalité mobile a continué indéfiniment à se développer, . . . en fonction de son oeuvre, mais le caractère dont elle était issue avait dès lors acquis ses traits définitifs".¹

Gide himself guided us in our search to know and understand him by revealing his childhood and youth in Si Le Grain Ne Meurt . . . and the rest of his life in his Journal and correspondence. He used many literary vehicles to reveal himself and his thoughts: novels, plays, essays . . . As an intellectual, Gide spoke out on a variety of issues from literary to political ones and there are many aspects of the man that can offer fruitful and lengthy studies. His experience

¹Jean Delay, La Jeunesse d'André Gide (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1956), I, 12.

with Communism is but one of them and studies on this subject have been done, by Edith Starkie, for example, in Richard Crossman's The God That Failed and by Georges I. Brachfeld, André Gide and the Communist Temptation which originally was a doctoral dissertation. Both bring out Gide's disappointment in the Soviet Communist society as he saw it. Brachfeld attempted to show the permanence of Gide's social concern throughout his life by examining his artistic works primarily. My own approach will be a psychological one. Using the information supplied by Gide mainly in his Journal, his autobiography, Les Nourritures Terrestres and Les Nouvelles Nourritures, but of course not exclusively, as well as suggestions and insights supplied by his contemporaries and scholars, I will try to analyze and explain his attitude toward Communism and the Soviet Union. What motivated him to concern himself with social problems? What were the guiding principles behind his concept of the New Society? What did he hope to see accomplished? The answers to these questions will guide us to understand the reasons for Gide's commitment to Communism and his later disappointment with it as we also examine the gap that existed between his ideal vision and reality as he saw it.

It is generally known that André Gide was born into a Protestant family of the middle class. His father, a professor of law, was a kind, intelligent man who believed in bringing up his son as an equal. He died before André reached the age of twelve and the boy was left in the care of his mother.

Madame Gide's views on education were quite different from her husband's. Instead of treating him as a friend, patiently explaining things to him, she believed in imposing strict rules which had to be rigidly obeyed. And so rigidity and authoritarianism characterized his adolescent upbringing.

The Gide household ran smoothly for Madame Gide possessed the virtues of a perfect housekeeper. Everything was in order, everything regulated for everyone submitted to rules and regulations. Compliance, obedience and submission, in fact, summarized very aptly her philosophy of life: to obey the word of God, to comply with the rules and traditions without questioning them. This is what André was taught. In Feuillets d'Automne Gide confessed that he was sorry his mother's impulses were inhibited by conventions, the result of a bourgeois education. It was a behavior that he would condemn. Her lack of self-confidence and the need for social approval and acceptance made her fearful of spontaneity in thought and action. Such a disposition, explained Gide, was very regrettable and, in fact, did him great damage, as we shall see.

A very nervous and emotional child, he realized quite early that he was different from other children. At the age of twelve he was already subject to nervous spells that kept him home for long periods of time. It wasn't only ill health that detained him there though; he had been dismissed from school for masturbation, "le vice de mon enface" as later revealed. This took on greater significance than it should have

because it had been firmly impressed upon him to live a chaste and spiritual life. The yearnings of the flesh, he was warned, led to sin. This teaching left an indelible mark on the boy who suffered its consequences: the torments of conflict, the battle between the mind and the body. "Pour m'efforcer de m'y soumettre," he wrote in his autobiography, "je n'avais obtenue qu'un profond désarroi de tout mon être".² Here is the origin of his later rebellious attitude as well as the guilt feeling, the dualism that will explain, in part, his later sexual behavior. The practice of onanism had already revealed a sensuousness, one though, that was self-directed and his sexual experiences will continue to have the characteristic of a solitary act. His homosexuality compounded the torment but he took action to liberate himself and others from social disapproval.

These early conflicts made him seek out a solution, to resolve the dualism into harmony.³ First though, he had to escape from his environment. Thanks to a school friend, Pierre Louis, he began the process of liberation. Louis introduced him to a new world in which he would begin to make discoveries about himself: his personality, values, hopes and his talents. This represented a first step toward a gradual transformation and development of his being and in his think-

²André Gide, Si Le Grain Ne Meurt (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1954), p. 374.

³Ibid.

ing. Gide admitted that without Pierre Louis, he would have continued to live apart, like a savage, for an insurmountable shyness held him back.⁴ This was a fact, not an exaggeration. Throughout his life, Gide would confess to a shyness and a fear to do certain things, that prompted him to act at times in surprising ways. His friends attributed to it his often strange behavior. A much more outgoing person, involved in the world about him, Pierre, who shared with Gide a love of literature and the desire to write, introduced his friend to the Symbolist group in 1891. Two things should be retained from this period that would be significant for the study of the personality of Gide: Stephane Mallarmé's influence and Gide's formulation of his responsibility as a writer.

Already the author of a poetic and romantic work, Les Cahiers d'André Walter, Gide became a member of the literary headed by Mallarmé in 1891. There he met other Symbolists among whom were Paul Claudel, Paul Valéry and Maurice Maeterlinck, to name just a few. It was Mallarmé's high regard for art, placing it above all other concerns, that most impressed the young newcomer. It will, in part, explain his later attitude toward affairs outside the realm of art, be it a political movement or a social cause, that is, always hesitating before, or objecting to, complete commitment which he reserved only for his art. "La littérature," he wrote,

⁴Ibid., p. 266.

"était le but, oui la fin même de la vie".⁵

This strict devotion to art is made clear through his opinion of writers such as Léon Blum, Bernard Lazare who were pre-occupied by matters other than the purely artistic. They were actively involved in politics and it was to political action that they were really committed, not literature. Gide feared that what these men wrote, might no longer be for art's sake and, in his mind, they could not be called artistic.⁶

The political and social beliefs and activities, of men such as Blum and Lazare, especially their unconventional thinking were completely alien and frightening to a young man whose puritan, middle-class background held conformity to be the rule of life, to be the standard of good and correct behavior, whose self-assertiveness was weak, whose independence and thoughts had been held in check by his authoritarian mother. This contact with what was for him a revolutionary attitude - anti-conformity, criticism of accepted bourgeois traditions and values, made a deep impression on him. He learned from their example that each man, because of his particular character, had a specific role to play in life, a role that was unique. This perception was of the utmost importance because it paved the way for a development in the young man's thinking and to the formulation of a personal morality that he was to express in Les Nourritures Terrestres (1897).

⁵Gide, Prétextes (Paris: Mercure de France, 1929).

⁶Si Le Grain. . . ., p. 282.

During this period Gide made known his responsibility as a writer that explained both the substance and the character of his work. When asked if he had a formula that could summarize his work, Gide answered that indeed he had! His reply was: "Nous devons tous représenter".⁷ He will, of course, be true to his words.

From 1891, Gide began to make contact with a larger world outside the narrow one he had been confined to, that of art. The next step toward the liberation from the hold of his early environment was the trip he undertook to North Africa with Paul Laurens, an artist friend. Several events occurred there to break him away from the childhood mold. One was a sexual experience that brought him the conscious recognition of his homosexual tendencies and the other was the convalescence from a serious illness, tuberculosis, that represented a re-birth for Gide, an awakening to sensuality, a thirst for pleasure all of which led to the formulation of a new personal morality which in turn would earn him the title of "reformer".

Gide had already been aware of his preference for boys but still he tried to turn away from this bent, fight and correct it. The night he spent with a native girl was successful but only because he closed his eyes to imagine the boy in his arms and although the attempt to "normalize" his relations

⁷Ibid., p. 280.

failed, in terms of Gide's development, this experience represented a triumph of the demands of the flesh over virtue, of sensuality over puritan stress on spirituality and the first crucial experience of shared physical joy. What should be stressed is that these sexual contacts were strictly of a physical nature. The intellect was quite distinct from the senses and this explained the deep love he could later feel for his wife and, in spite of his physical coldness with her, their happiness together. Their union was entirely a spiritual one, based on understanding, devotion and a pure love.

Unlike Oscar Wilde, whom he knew, Gide did not flaunt his homosexuality. His own experiences were usually fleeting ones and, once, when he did witness an active homosexual act, he was greatly disturbed, even horrified.⁸ Gide had met Wilde for the first time in Paris in 1891, in North Africa and again in Florence three years later. The Irishman fascinated him. Wilde taught him to have confidence in himself and accept himself. He did have an influence on the very moral Frenchman who preferred to deny it though and stressed their differences. On one occasion when the older man ordered Gide never to write "I" again, he interpreted this to mean that Wilde was hiding behind a mask for his works were - like his own - of a confidential nature. He did not obey. Instead, he said, he chose to

⁸Gide, "In Memoriam," in Oscar Wilde (Paris: Mercure de France, 1925).

reveal himself entirely for he disliked artifices and believed in straightforwardness, simplicity and sincerity. Another now famous comment made by Wilde about his lips was used by Gide to demonstrate their divergent views: "Je n'aime pas vos lèvres," he said, "elles sont droites comme celles de quelqu'un qui n'a jamais menti."⁹ Gide further explained that the art of Wilde was born out of a need to hide, his own - to reveal.

This quest for truth and sincerity in writing about himself and his perceptions were already characteristic features that would determine both his art and his behavior. These features together with a crisis that occurred in his personal life would lead him to publish a treatise on homosexuality, Corydon, and his autobiography, Si Le Grain Ne Meurt.

Gide had always insisted that his physical relationships were strictly on a sensual level, completely devoid of intellectual or emotional participation. This was why he could truthfully say he loved his wife and had never betrayed his loyalty to her, was never false to her, that is, until he became totally involved with Marc Allégret. The situation became complicated in 1918 when his wife found out about this affair. Betrayed and hurt, she reacted very strongly. Her pain was so keen that she tried to wipe out her past with Gide and burnt all his letters to her, an act that had a devastating impact on him. Their happiness together ended and Gide was overcome with grief.

⁹Gide, Incidences (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1924), p. 94.

The personal crisis that followed led him to reveal his true nature to the world. Now that he no longer needed to protect his wife against public opinion, in spite of Oscar Wilde's trial and ensuing imprisonment that ended a creative and successful career, unheeding the warnings by friends that the publication of those works would do him great personal harm, both to his name and his person, characteristically he went ahead with his plans.

Corydon was an attempt to prove that homosexuality was not an illness, as Proust depicted it in Sodom and Gomorrhha, nor was it a despicable act contrary to nature. In fact, it was only the Christians who judged it to be immoral. In Ancient Greece where it had represented a specific form of love, that of a mature man for an adolescent, this type of a relationship became a worthwhile educational system and flourished for the benefit of society. It was by no means a corrupting force. When he later read about himself as a pernicious influence on young people, he was shocked and hurt: "Pervertir la jeunesse!" he cried, ". . . comme si l'initiation à la volupté était en soi, un acte de perversion!" C'est en général tout le contraire!"¹⁰ He considered himself as exercising a useful and beneficial influence on them. It was his conviction that only the friendship of an older friend can help a youngster slip safely into manhood and keep him from such evil temptations as prostitution.

¹⁰ Roger Martin du Gard, Notes sur André Gide: 1913-1951 (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1951), p. 97.

Si Le Grain Ne Meurt is an autobiography that strikes one as a confession rather than an effort to recreate the events of one's own past and leave a testimony for future generations as Duhamel, for example, did in Lumières Sur Ma Vie. Gide's aim was to explain himself by revealing all the secrets of his nature, by baring his soul and thus showing that he was not like others. His honesty and tone are reminiscent of another original and complex being of different era, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. But Rousseau was prompted to write his Confessions by illness, a sick need to justify himself. Gide's work was intended as a self-revelation and a desire to shock the public. Corydon too had been meant to embarrass ("je veux gêner").

The publication date of Corydon¹¹ was 1924 and Si Le Grain Ne Meurt 1926 a time when Gide had finally become known as the greatest living French writer, a time of long-awaited glory.¹² What had prompted him to reveal to the public his sexual habits, to justify what hitherto was considered an abnormality, to speak openly on a subject that was taboo? It has been mentioned that Gide no longer felt the need to protect his wife from discovering his true leanings. But there was a great deal more. Roger Martin du Gard, a writer and close friend of Gide's since 1913, explained this action as a Dostoevskyan need for expiation, his "intoxication slave".¹³ He was referring to the

¹¹Corydon had been published in a limited edition in 1911.

¹²Gide's work, well ahead of its time, had been appreciated by only a small elite.

¹³Notes Sur André Gide, p. 46.

Russian's readiness to confess, to ask for pardon, not of a priest for instance, privately, but publicly.¹⁴ Gide himself described his move as a necessity to obey an inner impulse for truth: "J'ai besoin, besoin, de dissiper enfin ce nuage de mensonge dans lequel je m'abrite, depuis ma jeunesse . . . J'y étouffe".¹⁵ Besides, Gide believed that public opinion had evolved since Oscar Wilde's trial, since the writings of Freud on the subject, that sexual taboos had been lifted, and the moral code had consequently become more liberal. He felt sure the time was right for such a work. The most persuasive reason though was his secret desire to be the first to write about a controversial subject, and to make a considerable impact with it. That was characteristic of him. Unfortunately, his evaluation of public opinion was misguided. It was not ready for his revelations. The book had no influence on either the laws relating to homosexuality or the judgment of the people on this issue. As predicted there was a negative side to this venture. Gide did create a scandal and he was hurt by the public's hostility to his books. Good or bad, Corydon was a work that Gide considered as his most important one: "Je crois . . . avoir dit dans ce livre à peu près tout ce que j'avais à dire sur le sujet importantissime et que l'on n'avait pas dit avant moi."¹⁶ He strived to be first and endeavored to be different.

¹⁴Gide, Dostoevsky (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1923), pp. 114-115.

¹⁵Notes Sur André Gide., p. 44.

¹⁶Gide, Journal: 1942-1949 (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1950), p. 39.

He had already achieved that distinction with his work Les Nourritures Terrestres which set him apart from his contemporaries. This work represented a break with the Realist and Naturalist Schools of the nineteenth century French writers as well as from the Symbolist group. It was a personal, lyrical expression of joy of living. The recovery from illness had awakened in Gide a thirst for pleasure, for happiness, for living fully: here he revealed his new-found values which would always form the basis of his future expressions of beliefs and judgements and would shed light on his reactions to the aims of the Soviet Revolution and Soviet society. Here too he made clear his concept of the role of the writer as teacher and guide.

Addressing himself to a fictional character, a disciple, he called Nathanaël with the familiar "tu", a novelty, he created a bond with the reader and an intimacy that is felt all the more strongly because of the sincerity of tone, of the enthusiasm too that he succeeded in communicating through his own joy and fervor. The sense of the narrator's nearness, his active presence is felt as well as a generosity by the total unreserved gift of himself. More than just reaching out and offering his love, the author wanted to teach, to guide his reader to a new way of living ("Mon rôle a été moralisateur").¹⁷ Now Gide would rebel against his mother's moral code, against middle-class values and offered a new way of life that would

¹⁷Notes Sur André Gide, p. 97.

bring happiness to man that would help him find fulfillment and finally, but most importantly, would bring out in him his true nature where lay the true worth of every human being. His ethic is summarized in the following way:

"Agir sans juger si l'action est bonne ou mauvaise. Aimer sans s'inquiéter si c'est le bien ou le mal."¹⁸

To obey one's impulses and one's instincts and not stifle them for some code that cannot be right if it did not bring happiness: that was Gide's message.

The statement: "Mon bonheur est fait de ferveur"¹⁹ is an attack on the bourgeois emphasis on material possessions, especially money, as if they had the power to bring happiness.

In this work, many of the fundamental beliefs and ideals were made evident that would appear in other works, The Immoralist, for example, and they would earn him both disciples and critics. To his disciples he represented the teacher he had wanted to be and the guide to a new morality, a promise of a full life and freedom from the restrictions imposed by middle-class values. Some critics sensed in Gide a powerful force that could undermine society for he was fostering a new way of life that spelled anarchy since it was contrary to the existing and accepted principles.

Henri Massis, Gide's most fervent and adamant critic,

¹⁸Gide, Les Neurritures Terrestres (Paris: Bordas, 1971), p. 74.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 124.

called him an "immoralist", quickly adding that this judgment was not based on his homosexuality but on his role as a "reformer", as one who was opening up the way for change both in the spiritual realm and in the current value system.²⁰

Already then Gide was advocating reform, already he openly went against society's ethic, the accepted norm. He would later see in the work of the Soviet Revolution his own aims being pursued. Massis was moved to speak out against Gide by the convictions he held and stood to protect: Catholicism and the respect for traditional values as well as by the threat he felt was posed by Gide's writings.

Since Gide assumed the leadership of the Nouvelle Revue Francaise in 1909, his influence both literary and spiritual was undeniable. The purpose of the small group he formed around him was to re-examine French and European values without the prejudices of any school or party and to substitute new criteria for those surviving symbolist periodicals. Jean Schlumberger's description of the kind of group it was, testified to Gide's continuing conviction in individualism. "Our unity never partook of the uniform," he said, "It did not hamper our individual self-affirmation and brought together new recruits without hampering them either."²¹ This unity had the character of a cohesion brought about not by a program but

²⁰ Henri Massis, D'André Gide à Marcel Proust (Paris: Lar-danchet, 1948), p. 47.

²¹ Justin O'Brien, "N.R.F.," in French Literary Horizons (N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1967), p. 176.

was based on a few principles, moral as well as esthetic. Gide was indisputedly then and after the War the prime mover of the venture and gave many young writers a chance to be published. During the days before 1914, the works of a whole generation of new writers, among whom were François Mauriac, Jean Giraudoux, Jules Romains, and Georges Duhamel, appeared in it.²²

Gide's own works, ironically, hardly sold at all and his readers were limited to a small group. The reason for his lack of popularity, he later explained, was that like Baudelaire and Rimbaud, he too was ahead of his time and had to wait until the public's tastes evolved sufficiently to be appreciated.

Because of his influence in the spiritual realm, and because he remained undecided, Gide posed a threat to those around him who were converting to Catholicism, men such as Jammes, Claudel, and Ghéon. When he had directed his readers to develop their physical senses, not to deaden them, to seek pleasure ("je ne crois plus au péché"), to see God everywhere ("Ne cherche Dieu ailleurs que partout"), he opened himself up to attack. What angered Massis, for one, more than anything else, it seems, was the following statement of Gide's which he quoted:

"Il me paraît monstrueux que l'homme ait
besoin de Dieu pour se sentir d'aplomb sur

²²Ibid., p. 177.

la terre. . . . Je voudrais que l'on élève
 l'âme de manière qu'elle ne sente pas acculée
 au désespoir en apprenant tout à coup que
 Dieu lui manque. Mieux vaut s'en convaincre
 d'avance; et le meilleur moyen d'empêcher
 qu'il nous manque, c'est bien d'apprendre
 à se passer de lui."²³

It is clear in this passage that Gide did not want people to need God, or use him as a moral support. They should show, he felt, greater strength and independence. He had been tempted to follow the example of his friends and convert to Catholicism when he came to realize that these men were victims of a mystical infection, of a state of mind brought on by the War. Gide admitted that his own Numquid et Tu was a product dictated by those times. Now, however, he was aware of the reasons for this outbreak of religious fervor and that everyone of the converts seemed to be suffering from some sort of weakness be it fatigue or fear, disappointment or illness, sexual or emotional impotence. Their conversion was not motivated by religious faith alone, but were actually searching for help, for a source of strength or a pacifier. This gave Gide the excuse not to join the others, to remain where he enjoyed being - apart from the crowd, free of commitment. This was one example of behavior and reasoning that would be repeated in relation to Communism.

²³Massis, p. 53.

Gide's decision did not mean that he had no weaknesses himself. Like the great reformers he compared himself to, Luther and Rousseau, Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, he suffered from inner turmoil that, in his case, led him not to Catholicism which he despised for its dogmatism, but to a particular interest in psychology and morality. It made him forever preoccupied with such questions as: What is man? What kind of life should he lead? Should it be an active one or a contemplative one? What should his relationship be with God? What can man do? Where lies his salvation? He looked for answers in the Gospels, in Nietzsche, Dostoevsky and a number of other writers and philosophers. The spiritual and moral aspects of man concerned him most. What is good, what evil? Where were Heaven and Hell? Hell, he said, was present but then so was joy. Joy was a state of being that could be achieved on earth and not in an afterlife. "Et nunc" quoted Gide from the Bible. Eternity was here on earth and now in time. It was most important for the understanding of Gide's basic beliefs to see him as revolting against those who preached a life of joy in the hereafter only, such as the Catholic Church. How could one become filled with joy? Gide contrasted two views that offered a way, views that were based on opposing concepts of the individual. For Nietzsche, man must be a superman who must express and assert himself. That was his goal in life. For Dostoevsky the answer was: resignation. Quoting a passage from The Possessed, Gide showed

how close Dostoevsky was to the Gospels:

"Quand tu abreuveras la terre de tes larmes,
quand tu en feras présent, ta tristesse
s'évanouira aussitôt, et tu sera tout
consolé."²⁴

This state of joy could be reached by self-abnegation, a renunciation of that which is unique in oneself, for it prevented one from entering the Kingdom of God and participating in universal life. How did one resolve these contradictions between individualism and renunciation? Christ had answered this question: "Qui veut sa vie la perdra;" quoted Gide, "qui donnera sa vie pour moi la rendra vraiment vivante".²⁵ How did Gide reconcile the emphasis laid on the individual's uniqueness of Les Nourritures Terrestres and now the sacrifice of this very quality? It had to do with the stages of man's inner development. In Dostoevsky he had written: "le sacrifice de soi-même au profit de tous, est selon moi l'indice du plus grand développement de la personnalité, de sa supériorité, d'une possession parfaite de soi-même, du plus grand libre arbitre".²⁶ And in "Billets à Angèle": "Le triomphe de l'individualisme est dans le renoncement de l'individualité".²⁷ It was this reasoning that would enable him to readily accept

²⁴Dostoevsky, p. 213.

²⁵Ibid., p. 54.

²⁶Ibid., p. 55.

²⁷Incidences, p. 38.

a society of the Communist type in which the collective was the dominant feature.

Gide's profound understanding of Dostoevsky, his attraction toward the Russian novelist stemmed from the many traits they had in common, from the physical ills and mental anxieties to their concern with ethics. Gide admitted to an influence but preferred to refer instead to their similarity of thought.

Gide resorted to psychology as a means for understanding himself and his conflicts, and through it, to resolve them into some kind of a tolerable harmony. His preoccupations with moral problems, with the inner life of man, earned him the title coined by Malraux of a "directeur de conscience".²⁸ André Malraux in 1927 referred to Gide's influence on the young and called him an innovator in the realm of the spirit, a teacher who showed them how to dominate their torment and who revealed to them the intellectual morality.

Henri Massis, acknowledged this influence and because of it, reproached Gide with shunning his responsibility:

"Eveiller le trouble qu'une âme portait
en elle, lui en prendre conscience en se
prêtant à demi, puis fuir dès qu'elle le
presse, voilà tout l'enseignement d'André
Gide, ce qu'il appelle son influence . . .

²⁸Massis, p. 261.

André Gide est essentiellement l'homme
qui se refuse."²⁹

Massis also attacked Gide with the words of Jacques Rivière
who had intended them as praise:

"Cette âme est détachée; elle ne se fixe
en aucune possession. Elle ne donne son
adhésion que comme un baiser; aussitôt
elle la retire".³⁰

Massis was right. This attitude was very clear in
Les Nourritures Terrestres when he gives advice to Nathanaël:
"Laisse à chacun le soin de sa vie";³¹ "Ne demeure jamais.
. . . Rien n'est plus dangereux pour toi que ta famille, que
ta chambre, que ton passé";³² "Ne prends de chaque chose que
l'éducation qu'elle t'apporte".³³

Why couldn't Gide commit himself to anything or anyone
completely? Because making a choice meant leaving something
out, just as loving someone in particular meant not loving
someone else, ("Toute préférence me semblait injustice;
voulant rester à tous, je ne me donnais pas à quelqu'un")³⁴
This was Gide's explanation for his seeming egotism. The

²⁹Ibid., p. 76.

³⁰Ibid., p. 78.

³¹Les Nourritures Terrestres, p. 75.

³²Ibid., p. 97.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., p. 119.

last lines of Les Nourritures Terrestres offer perhaps the best clue by which to defend him. The cult of the self was but one aspect of Gide's teaching, one that he developed here but, as he admitted himself, there was more to life: "AUTRUI - importance de sa vie; lui parler. . . ." ³⁵ Only at the very end did he make it clear that his was one of many possible attitudes to take in life and, in any case, it should never exclude concern for others. He was not advocating a selfishness in the derogatory sense of the word but a necessity to fulfill oneself, to allow one's nature to evolve so that one could advance to a higher level of selflessness and renunciation. Every person is a unique being with his own needs and temperament and it was not right for anyone to impose a general rule of behavior for all, be it a church, a ruler or a society, nor can anyone claim to be able to discover the truth about another being. Everyone had the obligation to try to uncover this inner truth alone and cultivate it for this truth was what made each person unique, which in turn made him "le plus irremplaçable des êtres". ³⁶ This was the duty and responsibility of each human being and this is why Gide commanded his imaginary disciple to throw away his book and set out on his own way.

³⁵Ibid., p. 179.

³⁶Ibid., p. 182.

How could this man who so valued individualism, this artist who considered it necessary to avoid any commitment that might sway him from his art and prevent him from remaining "disponible", suddenly reverse his position to participate actively in a particular cause, in a social movement? What was it that attracted him to Soviet Russia and Communism, to the new society that was based not on spiritual values but on materialism and dedication to creating equality among its members? Why would he, who considered himself incompetent in social, economic and political realms involve himself in these matters? To answer these questions it will be necessary to examine the reason and nature of his commitment and the extent to which it contradicted the patterns established earlier in his life.

Gide openly declared his admiration for the Soviet Union only in 1931. He was then over sixty years of age and already haunted by death. He feared that he was becoming sclerosed and that he had nothing very new, very ardent to day, little tension and creative imagination left. He was falling back upon reminiscences (Si Le Grain Ne Meurt), essays, rather flat and dry, semi-ironical stories (Robert, . . .). He stood in need of a renewal. Outwardly, since 1925, he sought it by travelling and by involving himself with social and political problems which until then he scorned. The Symbolists had taught him to keep art free from extra-literary influences and Gide was convinced that artistic creation required ignorance

and a lack of curiosity for social and political questions. He had also admitted incompetence in social, economic and political areas preoccupied as he was with his own psychological problems which had made him unable to see the world about him in terms of some objective criterion. However, the particular intellectual atmosphere that followed the First World War forced him to turn his attention to it and he claimed now that he had always concerned himself with mankind, that he had sought change and advocated reforms. "Aucun progrès de l'humanité n'est possible," he wrote in his Journal in 1931, "que celle-ci ne secoue le joug de l'autorité et de la tradition."³⁷ Gide blamed his emphasis and concentration on the individual rather than the social because, as he wrote in Literature and Ethics (1897) and in The Future of Europe (1923) he believed it was essential to reform man first; social questions would be dealt with later. When he came to realize that in order for man to change, institutions had to be changed first, he reversed his priorities.

That which one critic (Jean Guéhenno) termed as Gide's "conversion" to the religion of man, when he turned his attention away from himself, also reflected the new values and priorities of the 1920's and 1930's. These were decades of unrest and anxiety. Leading intellectuals were forced to face reality, speak out against social and economic in-

³⁷Gide, Journal: 1889-1939 (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1948), p. 1037.

justices and the political situation that was threatening Europe with another war. Gide felt this growing anxiety and his state of mind had been aptly described by his friend Roger Martin du Gard, even though he was referring to himself, when he wrote in 1932 that until two or three years ago, he had been living in an ivory tower, but that now, the propelling force of events compelled him to think about the future: "Nous allons . . . vers des temps où il sera anachronique et vaguement criminel de faire le mandarin".³⁸ He stressed in the letter that it was in fact Gide's influence that prompted him to think about current affairs.

Actually Gide was right when he said he had dealt with social problems many years before. From his experience as a juror he produced Souvenirs de la Cour d'Assise in 1912 in which he criticized the judicial system. Then, after his trip to the Congo in 1925, he wrote two works, Voyage au Congo and Retour du Chad which exposed the evils of the capitalistic system and showed a concern for the poor and the oppressed. His remarks were critical of the colonial system that was exploiting the native population and he went so far as to write letters exposing that situation. These represented the extent of his commitment but they did reflect a growing awareness of problems besetting others which were different from his own and was a step toward actively involving him-

³⁸ André Gide et Roger Martin du Gard, Correspondance: 1913-1934 (Paris: Lib. Gallimard, 1968), I, p. 512.

self to do something to help them. Until then, Gide's works embodied personal problems; now, he turned his attention to speaking out for others, those who could not make themselves heard. In 1921, quoting the Goncourt brothers, he wrote: "On n'écrit pas les livres qu'on veut".³⁹ He had been writing books conceived before the age of thirty (1900) so that each one of them pulled him back in time and did not correspond at all to the actual state of his mind. Now at last, he said, he had discharged his debt.

Still, the question remains, what prompted Gide to commit himself to a far greater extent than he ever had so late in life? Roger Martin du Gard reported a conversation that throws light on his state of mind around 1932 and explains his decision:

"Il évoque l'évolution rapide du monde, des idées, des institutions. Il avoue qu'il a du mal à suivre, qu'il se sent un peu 'dépassé'. Les progrès sociaux qu'il appelle de tous ses vœux, il sait bien qu'il ne vivra pas assez pour les voir réalisés; et cette certitude contribue à le détacher de la vie. Il ajoute . . . 'c'est pour cela que je m'engage aussi à fond, aussi imprudemment (sic) dans le communisme'".⁴⁰

³⁹Incidences, p. 52.

⁴⁰Notes sur André Gide., p. 99.

Martin du Gard interpreted his actions as not having been undertaken in a very serious vein. Had Gide been younger, he would not have given in to his enthusiasm without a more critical attitude that was far more characteristic of him. Martin du Gard predicted in 1934, knowing this friend of his as well as he did, that his especially highly developed critical faculty, the loathing for any dogmatic system and his attraction for opposing, contradictory situations would make him uncomfortable in an atmosphere of certitude and blind faith. He was amazed that the Communist Party actually counted on Gide's fidelity. Echoing the words of Jacques Riviere he wondered at it:

"Quelle imprudence d'attacher tant de prix
à l'affiliation d'un esprit aussi naturelle-
ment inapte à la conviction, toujours ailleurs
que là où il semblait s'être fixé la veille!
Je crains fort que . . . il ne déçoivent un
jour ses nouveaux amis".⁴¹

How right he was to be!

Meanwhile the result of Gide's decision added a new aspect to his life and character. What irony for a man so committed to being free of commitment for the most part of his life, to have some letters, articles and speeches he had written in the 1930's on social and political issues, collected and published under the title of Littérature Engagée! The

⁴¹Ibid., p. 108.

writings also included a play of socialist persuasion, Robert ou l'Intérêt Général, never performed in its original version (1935) although it had been translated into Russian by Elsa Triolet. A bad play, Gide himself said he was sorry he had not listened to his friends and abandoned it.

Not surprisingly though, the book began with Gide quoting Jean Guéhenno who denounced him as a coward for refusing to face life and for being fearful of truth in an article entitled "Ame, ma belle âme," reprinted from the magazine Europe and dated October 26, 1930. The following scathing remarks were written, it must be noted, before Gide's outspoken enthusiasm for Communism:

"ils sont là quelques uns . . . qui,
loin du tumulte à l'écart du monde, se
réunissent et tiennent d'admirable et
inefficaces propos. Les hommes ordin-
aires . . . entreprennent des guerres,
des grèves, des révolutions . . ."⁴²

Gide's answer showed his awareness that there was some truth in that statement though and he used the article to emphasize that it was a truth not based on fact but prompted by hearsay, a reputation based on rumors and gossip. This reputation, although untrue, in Gide's mind, had been damaging because it diminished his prestige. When he had denounced the abuses of the Concessionary Companies of the Congo, Gide

⁴²Gide, Littérature Engagée (Paris: Lib Gallimard, 1950), p. 13.

had said: "ma voix n'aurait pas eu tant de mal à se faire entendre, sans cette reputation de mandarin insoucieux des autres".⁴³ It was a fact that, besides the Congo episode, Gide had worked during the First World War at the Foyer Franco-Belge. He could not participate as a soldier because of his age and ill health. Later, Roger Martin du Gard would characterize his work there, which lasted three years, as one of perseverance and devotion that were meritorious.⁴⁴

Although some would later blame Gide for being close to the Right wing Action Française, he excused himself by saying that he actually was inclined toward the Left but he did it, he said, "par égard pour quelques amis à qui il me déplait de déplaire".⁴⁵ Since the direction he then took did not actually correspond to his natural bent, it had no value, he rationalized, for only an unbiased and unprejudiced thought had any worth. It is evident that Gide could always find an excuse for his actions and turn about face whenever necessary. This, of course, takes much credibility away from his "commitment" to Communism.

Gide's more vocal and enthusiastic participation in current events, as a well-known figure of influence began in 1931 and it was as an admirer of the Soviet Union. In his Journal he wrote in May of that year:

⁴³Ibid., p. 14.

⁴⁴Notes Sur André Gide., p. 105.

⁴⁵Incidences, p. 49.

"Mais surtout j'aimerais vivre assez pour voir le plan de la Russie réussir. . . . Jamais je ne me suis penché sur l'avenir avec une curiosité plus passionnée. Tout mon coeur applaudit à cette gigantesque et pourtant toute humaine entreprise".⁴⁶

It was also a time when he stood up to speak up against War. In 1932, there were already threats on all sides of another conflict. China was at war: Japan had conquered Manchuria; the economic crisis in the United States was spreading into Europe and especially Germany where Hitler was rising to power in that weakened country. A world congress against war was being formed in Europe in which Gide took part, making his position officially known. Yet, when the war would break out, he would be silent throughout. Two opposing forces paralyzed him, his own conviction in pacifism and the appeal to arms which came to him from the well-known pacifist, Albert Einstein. Gide was all the more disturbed by the dilemma because his admiration for the scientist was so great but so was his horror at the thought of war. Einstein understood the abominable threat that was posed by Hitler and that the only answer was to wipe him off the face of the earth.

Having made known his enthusiasm for Communism, Gide nonetheless refused to join any group, be it the Party or the

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 1044.

Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists, created in sympathy with the Soviet counterpart: The Revolutionary Association of Soviet Writers. There were several reasons for this reluctance to bind himself. First of all he still believed that art should not be subjected to any ideology or directive:

"Ecrire désormais d'après des principes
d'une charte cela ferait perdre toute
valeur réelle à ce que je pourrais écrire
désormais; ou plus exactement, ce serait,
pour moi, la stérilité".⁴⁷

It was vital for Gide as an artist to remain free of any obligation or duty. He was willing to participate actively, offer real sympathy and support but had to do it without constraint, freely. Again his excuse was convincing: a further commitment, he pointed out, would not be beneficial to their common cause. If he joined the Communist Party, Gide was saying, and then made speeches, wrote articles in its favor, he would simply be considered as its mouthpiece, that is, following instructions. By remaining independent, his beliefs and appeals would have greater impact because, freely pronounced, they were therefore more honest and sincere. This shying away from a "contract" so to speak, was also, as we saw, consistent with his nature. As an intellectual, he said he could not allow the feelings of duty or obligation to a cause to hamper

⁴⁷Littérature Engagée, p. 18.

his freedom of thought and action. Another interpretation would be to recognize this as a protection against the eventuality that Communism would become unpopular. It would be easy to deny his support or denounce it. Nevertheless, the commitment that he did make, of sympathy, primarily was sincere and wholehearted at the time. He found it necessary to leave the door ajar for escape should he need to which was a precaution; he indicated that, perhaps unconsciously, he did not really believe that Utopia had become a reality. Meanwhile it did give him something to be enthusiastic about, it did awaken his fervor.

Gide participated actively not only in supporting Communism but also in the affairs concerning all of Europe, with Hitler, Mussolini, Franco and the whole problem of Fascism. This essay will limit itself to his flirtation with Communism and his adventure in the Soviet Union.

What were some of Gide's thoughts on the matter in 1935? He was then 66 years old, he had spoken out on many issues such as the concept of Progress, the individual's responsibility to himself and the new society, his understanding of Communism. Perhaps the result of a meeting organized by Ramon Fernandez and held at the Union for Truth⁴⁸ on January 26, 1935 could best bring out Gide's current stand and show that prior to his trip his attitude was consistent with beliefs and convic-

⁴⁸Union for Truth was founded in 1906 by Paul Desjardin (1859-1940).

tions he had been expressing for many years. The results of the discussion were published in the Bulletin of the Union under the title: "André Gide et Notre Temps". The meeting was in the form of a debate about Gide who participated in it and made every effort to answer the many questions directed at him by friends and foe alike in, they said, the interest of objective and critical thought. Henri Massis, Gide's most persistent and relentless critic was there as well as Jacques Maritain, both representing the Catholic viewpoint.

The essential problem revolved around the apparent contradiction posed by Gide's faith in the new enterprise and his past convictions namely: how did he reconcile them with Marxism? Maritain said that there was a dichotomy between Gide's hopes for society which were bourgeois and thus would not be acceptable to orthodox Marxists, and his enthusiasm for the Soviet Union. In Maritain's opinion, only Christianity could succeed in fulfilling Gide's concept of progress, justice, a great culture and of a "sincere" or "honest" civilization. Gide responded with a blow to Christianity: the Society in which we live, he said, which claims to be Christian is pitiful. Modern society according to him has corrupted the teachings of Christ and instead had created a dogmatic doctrine and promoted fanaticism. Both dogmatism and fanaticism he was convinced were bound to produce war. The solution lay in atheism which alone could pacify the world today. When Maritain pointed out that Communism had become a form of

religion and an intolerant one at that, Gide replied: "mais l'important c'est que ce soit une religion raisonnable, raisonnée, apprise et non point révélée. Tout est là."⁴⁹ He meant that it was acceptable as long as it was not blind faith that exalted the believer but a faith in something he could be made to understand by the use of critical faculties. He further explained the difference by opposing the attitude that was based on scepticism and that led to salvation and the uncritical submission characteristic of fascism. The behavior pattern, when it was a matter of revealed truth was to listen, submit and follow the dogma: "Credere, Obbedire, Combattere". But believe in what? Obey whom? Fight what? should be the foremost concern, and the attitude taken should be one of questioning and probing otherwise the result could be "wholesale slaughter".⁵⁰

In 1933 Gide realized that Marxism was taking on the character of a religion with a dogma all its own⁵¹ but he justified it as being a temporary step, a necessary one, toward building the social state.

When asked to explain the apparent contradiction in his thinking about the responsibility of society toward its members and that of man toward society, Gide replied that there was no contradiction there. As an individualist, his

⁴⁹Littérature Engagée, p. 71.

⁵⁰Justin O'Brien, ed., "Two Declarations by André Gide," Partisan Review (July-August, 1951), p. 397.

⁵¹Journal, p. 1181.

critics remarked, he should be concerned with what society can do for man, and not, as he now did, with what man could do for society. Those assumptions, Gide declared, were derived from theoretical thinking whereas his beliefs stemmed from feelings, so that he did not see that which they considered a contradiction, to be one in effect. He reminded them that it was not the teachings of Marx that brought him to Communism but those of the Gospels, not cold rational theory, not materialism, but spiritualism. He had written in his Journal in 1933: "ce qui m'amène au Communisme, ce n'est pas Marx, c'est l'Évangile,"⁵² and the Christian belief of giving oneself - as we saw earlier - represented for Gide, a higher stage in the development of the individual, one of complete self-possession and of freedom of choice. Then too, he felt it was important for the masses to cultivate a difference between individuals, even the "anomalies", for who knows what they could produce, another Dostoevsky perhaps? Humanity, he stressed, would be the poorer without them. "Tout effort de désindividualisation au profit de la masse, est, au dernier ressort, funeste à la masse elle-même",⁵³ he wrote in August, 1935.

Another reason which had little to do with Marxist influence on him was the realization that his own situation of a privileged being was unjust and it made him feel uncomfortable. To illustrate this feeling and his position, he recounted the conversation with a man, mentioned in Souvenirs de la Cour

⁵²Ibid., p. 1175.

⁵³Ibid., p. 1232.

d'Assise, and retold in Les Faux Monnayeurs, who escaped from a shipwreck. A safety raft that could only hold a small number of victims had been lowered from the sinking ship "La Bourgogne". Those who were able to get into the raft were safe but only if they prevented the remainder from climbing in. To assure their own survival, those in the raft used knives and axes to chop off the hands of the rest. A few escaped only at the expense of others. This situation was intolerable to Gide: "je ne puis admettre une barque," he said, "où quelques uns seulement trouvent abri".⁵⁴ Intolerable also was the idea of being a "privileged" person. Social questions thus had taken on a significance for Gide.

It is essential to see him here, as a sensitive man, motivated to act by his feelings which in turn were rationalized. His most persistent and consistent belief was that man's happiness and his hopes for fulfillment were possible on earth and he was convinced that the Soviet Union represented the example of the future, when society would be based on economic justice, and social equality would liberate man from oppression and exploitation to permit the free expression of the self. Out of the material reforms that, as he understood, necessarily had to come first, spiritual reforms would follow, reforms that he had been advocating for the past forty years. At this point Gide was confident that his vision and hopes would be fulfilled in the land devoted to struggling to achieve the same goals.

⁵⁴Littérature Engagée, p. 73.

This identification of purpose is what makes Gide so sincere in his enthusiasm and so committed to the cause.

In Les Nouvelles Nourritures published in 1935, when his commitment had become public knowledge, Gide gave a lyrical expression to his new faith. Reminiscent in form and essential themes of Les Nourritures Terrestres, written nearly a half century before, he again emphasized the importance of love in life, for it represented wisdom and God and all our real possessions. He called upon man's responsibility of finding happiness and fulfillment on earth through fervor, availability, through experiencing all aspects of life. To manifest the uniqueness of one's nature was a duty one owed oneself and civilization.

"Je sens en moi l'impérieuse obligation
d'être heureux. Mais tout bonheur me
paraît haïssable qui ne s'obtient qu'aux
dépens d'autrui et par des possessions
dont on le prive. Un pas de plus et nous
abordons la tragique question sociale.

Tous les arguments de ma raison ne me
retiendront pas sur la pente du communisme".⁵⁵

United in this passage are Gide's early teaching and his new concern for the world at large in terms of the themes he had expressed many years ago. He now explicitly mentioned the "social" question. This is the essential and most striking

⁵⁵Gide, Les Nouvelles Nourritures (Paris: Bordas, 1971), p. 202.

novelty. Furthermore, it was his heart and not his reason that led him to Communism which implies that reason could have prevented him from this commitment. This gives credence to Roger Martin du Gard's interpretation of Gide's involvement as having been an impulsive one.

Gide had often admitted, as we have pointed out, his incompetence in theoretical formulations of political, social and economic questions and, at the same time, blamed the lack of warmth and human qualities in resolving them. He called for the heart and sentiment to play a larger role in the formation of the new society, which Duhamel had done as well.

In Les Nouvelles Nourritures he called out not to Nathanaël but to "camarade", a brother, an equal. He proclaimed the need for change, for a new world and a new man.

Had Communism evolved historically, as explained by Marx, rather than having been suddenly and violently imposed, the New Man would have evolved simultaneously. Given the situation however, he had to be created artificially. Lenin chose to produce him by means of education and thought control. Prior to his experience in the Soviet Union, Gide had his own conception of the New Man and it was in terms of his own idea of Progress.

First of all Gide assumed that Progress was possible, Man had changed throughout history, which meant that he would continue to do so.⁵⁶ How does man change? Only through the

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 222.

individual himself said Gide ("il ne tient qu'à moi").⁵⁷ It is clear that for him, as it would be for Jean-Richard Bloch, Progress and salvation lay within the individual.

Published after his declaration of commitment to Communism, after his promise to accept the Soviet Union's invitation to visit their country, Les Nouvelles Nourritures was welcomed by the Soviet press. It praised its anti-bourgeois features and was delighted with the message that the way to man's happiness must not be obtained at the expense of the humiliation of millions of people, through selfishness, nor through the isolation of the individual but through the latter's gift of himself and his readiness to fight the old ways.

Having accepted the invitation from the Soviet authorities to visit the Soviet Union, Gide set out in the summer of 1936. The period from July 1935 to August 1936, from the point of view of internal policies was a very promising one in the Soviet Union. There were no deaths of Politburo members, no trials of leading political figures. The harvest too was reasonably good. The New Constitution was being drafted to be ready in June 1936 and Nikolay Bukharin, the Old Bolshevik, "thought of it as a document which would make it impossible for the people to ever be 'pushed aside'".⁵⁸ Little did anyone know, especially a foreigner, that under the apparent calm, Stalin was preparing his onslaught of all opposition which would become known as the Great Purge.

⁵⁸Robert Conquest, The Great Terror: Stalin's Purges of the Thirties (N.Y.: The MacMillan Co., 1968), p. 90.

Enthusiastic, unaware, Gide set out in June. In the Soviet Union he would be accompanied by five companions: Pierre Herbart, a young writer close to Gide for a number of years; Louis Guilloux, a novelist; Eugene Dabit, also a novelist and a literary protégé of Gide's; Jacques Schiffrin, a publisher, editor and member of the inner circle of the Nouvelle Revue Francaise; and finally Jef Last, a Dutchman, member of the Communist Party and a proletarian writer. Both Herbart and Last were members of the Party and spoke Russian. Curiously enough, Gide made no mention of the departure in his Journal. The date of the last entry before the trip was May 17, 1936 and the writing was not resumed until after his return to Paris, on September 3. Another break in the Journal occurred from September 17 to October 2 when he was putting down his reflections reactions and experiences in the Soviet Union down on paper. But already the September 3 entry reflected the tone his publication about the trip would assume:

"Un immense, un effroyable désarroi. Dîné avec Schiffrin qui essaie de se raccrocher à moi et de trouver dans ma conversation quelques secours. Il parle de sa 'déception' en U.R.S.S. et de celle de Guilloux".⁵⁹

In the entry dated October 2, he noted that he had to write a preface to warn the reader. "Disappointment" and "warning"

⁵⁹Journal., p. 1252.

are ominous signs of foreboding. Where is the enthusiasm? Where are the expressions of hope and encouragement? Why note the need for a preface?

The preface signaled the alarm. Avoiding all ambiguity, clearly, unhesitatingly, Gide stated his change of heart. Before his trip, news of achievements in the Soviet Union had been varied: some spoke of great progress, others of failure. Because he felt that most were prejudiced in their views, motivated by enthusiasm or fear, Gide had decided to find out for himself the state of the great experiment. What he saw made him realize that his hopes had been misplaced and his faith in the Soviet Union a mistake. Instead of remaining silent though, as Romain Rolland would, he openly and frankly admitted his error for the sake of humanity because as he said its destiny and culture were far more important to him.⁶⁰

In his book Retour de l'U.R.S.S. (1936) Gide criticized the Soviet Union without reservation. His purpose in revealing the truth as he saw it, was to bring about an improvement so that as harsh and painful as the facts were, his intentions were to hurt only in order to heal. The work was a warning that the Soviet Union was embarking upon a dangerous path, one that would lead away from its original revolutionary goals. It had represented "une terre où l'utopie était en passe de devenir réalité".⁶¹ but it was failing to live up to those

⁶⁰Gide, Retour de l'U.R.S.S. (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1936), p. 18.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 15.

goals, and was becoming quite the opposite of the original dream.

After this forbidding preface, Gide unexpectedly began his account on a very high note, emphasizing the joy and wonderful feelings of warmth that he had experienced amongst workers and children. He was very happy around the young and enjoyed watching their sport activities, their singing and dancing. He admired the many types of recreational facilities that were made available to the people such as the little theater in the park and the cultural gardens. He was delighted with the people in general, with whom it was so easy to communicate. Nowhere, he exclaimed, had he ever felt such a deep sense of humanity, of comradeship and brotherhood. He was also very much impressed by the beauty of the landscapes, especially the forests of the Caucasus but he did not dwell on these aspects of sightseeing. He was more interested in men than in plants. He had come to explore not the aspects of nature but the nature of society.

Retour . . . is not an orderly enumeration of Gide's likes and dislikes about what he saw, nor an outright attack on the Soviet system. Rather it is a series of impressions following one another without any apparent connection or transition making the reader feel he was participating in the journey, discovering progressively the people, places and conditions. Progressively too, the reader sensed the ills that became increasingly evident. As time passed and the writer

penetrated more deeply into the country, bypassing the places he was officially meant to visit and instead exploring and observing on his own, he began to understand that there was a difference between appearance and reality. The more he saw the more strongly he conveyed the discontent, the disappointment until, exasperated, his critical powers took over and admiration yielded to condemnation. Certain aspects that appeared again and again in his report stood out and finally became the main themes around which the work revolved. They were: conformity, inequality and dictatorship. They gave the book its cohesion and impact.

At first Gide was attracted by the crowds of Moscow but he noticed a peculiarity about them in terms of dress, needs and state of being. There was a pervading sameness that appeared repulsive to him but he thought that perhaps it was necessary for their happiness. When he was shown a model kolkhoz he found it to be very attractive and prosperous. It is important to note that he did not explain how a kolkhoz functioned because he did not know himself. What he did describe and stress was the lack of individuality in them; there was a sameness everywhere that seemed so strange and saddening. For the first time he mentioned "conformity" but not in a derogatory way, simply to account for it. At this point it seemed to him that the happiness of the masses was obtained through a depersonalization of their environment.

Stakhanovism, he found out, was a method for increasing production by motivating the worker to work harder. Believing the people to be indolent and in need of prodding, Gide thought it useful method for dealing with inertia. On a similar basis he also justified the reestablishment of a salary scale which, although, it created inequality, did deal with the problem of laziness. In spite of this, he pointed out, there no longer was any exploitation of a large number of people for the profit of a few. "C'est énorme," he commented.⁶²

Seeing more and more of those features that disturbed him, uniformity, conformity and inequality, he finally came to realize that all of these were related to the greatest ill of all, to dictatorship. He was particularly distressed because they represented symptoms of the direction the new society was embarking upon, one that was quite contrary to his ideas of Progress and a better life for the people. Uniformity showed a lack of personality and individuality or a fear to express them; conformity spelled either an undeveloped critical spirit or an imposed discipline; then, the kind of inequality he witnessed could not fail to bring about the return of the old class structure that he had fought against for so long and had hoped was abolished. In Les Nourritures Terrestres he had cried out: "Familles, je vous hais! foyers clos; portes refermées; possessions jalouses du bonheur".⁶³ By remaining

⁶²Ibid., p. 46.

⁶³Les Nourritures Terrestres, p. 116.

shut to any outside influence, the family embodied the odious characteristics of totalitarianism.

In the Soviet Union, he found out, uniformity of opinion and thought existed not because it brought happiness but was a policy deliberately imposed by the State. The newspaper Pravda was one tool of thought control. It daily informed the people what they should know, think and believe and, as a result, speaking to one person was like speaking to all. The educational system was another means of control. Children as well as adults were kept ignorant of the situation beyond their own boundaries. They were made to believe that their lot was the best and happiest and they were taught to be proud of the achievements made in their country. They were prohibited from criticizing the State: it could never be wrong. If there was any criticism to be made, it was against oneself. To perform well was an essential obligation of every citizen and it meant to conform to the official line. The imposed Party line, or directive, was never questioned and the criterion for excellence became the degree of conformity; the worth of a human being, not personal merit, but "right-thinking".

Uniformity of thought and the obligation to conform to an official standard appeared frightening and dangerous to Gide. Already he had noticed that the young people were unaware of the enslavement of their consciousness, that their minds were controlled. The mind that Gide had most wanted emancipated was being subjected to powerful propaganda in a

society he dreamed would permit all to think, feel and speak out freely but where instead, he learned, objective criticism was considered treason.

His other grievance, inequality, which he noticed more and more of as he continued to explore the various towns, was not merely the inequality of wages earned by the worker but the disparity of living conditions among them. He suspected that these vast differences would lead to the formation of the familiar class structure based on wealth that would be too similar to the French bourgeoisie. The heart of the problem here, of course, was that the Revolution directed at social change was attacking existing institutions. It could not succeed there unless first, man's nature was changed, his inner being and inherent tendencies. Those middle-class instincts, softness, pleasure-seeking, indifference to others, deeply embedded in man, had not altered and so he was still motivated by personal material gain. Not only did the New Man not appear on the scene but the old institutions that were to have been wiped out, remained as strong as ever. The family kept its old structure of a basic social unit; inheritance, private property were far more predominant and staunchly entrenched than ever before. The revolutionary ideals of fellowship, fraternity, sharing, communal living seemed to have been lost or abandoned. Economic necessity forced the worker to produce more and more quickly and the most effective way to motivate him to be efficient was to promise him greater material benefits.

The signs that the old ways were reappearing were all too evident; and one which most troubled Gide had to do with human relations. He noted an indifference toward the less fortunate, the poor, which created an atmosphere of social inequality with the latter suffering the humiliating feeling of inferiority.

There was evidence of the return to the old form of the middle-class in the laws that had been passed, especially those pertaining to abortion and homosexuality. Besides, the law against abortion had been passed without consulting the people, for one thing, the majority of whom were against it and, furthermore, it reestablished the family as a basic social unit.

In his conversations with many workers, Gide reported the bitter complaints about low wages and the increased difficulty in supporting dependents. They were surprised and rightly distressed that their will was not heard, nor even asked. Why, knowing how hard the times were for the workers, did the State not attempt to make life easier for them?

Gide was sympathetic to the people's bitterness and had understood what this law added to the hardships of their lot, however, he defended it on the grounds of the abuse of abortion that led to a decrease in population. On the other hand, his reaction to the law against homosexuality showed far less understanding. To the author of Corydon it represented a regression. The severe penalty, five years in exile, was in his

eyes, completely unjustified. The reason for the strict enforcement of the law, he learned, was that homosexuals were considered to be non-conformists. All non-conformists were relentlessly pursued because they were "counter-revolutionaries". Therefore homosexuals had to be punished because they were counter-revolutionaries. Gide was taken aback by this reasoning in which he perceived a fundamental difference in the interpretation of essential and basic concepts of the terms "revolutionary" and "counter-revolutionary". Wasn't it the revolutionary spirit that broke with the corrupt Czarist world? Wasn't it the same spirit that burnt with love for their fellow men and yearned for justice? Weren't its characteristic features: a critical stance and an uncompromising attitude? What happened to those Revolutionary ideals? Where were the followers of Lenin and Trotsky? There occurred a reversal that was troubling. Now those who dared speak out against compromises and concessions which led away from those original ideals, were labeled "trotskiites", or traitors. They were put to shame and their voices were suppressed.

This was a simplistic explanation for what was to become known as Stalin's rise to power, his method for dealing with any opposition. Accused of being traitors, they would be forced by threats on their families and by torture to confess their guilt publicly. The accusations were fabricated, the public kept in ignorance as to the facts, and so these "traitors" would be disposed of. This method, known as the Stalin Purges, a terror on an immense scale, millions died, was long concealed

or misunderstood. It was, for decades, a source of doubts and of falsehoods that troubled the consciousness and conscience of the West. Although the horror was connected with Stalin's name, he only continued a method that even Lenin had used during War Communism to rid himself of opposition and ensure the power of the Bolsheviks.

The compromises made were, for example, the restoration of the family unit, private property and inheritance, anathema in Gide's eyes. Unable to rely on patriotism alone it was necessary to provide the citizens with a more personal reason for defending their country. Nevertheless Gide's point was well taken: the critical spirit upon which the Revolution had rested was being suppressed through the educational system, propaganda and force. The so-called Revolutionary attitude expected now was a behavior totally unanticipated and unacceptable to him. The secret police, (known at various times as the Cheka, OGPU, NKVD) made sure that there was complete approval of all that was being done in the Soviet Union. The threat of persecution was a daily terror. The people's approval had to be not only a token one but wholehearted and enthusiastic. Gide was absolutely astounded that this was being achieved and, at the same time horrified to learn how it was being done. Perhaps the severest and bleakest evaluation expressed about the Soviet Union by Gide were the following words: "je doute qu'en aucun autre pays aujourd'hui, fût-ce dans l'Allemagne de Hitler, l'esprit

soit moins libre, plus courbé, plus craintif (terrorisé)".⁶⁴

Gide attacked most severely the oppression of people's mind and their will. Conformity was imposed from the outside and individualism was snuffed out early. In 1933 he had expressed his belief that to achieve true individualism, a certain inequality would necessarily result because of the differences in every person's make-up but first there had to be a stage of equality, that is equal opportunity. It was essential that conditions were identical for all so that no one was hampered in his growth or handicapped by circumstances beyond his control so that he would be able to develop according to his own nature. "C'est cette idée," Gide stressed, "qui est à la base du Communisme".⁶⁵ At the time, not only was there inequality on the materialistic level, but the equality that was being sought was precisely one that should not exist in a just and free society, that of the spirit. If what Gide had described was true Communism, this then was its opposite.

Before his departure for the Soviet Union, Gide had justified "directives" as a necessary means for the creation of a better world having, on this basis, contrasted it favorably with Hitler's Germany. As an artist, however, he could not justify regimentation at all. Conformity in the realm of art spelled doom for culture. Freedom should be offered the artist and not constraint in the form of a rigid doctrine.

⁶⁴Retour . . ., p. 67.

⁶⁵Gide, "Le Communisme et le Problème de la Guerre," La Nouvelle Revue Française (Avril 1933), p. 701.

Of what value was an artist who merely reflected what he saw and saw only what he was told to see, who only approved and admired his society. Gide found it very "regrettable" that art and the artist were thus used. Of value to man was the civilizing force and the critical spirit in art: "rien ne vaut, pour se cultiver, que ce qui force à réfléchir".⁶⁶ It was also a beneficial force that could produce a "good" man. According to Gide, man was not naturally "good" as Rousseau would have it, but he could be molded by art and culture. The value of an artist also lay in him as an "opposing force". In the West, a great artist was usually a non-conformist,⁶⁷ which is why Gide looked to the Soviet Union with growing apprehension. There artists subjected to regimentation became tools serving the Party, as engineers of the human soul. They were required to produce a popular art that would correspond to a specific formula and that would be immediately understood by all. If it did not do both, it would be criticized as "formalistic" a judgment that condemned the work as useless and bad because it gave more importance to form than to content. Gide explained that "l'oeuvre d'art sera jugée formaliste, dès que pas inclinée du tout et n'ayant par conséquent plus de sens".⁶⁸ The basis for this type of criticism seemed totally absurd to Gide who condemned such works as purely political and under no circumstances

⁶⁶Retour . . ., p. 90.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 79.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 84.

artistic.

In 1934 when the Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Revolutionnaires assembled to hear the report of the first Congress of Soviet writers, Gide spoke out before forty five hundred people on the very problem of literature in relation to revolution. The duty and role of literature was not to serve it by obeying an imposed criterion that had nothing to do with aesthetics: "une littérature asservie est une littérature avilie, si noble et légitime que soit la cause qu'elle sert".⁶⁹ The principal preoccupation of the artist should instead be to serve Truth. "Mais comme la cause de la vérité se confond dans mon esprit . . . avec celle de la Révolution," Gide went on, "l'art, en se préoccupant uniquement de vérité sert nécessairement la Révolution".⁷⁰ He predicted though that Soviet art would free itself from the struggle to build a new society, that is, become emancipated once such a society was established.

It is interesting to note that in Retour . . . Gide did not dwell on this question particularly. He did not examine the work of any writer specifically, nor did he discuss the literary doctrine formulated by the Kremlin and approved at the Convention of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934. Gide's main concern was not so much with literary criticism, or political analysis as with bringing to light the most striking features everywhere present, to supply information that would give a

⁶⁹Littérature Engagée, p. 58.

⁷⁰Ibid.

general and broad picture of the situation as he saw it.

All of his comments on the injustices and conformity led him to acknowledge the existence of a dictatorship. A dictatorship as such was to be expected, of course, as a necessary step toward achieving Communism. However, what Gide found was not the dictatorship of a class, of the proletariat, but the old familiar, despicable and intolerable kind, that of one man. This was not what Gide had hoped for or expected. In fact it was exactly the contrary.

Attached to the main and critical part of *Retour . . .* was an appendix, just as long but differing considerably in tone and intent. Each of the six chapters devoted to a particular event was complete in itself, self explanatory and had no other connection with the rest except in the message. The appendix served to contrast Gide's attitude about the land of the future before his contact with it. He also related some private moments and experiences of a personal nature that had either made a lasting impression on him or touched him very deeply.

First his speeches were reproduced; on the occasion of Gorki's funeral, to students in Moscow, writers in Leningrad; then there were reflections about the war waged on religion; the very moving encounter with Nikolay Ostrovsky, author of How The Steel Was Tempered; a visit to a model kolkhoz, to Bolshevo, a town where criminals were rehabilitated and finally, a touching story about the abandoned children, the besprizornye.

Upon reading the first of Gide's speeches delivered in the Soviet Union on June 20, 1936, one is struck by the differences of opinion and feelings that had occurred in the interim. Gide enthusiastically referred to the writer's status as a revolutionary one: he was no longer an opposing force, no longer an enemy. How wrong he was! "C'est ici que je me bloussais; je dus bientôt, hélas! le reconnaître".⁷¹ Here, clearly shown was the change that evolved in his convictions a realization of his mistaken beliefs.

Gide revealed that the speech he had made on July 2, 1936, addressing the writers of Leningrad, had to be submitted first to censors and this he found, needless to say, horrifying. He personally experienced, even if in a superficial and temporary way (real nonetheless) what it was like not to enjoy freedom of speech and to have to obey a directive.

Against authoritarian systems of any kind, having previously spoken out for atheism because he believed it would prevent wars, not cause them, he now deplored the government's silence on religion. He attacked this policy on the grounds that the silence was enforced and so was a form of oppression in itself, depriving the people of knowledge that could defend them against an "epidemic of mysticism", one likely to occur because of the people's ignorance in religious matters. While it was good to liberate man from the arresting influence religion could have

⁷¹Retour . . ., p. 78.

on the development of the mind, from the superstitions it could engender, its beneficial cultural values had been sacrificed in the process to the detriment of the New Man.

From religion Gide went on to introduce Nikolay Ostrovsky, a man, he said, tongue-in-cheek, he would like to call a "saint" religion, he naturally could not. Wounded in the Red Army, the active and devoted young Communist was forced to gradual inactivity by poor health and, finally, blindness. Yet, and in this lay his remarkable and praiseworthy qualities, he composed a novel, while awaiting death, as his contribution to the new society and as his way of serving his fellow men. The composition of the work was an act of supreme will power and courage, worthy of the New Man.

Another experience filled Gide with admiration and that was his visit to Bolshevo. There he witnessed the successful rehabilitation of convicts that society had taken upon itself to convert into useful citizens. Finally, a look at another type of outcast - the abandoned children - "bisprizornye", left him sad but impressed by a particular incident. Two policemen were carrying away a hysterical child, screaming and struggling to break away. A little later, Gide saw the same child sitting quieting on the sidewalk, calmed by the gentle persuasiveness of the policeman. This behavior of a man toward a child, the successful communication through affection and tenderness touched the older man deeply. He was so impressed that, he confessed, it made his whole trip worthwhile.

Throughout the book, in spite of the many criticisms about essential problems of freedom and truth, the individual and society, in spite of the many failures he pointed out, one thing remained certain: his contacts on the human level were a very positive experience. The Russian temperament appealed to him immensely. Despite the return to bourgeois values, despite the many hardships endured by the people, their natural gift for joy and happiness overwhelmed him. Their optimism, warmth and depth of feeling touched him and, he admitted, never before had he smiled so spontaneously and so often.

The positive elements in the book were not stressed. It was the disappointment, the negative qualities that stood out which reflected Gide's general feeling about his stay. When he had initially mentioned publishing the results of his insights it was understood that it would be a work revealing his fears and disillusion. For this reason his friends vigorously advised him not to go ahead with his plans for much the same reasons he was advised not to publish Corydon and Si Le Grain Ne Meurt decade before. The reaction, he was warned, would be unfavorable to him. He would be made an outcast and disgraced by the Communists, French and Soviet alike. The hostility, the loss of friends would hurt him. Again Gide ignored the warnings, went ahead with his intention, for much the same reasons as before and, as predicted, he was subjected to a fierce outcry. No book of his ever sold so well or so quickly. No work of his ever reached such a large number of readers or received so much

attention or vociferous reaction!

The critics were in fact so numerous that Gide found himself writing a sequel to his Retour . . . , Retouches à Mon 'Retour de l'U.R.S.S.'⁷² (1937) which in essence meant to justify his position and to respond to the criticisms: "témoignage si hatif . . . si partiel, si mince devant cette bouleversante expérience humaine et ses 19 années d'efforts", "très superficiellement informé et par là injuste", "insuffisance de documentation de Gide".⁷³

The beginning of Retouches . . . is devoted to answering particular critics and criticisms that hurt him most either because they came from unexpected sources or were simply unjustified. He did not allow himself to be overcome by insults or slander and threw a few punches of his own: referring to Romain Rolland,⁷⁴ he made a stinging remark "combien sont rares ceux qui atteignent la fin de leur vie avant d'avoir montré l'extrémité de leur grandeur",⁷⁵ and to Paul Nizan: "si intelligent pourtant d'ordinaire".⁷⁶ In the first case "rare" does its damage and in the second "d'ordinaire" hits the target. These were followed by a paragraph that showed Gide's assurance in his opinions and his conviction in the accuracy of his

⁷²Gide, Retouches à Mon "Retour de l'U.R.S.S." (Paris: Lib. Gallimard, 1937).

⁷³Pierre Herbart, Carnet de Voyage (Paris: Lib. Gallimard, 1936).

⁷⁴A recent book on the relationship between Gide and Rolland: Frederick John Harris, André Gide and Romain Rolland: Two Men Divided (N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1973).

⁷⁵Gide, Retouches . . ., p. 7.

⁷⁶Ibid.

observations, predictions and pointed to the faltering position of his critics, especially with regard to the Moscow trials. How long would they remain blind to reality?

There were those who did agree with Gide's conclusions but excused the current inconsistencies as only temporary but necessary. Even if they seemed to betray socialism and the Revolution now, they would ultimately lead to the desired end. Gide would not agree with them to the fact that any means would achieve the desired goals.

There were those who accused Gide of incompetence in political and economic matters and that his statements and interpretations were inaccurate and unreliable. Gide's answer to them was very simple and true: had he praised the Soviet Union he would have never been judged incompetent. Hadn't the Party been eager to have him join the ranks? Hadn't the Party invited him to the Soviet Union? That had been proof enough of respect.

It was this attack of "incompetence" and "ignorance" that in fact gave shape and substance to Retouches. He admitted that he learned the facts about the Soviet Union after his return, but then he defended himself by reminding the readers of the presence of his companions who offered him their knowledge and experience, and together with the information he had acquired before his departure were sufficient to make him a reliable observer. Of the five men who accompanied him, two were active members of the Communist Party and two spoke Russian. Jeft Last,

the Dutch writer, was making his fourth trip to the Soviet Union and Pierre Herbart had been living in Moscow for six months prior to Gide's arrival, working on a propaganda journal called Littérature Internationale. Herbart was well-informed and understood the meaning behind certain events that escaped the others. One such event was the episode involving Nikolay Bukharin. A Revolutionary since the days of Lenin and Trotsky, Bukharin had been designated by Lenin himself to succeed if either he or Trotsky were killed. Now that Stalin was eliminating the old Bolsheviks and any possible rival, he had fallen into disfavor. On several occasions he had attempted to speak to Gide privately but always unsuccessfully. Someone invariably would join their tête à tête and Bukharin would quickly leave. Once he had made an appointment which he never kept. To Gide this simply meant negligence or indifference on the part of the Russian, but certainly not an "inability" to come. This episode served to demonstrate the value of experience his companions had as well as Gide's naïveté about Soviet ways.

He defended himself for not having used statistics or substantial proof to justify his claims. Gide referred those critics to other works available on the Soviet Union that based their information on figures. Gide's intention had been to compose a work of a different nature. Still, he was ready to comply with his critics, having now done some additional studying, to back up his findings with tables and even with written testimonies. He did admit that during his trip to the

Congo as well as to the Soviet Union, he had seen disastrous things the causes of which he did not understand. This did not however alter the facts. It was only after having written Retour . . . that he informed himself more fully from those who were equipped to teach him: Citrine, Trotsky, Mercier, Yvon, Serge, Legay and many others⁷⁷ and understood those causes.

In Retouches . . . Gide used well-documented works to support his own observation. Now he proceeded systematically to shatter illusions with facts: the assumptions that there were no people out of work (no^{un} employment), no prostitution, that there was equality of the sexes, that education was available for all and human dignity had been restored to all - the expected results of the Revolution - were false. It would indeed have been a better world had these social problems been solved. He proceeded to prove the failure to achieve the desired goals in his example of the battle against illiteracy. This illiteracy was supposed to have been wiped out by 1927. In 1936 there was still talk of taking measures to eliminate it. The problem involved students themselves, their inaptitude, their abandoning classes; the school books full of inaccuracies; the fate of teachers whose insufficient wages forced them to look to other means of work to supplement their income.

The cause for Gide's great disappointment, as he put it, was not so much due to the inability to achieve more quickly the desired goals but the propagation of false impressions that

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 53.

the Soviet Union was a worker's paradise. He accused the French Communists of propagating these illusions to the workers. The duty of an intellectual was to serve the people by guiding and enlightening them. Instead, they were feeding the masses with lies and false hopes that were detrimental to both the people and the cause. In the Soviet Union the plight of the worker was much worse than that of his French counterpart. Now Gide took back his words written in Retour . . .: he was indeed exploited. His hours were long, his income low, his housing poor and his opportunities for changing his employment few. The secret police hounded him for information about any possible "sabotage". Imprisonment was not just an idle threat but a reality and it was carried out with alarming frequency.

The only way to succeed for a Russian was to become a Party member, a commitment that could not be undone without serious consequences to himself such as blacklisting and losing his job. Being a member meant abdicating the right to think for oneself. Even a Party member was always watched and one way of surviving was to become an informer. This was also a means for advancement. In Soviet Russia one denounced friends, not enemies, as was the French practice for example. How desperate or how vile could a man be to inform on his friend? Or perhaps one should ask how effective the persecution, the motives, the indoctrination that could produce such results, such changes in man.

Why didn't the worker revolt? They certainly had cause to, thought Gide. The fear of being informed on and the severe reprisals that would follow, condemned the worker to silence. Now we can recall and appreciate Gide's sincere wish and his actions which followed his Congo experience, to help the oppressed man who could not express himself, who was not given the opportunity to grumble. It was understandable too, just from this aspect of Soviet policy, that he could not possibly show it any sympathy. These means of establishing a new society simply were not leading to the goals set by the Revolution.

The rash of trials that took place in the 1930's was partly the result of the unsuccessful attempt to increase production through an intensification of industrialization. The failure of this program was evident from the poor quality of products, in the amount of waste and discarded items. Gide would provide a written testimony to that effect by someone who had been there at the time of conviction and knew the people who took part in the trial. He used this expert witness to back up his own opinion and to denounce those trials as unjust and planned. The accusations were false and the public ill-informed, wrote Kleber Legay, the Assistant Secretary to the Federation of Miners, whose letter dated January 29, 1937, was published in the paper Syndicat the following month. Only now the stories given to the Soviet people, to the effect that a vast conspiracy had penetrated every part of Soviet life and its instigators had to be tried "fairly" and punished "justly", was a lie, a

plot that had been master-minded by Stalin.

Just as accusations were invented to stage show trials that would scare the masses into obedience and submission, so were statistics manipulated to demonstrate - falsely - the improvements that have been achieved in the life of the Soviet worker. Gide demonstrated that the figures could be subjected to various interpretations. To those who used statistics to back up their claim that salaries of the workers had doubled in the past two years, Gide argued that the figures showed a rise, yes, but in the average salary. This did not prove there was actually any progress. First of all, the rise could represent the income of the privileged higher income group, then again, what did a rise in salary mean when the cost of living went up proportionately?

To those who considered Stakhanovism as a clever way for the worker to increase his income, Gide replied that it was a means of oppression and exploitation that forced the ordinary worker to produce more. No longer did Gide mention the "lazy" worker for whom Stakhanovism was invented as a clever whip.

To be subjected to overwork was not in itself an evil. (Marx had foreseen it as unavoidable), but it was wrong when, as it was happening in the Soviet Union, only a few privileged workers were permitted a greater income at the expense of others. This, Marx had warned, would lead to the formation of a privileged class and not to eventual reduction of time spent on practical

work.⁷⁸ In Retour . . ., now Gide took back his words: "Ne plus se sentir exploité, c'est énorme". He admitted this was no longer the case and added that, worst of all, they did not know any more who was exploiting them. This, he said, made life intolerable.

What had gone wrong? Why wasn't the proletariat that all-powerful force Lenin meant it to be? Because, explained Gide, that which Lenin and Trotsky feared had come into being. A bureaucracy was formed, so powerful that it took over the controls. "De plus en plus," he commented, "c'est la dictature de la bureaucratie sur le prolétariat".⁷⁹ Moreover it was a bureaucracy filled with useless and incapable people - those Stalin could depend upon for their devotion and conformity because they all owed their positions to a favor granted them. Lenin had feared the formation of a bureaucracy because it would spell the failure of the Revolution. To prevent that from happening he outlined certain conditions that had to be fulfilled. None of them were heeded and today, said Gide, one was far not only from Utopia but from even its intermediary stages.

This bureaucracy had created a gap between the people and government. The New Constitution (1936) was another step in that direction because it created an ever-increasing distance between the electorate and the deputies by its voting procedures, its rigged elections. Again Gide deplored the trend of events and he quoted Sir Walter Citrine whose view was that the U.S.S.R.

⁷⁸Retouches . . . , p. 46

⁷⁹Ibid.

had indeed become a dictatorship, in which all the power was held by a few and the masses played little or no part in government. Gide was distressed not so much because the power was in the hands of a few, for he did not subscribe to the wisdom of the masses, but simply and essentially because the majority, when it was suffering, should be allowed to express its grievances, to cry out in pain. This was his feeling since the Congo experience. His hopes in Communism had been the hope for man to make himself heard at last. In fact the people in the Soviet Union were not permitted so much as a complaint, not even a sad countenance. The hungry and poor still had to smile. To his great amazement, in spite of tragedies, and Dostoevsky was his prime example, the people were capable of joy. It was indeed a gift: "c'est bien par là que Dostoevsky reste si représentatif. C'est aussi par là qu'il me touche si profondément, si fraternellement et, à travers lui, avec lui, tout le peuple russe".⁸⁰

The people may not have had the right to speak out but Gide did. He felt it was his duty as an intellectual to speak for them and, in the name of Truth, reveal the actual situation in the Soviet Union. His enduring commitment was not to the Party but to Truth, to denounce lies when he became aware of them. Lies and false hopes could not help the people ("on le sert mal en l'aveuglant").⁸¹ His responsibility was to look at things

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 64.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 68.

as they were not as he wished them to be. People had the right to know that the Soviet Union betrayed their hopes, that it had not fulfilled the promises of the Revolution.

Gide ended Retouches . . . on a firmer note than he had Retour. . . . In the latter he left open the possibility of a change occurring in the policies of the Soviet Union. In the former, he attempted to prove that his feelings, observations and predictions of Retour . . . were not only a subjection reaction, but accurate observation and could be supported by such proof as statistics, corroborating testimony, especially those of members of the Communist Party who had been enthusiastic and faithful until, disillusioned by the policies of the Kremlin and the change in the character of the rule, left its ranks.

Retouches . . . was a type of exposé not typical of Gide's style. He was much more comfortable when expressing his feelings and impressions, when relying on his own powers of observation in which he had great confidence. The approach he was best equipped to handle was the psychological one, that of Retour. . . . Perhaps for that reason, half of Retouches . . . was devoted to a three-part appendix of which one part was dedicated to relating a few more experiences that gave further insights into the life in the Soviet Union, his encounters and conversations with the people; another was a tribute to his companion, Eugène Dabit, who died during the trip of what was diagnosed as scarlatina, and another, the last, was a collection of letters testifying to the support of Gide, agreement with his observations and which also

revealed personal experiences with Communism. This part called the "carnet de voyage" was reminiscent of the style of Retour. He recounted in it incidents that were brief, complete in themselves, and, as in Retour . . ., without any seeming connection with one another, but that brought out a particular theme. Each revealed a special situation concerning the Soviet Citizen and Gide's reaction to it. For example, he emphasized the inequality in the worker's conditions by sketching the lot of several individuals all representative of a certain and very real problem. For one, he contrasted those workers who could afford to go to Sochi, a resort town in the Caucasus to spend their vacation, to those workers who, underpaid, suffered the plagues of the poor: hunger, poor housing, the inability to fulfill the most basic of wishes such as getting married. Some would plead for scraps of food and would rummage in garbage pails, others mysteriously "made do", a suggestion which leads to all kinds of interpretations. Gide gave a concrete example of one consequence of the Kirov assassination⁸² which was typical of the more general policy of persecution. A young worker with his wife and infant had been

⁸²Conquest, pp. 41-44. Kirov's death, 1934, was the keystone of the entire edifice of terror and suffering by which Stalin secured his grip on the Soviet people. In his ambition to assume political supremacy, Stalin resorted to murder as a way of eliminating opposition. Kirov, Secretary of the Central Committee, Member of the Politburo, the First Secretary of the Leningrad Party Organization, showed signs of a certain independence. It is now known that Nikolayev, the assassin, was acting alone and that it was Stalin who had arranged for his opportunity. At the time, however, hundreds of Russians, including political leaders of the Revolution, would be shot for direct responsibility for the assassination. The official line called it a plot inspired by Zinoviev and Kamenev, Trotsky's name would be added later. In the 1936 trials, Zinoviev and Kamenev would have to confess to their guilt.

travelling for a long time in search of work. Since the assassination (1934), surveillance had been stepped up and denunciations, true or false, were rampant. Only suspicion had been cast upon him and ever since he had not been accepted for any employment anywhere. This was a pathetic story but not meant to evoke pity, rather, to emphasize an unjust system, based on arbitrary harassment, fear and persecution.

The realities as Gide perceived them and as he tried to convey, both in very human terms and impersonal, objective ones, were that the Soviet Union was much closer to the pre-Revolutionary society than to the one he had dreamed of an expected to see. The Revolutionary struggle engendered on the one hand, a commitment of many people to the building of the Soviet society and on the other, it resulted in a corruption of its ideals. Who could speak of progress in the face of injustices and a dictatorship, a powerful bureaucracy, an alienation of the people from government and a vigilant secret police, all symptoms of a backward trend and failure. Gide reminded the reader of Lenin's warning:

"all revolutions which have taken place up to the present have helped to perfect the state machinery, whereas it must be shattered, broken to pieces."⁸³

⁸³V.I. Lenin, State and Revolution (N.Y.: International Publishers Co., Inc. 1943), p. 25.

This was not done. The letters published by Gide in the appendix of Retouches . . . testified to the corruption of the achievements of the Revolution, the abandoning of its aims. Many of those letters expressed a concern for the French Communist Party and the fear that it too would betray the true cause. It had to be prevented from following the Soviet path and protected from its propaganda. Many used the image of a ladder when referring to the direction the Soviet Union was taking, each step representing a particular phase in its development. However, they pointed out, the steps were leading not up but down.

Some of those who addressed letters to Gide supporting his views that there were indeed visible signs of a return to a class structure based on privileges, poor conditions of the worker, of the evils of conformity, unjust trials, were ex-Communists who had lived and worked in the Soviet Union, who had had everyday experiences there and who had become aware of the unexpected developments in the society, developments they could not accept because they were contrary to their Revolutionary ideals. They were subjected to inner conflicts and turmoil which as one put it, were the most violent in his life. But invariably they came to the same conclusions as Gide whose own perceptions were not impeded by the depth of their convictions and the extent of their commitment. They were glad he spoke out and supported his vision of the Truth. They put their hopes in him because of his stature and fame. They knew that

his voice, unlike theirs, would be heard. They also remembered Gide's successful intervention to free Dimitrov and two Bulgarian communists who had been falsely accused of setting fire to the Reichstag in 1933, from imprisonment in Germany.

After the publication of Retouches . . . Gide continued to defend his exposure of the realities in the Soviet Union. He was most outspoken about what he judged to be the gravest problem, the existence of the bureaucratic system. He considered it to be the ultimate proof that the Revolution had failed. This is what ultimately made him reject Communism "Soviet" style. He repeated this quotation whenever he spoke of its failure in his Journal (summer 1937), in his letters, in the preface to Yvon's book, L'U.R.S.S. Telle qu'elle est which came out in 1938.

After the publication of Retouches . . . Gide made it known that he would retire temporarily (in fact for always) from the social and political struggles at least as far as Communism was concerned. And so ended another chapter in Gide's life, a chapter that evolved from his own past, and was a continuation rather than an interruption in his development. His initial support of Communism was both spurred by his own convictions and generated by the general atmosphere of the times, as well as his need to be at the vanguard. The active participation he embarked upon that was so contrary to his prior proclamations of exclusive devotion to art, not to mention his inability to act or make a choice, was the result of the change that took place in world events that had precipitated the intellectuals into

action, and created a new sense of responsibility. He may not have "chosen" to take action but rather gave in to a "temptation" which was his own explanation for his behavior. Back in 1893-94 he had written in the Journal that man was incapable of making a choice, that it was always a matter of yielding to the strongest temptation.⁸⁴ This had provided Georges Brachfeld with the appropriate title Gide and the Communist Temptation. Yet the identity of purposes of both the teachings of Christ and of Communism made the choice an easy one for Gide. As soon as he found out that man had to be reformed first, before institutions, he then identified his new convictions with the ideals and goals of the Revolution and expressed, prematurely to be sure, his faith in it.

He refused to join the Communist Party because it was his lifelong belief that it was man's duty to bring his own message to the world:

"Il faut beaucoup plus de précaution pour délivrer son propre message, beaucoup plus de hardiesse et de prudence, que pour donner son adhésion et ajouter sa voix à un parti déjà constitué . . . j'ai cru que c'est à soi-même surtout qu'il importe de rester fidèle".⁸⁵

⁸⁴Les Nourritures Terrestres, p. 113.

⁸⁵Journal, p. 711.

His disillusion with the Soviet Union was not so much with the state of achievements there (certainly he was impressed by the new school and parks, the kolkhozi and the sanatoria) but with what lay behind these concrete examples of apparent success. Probing a little deeper, he saw the same subjugation of the mind and soul, the same oppression and tyranny that characterized Czarist Russia. The splendor of Leningrad belied the inhuman toil, the bloodshed and misery that created it. So too he understood that these outward signs of advance were illusions meant to dazzle. This is what had prompted some critics to wrongly accuse Gide of being unfair toward the Soviet Union because his approach was not historical, that is, he had not evaluated the achievements against a historical background, nor weighed the present against the past, the old and the new. They were right in so far as Gide's approach was a psychological and moral one. He evaluated Progress not by physical structures but by the existing moral values and the condition of man in society. It was on these issues that he condemned the Soviet Union, for the means by which they were achieving the so-called Revolutionary aims were not worthy of the Revolution. He had conceded once that any means justified the admirable end of Communism. Now the goals had been corrupted, the Revolutionary spirit became counter-revolutionary and the despicable and criminal means no longer defensible or justifiable. It was not the superficial trimmings that determined his accusations but the fundamental bases, the foundation, the pillars upon which the new society

was being built.

Gide was committed to his understanding of Progress and the New Man. His vision was incompatible with reality not because the vision itself was at fault, but because Communism, as he saw and experienced it, was the contrary to what it was supposed to be. Just as the terms "Revolution" and "counter-Revolution" reversed their meanings, so too did the ideal for which men fought and died.

Many accused Gide of being a dilettante and jeopardizing the success of the Revolution and the hopes of men. Indeed, Gide had nothing to lose. Perhaps that was why his commitment to reveal the truth was so tenacious.

Although he rejected his bourgeois background and the wealth that made him a privileged being, it did after all make him independent and allowed him to assume a critical stance. His actions were disinterested: he was not spurred on by any experience of oppression or poverty. Although we could easily accuse him of trying to keep up with the times or of searching for a spiritual renewal, while under the spell of the general enthusiasm, his intentions were pure and consistent with his beliefs. He betrayed his Christian background by considering the new society in terms of it and of the morality he had evolved in relation to it. He can justly be accused of wanting to be part of the times and to go on exerting his influence, to sublimate a loss of creative power, but essentially, he was sincere. He may have been carried away by his emotions and

joined impulsively in the general interest for the new society and this was indeed, as Roger Martin du Gard explained, out of character. But let us not forget that when he did realize his mistake, he did not withdraw into silence as Romain Rolland had, but confessed it publicly, knowing full well, from experience, the consequences such an act entailed. This too, however, was consistent with the Dostoevskyan need for confession and expiation.

To those who judged him to be a man who only lent himself, never stopped anywhere, but twisted and turned and ran away, who considered Gide's reaction as typical, which indeed it was, we can only remark that it was not a negative quality. He did give himself to the cause of the Soviet Union but his rejection of it was also typical of his role as the "opposing force". If it was the enthusiasm and emotion generated by the Revolution that carried him astray, as it did many others who like Bloch and Romain Rolland felt the League of Nations to be too cold and bureaucratic to be effective, it was his sharp critical spirit, that saved his reputation for posterity. Wasn't it with posterity he was most concerned? The means for improving civilization, he concluded, was through criticism and skepticism, not compromise and conformity. His role was to break down illusions, prejudices and dogma, not to support crime and lies. At the very end of his life he still believed that it was wrong to seek a "general enforced uniformity"⁸⁶ because "such a process of levelling

⁸⁶Justin O'Brien, "Two Declarations by André Gide," Partisan Review (July-August 1951).

would be the end of arts, letters and sciences, and all development of thought".⁸⁷

In the Journal, an entry dated January, 1945, showed that Gide continued to express his love for the Soviet people and referred to his stay in the Soviet Union as the most memorable and that it was the country he would choose to go back to visit.

In 1951, just a few weeks before his death he admitted that he still did not know what it was he was heading toward, nor what he wanted for civilization but he was sure, he said, that he was against falsehood. Salvation lay in truth, in man's responsibility not to take things at face value and to accept as certain only what he has been able to verify.⁸⁸

Gide was the embodiment of his beliefs: a critic and an individualist. A committed man, committed to his art first of all, but also to his particular values which he had evolved before his thirtieth year and which he continued to profess to the end.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 398.

CHAPTER III

ROMAIN ROLLAND: SILENT CENSURE

Romain Rolland, frequently referred to as the "conscience" of Europe, was a distinguished figure both as an artist and as a spokesman for unity and peace in the world. Innovative in literature, courageous in his struggle to uphold independence of thought in turbulent times of war, revolution and encroaching totalitarian systems, he actively participated in the events of his time. He involved himself with issues that affected all mankind and made his position known through articles as well as through his imaginative art. An outspoken enemy of nationalism and imperialism, a relentless defender of the oppressed masses, he adopted the ideal of humanism and those of the Soviet Revolution believing that there lay the answer to the ills of society.

His contact with "The Other Europe", as Luc Durtain called Russia, began while he was still a student at the Ecole Normale, in 1886. There he read the novels of the nineteenth century writers among whom Turgenev, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. Tolstoy so impressed the young man - it was a meeting of like minds - that he even wrote him a letter, and, extraordinarily enough, received an answer. Rolland's thought was to be profoundly affected by Tolstoy's writings both by those before and after his conversion or crisis. In 1916 he met, for the first time,

a Russian revolutionary, Anatol Lunacharsky, who became the Commissary for Education the following year, but was then a refugee in Switzerland. Lunacharsky put Rolland in touch with Maxim Gorki and there developed a relationship, a significant one for both writers, which lasted until Gorki's death in 1936. It was mainly Gorki who kept him up to date on the internal situation of the Soviet Union.

Poor health had kept Rolland from visiting the Soviet Union until 1935. When he finally did see the new society, he refused to disclose all of the impressions he had set down in his diary so that the information which is available is incomplete and not necessarily a true reflection of his feelings. To understand that decision as well as his continued support of Soviet socialism, in spite of criticism directed against him, it is helpful to examine the man, his beliefs, ideals and activities.

It is impossible to devote a study to Rolland's rapport with the Soviet Union and not mention his role in European affairs. Much was happening in Europe that concerned and involved him actively and determined, to a certain degree, his attitude to the Revolutionary effort and the construction of socialism. He was in touch with intellectuals and artists all over the world, met many of them personally and was very much attuned to the general feelings and trends, ideals and problems everywhere. Well-informed, outspoken, Rolland was a prominent and respected figure, if controversial at times, and a force

to be considered.

As we read his correspondence and his articles on the emotional and explosive issues, the steady control, high moral standards, integrity and sincerity that pervade his writings, make us, who look back on those difficult times, realize that he represented the noblest type of intellectual, a man of superior intellect who used his powers of reason and his talents primarily to unite men and maintain peace, to improve conditions. His extraordinary inner strength helped him overcome not only the physical hardships of health and need, but the wounds inflicted by antagonism to such a work as Au-dessus de la Mêlée, the mental anguish of the First World War and the pessimism at the failure to prevent the Second World War. It is remarkable how clear and prophetic his vision had been, how he had been able to put everything into historical perspective, always looking beyond the struggle of one day. His humanistic ideals were known to people all over the world and many volumes of letters testify to the devotion of his readers and his very real influence on them.

Open to ideals. himself, Rolland had been, in his youth especially, subjected to influences that helped form him. An admirer of great men, Michelangelo, Beethoven, Tolstoy and Gandhi he felt inspired to write their biographies. Some of his readings, his learning and personal contacts and certain mystical experiences that found a response in him, affected his thought and behavior.

Very early in his life, to the despair of his mother, he drew away from the traditional Catholic religion to a more spiritual form of belief. Characterized by a feeling he called "sensation de l'éternel" or "sentiment océanique" which, although it ran parallel to the Catholic religion,¹ did not divide people into sects but united them all. It was an all-encompassing belief that transcended the boundaries of time and space. He resisted all attempts to return to Catholicism. This "sensation de l'éternel" or "sentiment océanique" was an overwhelming sense of the divine. He felt it in the music of Bach and Mozart and in all great art. This indefinable feeling came to represent the essence of art: there was no technique for reproducing it or a rationale for explaining it. It was more a matter of intuition, an understanding that came from feeling.

Faith became significant at a period in his life when, very depressed by the move his family made from the country ("la terre Nivernaise") to Paris at the sensitive age of fifteen, he lost the sense of security in life. He confessed: "J'ai respiré, de 15 à 17 ans, les vapeurs de l'abîme."² Then he discovered Spinoza. At the age of 18 he found in the writings of the Dutch philosopher, the consolation to his despair, especially in the basic idea of oneness with the universe.

¹Jacques Nantot, "Romain Rolland, le Christianisme et les Chrétiens," Europe (Nov.-Dec., 1965), pp. 80-83.

²Romain Rolland, Le Voyage Intérieur (Paris: A. Michel, 1942), p. 129.

The sentence: "Tout ce qui est est en Dieu"³ particularly excited him and his response was: "Et moi aussi, je suis en Dieu! . . . je m'évade du gouffre de la substance. . . ."⁴ Everything is contained in the "océan de l'Etre". Now a new understanding of the world had opened up to him, one in which there was unity, and a coexistence with other worlds. This basic concept would preoccupy Rolland all of his life and underlie his efforts toward uniting men because that was the morally good thing to do: "Embrassons-nous, millions d'êtres."⁵

This feeling of being one with the universe gave him great inner strength to endure threatening situations in general and in particular, such as the one he had experienced in a train that abruptly stopped in a tunnel with a very real possibility of an accident at hand. Suddenly he recalled a passage he had read in War and Peace and now understood it. Pierre, a prisoner of the French during their retreat from Moscow unexpectedly began to laugh loudly. It had just dawned on him how foolish they were who thought that his immortal soul could be caught. Looking up at the sky, he realized it was all his, all part of him. How absurd it was to think they really had him! Rolland too had acquired an awareness of being part of the universe, a sense of something far larger, eternal.⁶

³Ibid., p. 45.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 47.

⁶Ibid., p. 55.

When he was 16 he had another experience of significance to him: a communion with nature, a revelation of nature. This occurred at the terrace of Ferney near Switzerland. Again, it was a shock of recognition. In his autobiography, Le Voyage Intérieur, he referred to these mystical experiences as "Les Trois Eclairs" because they struck like lightning, without warning, they let him "see" in one brief second. They allowed him to gain an insight into things and made him feel and understand that which remained closed to others. They gave him a far deeper awareness of life, transcending a material comprehension of reality to a metaphysical conception of life. He understood himself to be a being that was, on the one hand, made up of inherited characteristics, in a given time and space reality and, on the other, a being without specific features, of all time, eternal.⁷

His perspective thus extended over time and space and, from this height, he could look down quasi-divinely on those who had not been initiated into those sensations and were bound, egotistically, temporally to the "I" and the "now", subjected helplessly to the contagious passions of the day. It took another force in his life to turn his eye away from his inner self, from cosmic forces to the ordinary, to the people around him, to the events of the day in the world of today.

Malwida von Meysenbug, because she understood Rolland, exerted considerable influence on him. He had met her in Italy where he was doing research in 1889. She had known Herzen,

⁷Ibid., p. 31.

Mazzini, Nietzsche and Wagner. An idealist, she encouraged him in his work, and made him aware of his potentialities. Rolland enthusiastically described her as a woman who did everything, read everything, felt everything and besides was an independent thinker. She was, when the young man met her, an astonishing 71 years of age and truly an inspiration. She was instrumental in awakening him to reality: "vous m'avez donné conscience de me forces . . . foi dans mon oeuvre, sinon dans ce que j'avais déjà fait, du moins dans ce que j'avais à faire."⁸ At 24 he must have appeared innocent and sheltered because she felt the need to turn his attention to the world outside, to observe human beings. It was a wise suggestion. He needed this prodding because surprisingly he confessed he felt a "disgust" when in contact with most people. A strange feeling for someone who would want to unite himself to all men!

The friendship between Malwida and Rolland continued throughout his marriage to Clotilde which lasted but ten years. Rolland had married Clotilde, the daughter of a Jewish professor at the College de France, in 1892. Their break-up showed to what extent freedom to think and act were important to Rolland. The separation was a very painful one because they loved each other but neither would give up a life style that was essential to them, neither was willing to sacrifice for the other. Clotilde craved an active social life. It was impossible for her to

⁸Rolland, Choix de lettres de Malwida von Meysenbug (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1948), p. 7.

adjust to what she considered were extreme needs of her husband's work. For Rolland happiness was his work, his search for truth. His wife could not understand this and he felt sorry for her because he knew she was wrong to think that her way of living would be fulfilling yet he was unable to convince her. In her resentment for his work, she had become a hindrance to him and must have fared badly in comparison with Malwida who had always had a constructive and beneficial effect on him. It was not surprising that he called her his second mother because like his mother she was selfless in her giving and understood that he dedicated himself to the high mission he felt he had to accomplish. He could not allow himself the luxury of what he considered was wasting his life away in an ordinary existence. At the age of 24 he was aware of his duty in life:

"Il y a le devoir que l'on a de faire rendre à son esprit tout ce qu'il était appelé à rendre, de faire autant qu'on peut ce que la nature vous a donné les moyens et la tâche de faire."⁹

This tenacious determination to follow only his conscience, whatever the price, was partly due to pride and partly to his understanding of what man is. Explaining Tolstoy he wrote: "L'être de volonté chez lui, s'oppose . . . à l'être de nature".¹⁰

⁹Rolland, Printemps romain. Choix de lettres à sa mère: 1889-1890 (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1954), p. 236.

¹⁰Voyage Intérieur, p. 54.

He went on in a more general way to say that "en tout homme, il y a deux hommes: . . . l'homme d'instinct, et l'homme de raison; l'homme subliminal et celui qu'on s'évertue à construire sur le sol contesté et branlant de la propriété. Ils diffèrent toujours."¹¹ Reason and will were strongly developed in Rolland and to exercise them he needed freedom.

The strength of will, the confidence in his own thinking he owed in part to Malwida von Meysenbug and also to a great degree, to his mother. She was devoted to her son and they had an unusually close relationship that grew out of their love for music. At times Rolland had resented her authority and even went so far as to warn her of possible consequences if she continued to exercise it. They were severe. "Je renoncerais à toute amitié, à toute affection plutôt qu'à l'indépendance de ma pensée et de ma parole."¹² Yet when she died he confessed that: "Ma mère était l'axe de ma vie. . . . Jamais je n'aurais eu la trempe nécessaire pour soutenir la lutte de toute ma vie. Ce pur acier. . . . J'en ai souffert parfois mais j'ai été sauvé."¹³

An early example illustrating his independence of thought was his attitude during the Dreyfus Affair, a cause célèbre that divided the French into two opposing camps. His wife's family, Jewish, was unanimously convinced of Dreyfus' innocence;

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Printemps romain, p. 345.

¹³"Journal de Romain Rolland. Extraits Inédits: 1919-1923," Europe (Nov.-Dec., 1965), pp. 192-193.

most Catholics were of his guilt. Romain Rolland stood undecided. He required real proof or more definite proof before he would make a judgement. In the midst of heated passion he revealed a detachment and objectivity that were to be characteristic of him. In this case, Romain Rolland showed neither great curiosity nor great courage. There was a little anti-semitism in him. He still noted the blindness and intolerance on both sides, men who were overcome by their emotions, who forgot the real issue; he saw them creating thus a far greater problem of religious and social hatreds which Rolland perceptively sensed would be the outcome of the case whether Dreyfus was freed or convicted.¹⁴ This attitude of detachment, of self-control permitted him to see beyond the immediate, to objectively weigh controversial issues, and explain his stand of "au-dessus de la mêlée".

Rolland had not always been interested in political life but this changed when the social and political climate in France and the world became so overpowering, electrifying even, gathering a momentum that foreshadowed events which could not be ignored. In 1897 he was already looking forward to a new society: "La vieille société s'écroule: c'est un grand bonheur. Elle était aussi pourrie qu'il est possible . . ."¹⁵ and, already, he had predicted a "demolition" in the near future. He foresaw the sacrifice many innocent people would have to make and

¹⁴Rolland, Mémoires (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1956), p. 64.

¹⁵Lettres à Malwida von Meysenbug, p. 217.

he too was prepared, even then, to give up that which was most precious to him, his art and even the Louvre, for the hope of a "renaissance", a new principle of life, a new ideal, a God. "Il faut se préparer à la lutte," he said, "et tâcher de marcher avec la foi nouvelle."¹⁶

The new principle of life was Socialism. It was Europe's way to salvation: "Dans cent ans," he predicted in 1895, "l'Europe sera socialiste ou elle ne sera plus."¹⁷ Then socialism meant not so much a political doctrine to him, as a moral and philosophical one: "ce n'est pas à royauté, empire, ou république, que s'oppose le socialisme: c'est à l'individualisme."¹⁸ It was not the doctrine of Marx and Engels but a personal conception evolved out of his own ideals and based on some principles of "pure humanité".¹⁹

Still, Rolland was an artist who took into consideration the credo of "art for art's sake", that: "l'art se suffit à soi".²⁰ How would it be affected by the struggle for a new order?

Disagreeing with the aesthetics of Ibsen and of Tolstoy (after his conversion) which were based on morality and society, that is, a work of art was good if it were moral and socially

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Mémoires, p. 253.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 245.

²⁰Ibid., p. 139.

useful, bad if it weren't, he also rejected the other extremists such as the Aesthetes and the members of the Parnassian School who called pretty phrases Art. "L'Art est dans le coeur de l'artiste."²¹ There is something in Art, suggested Rolland, that is beyond a rational explanation, beyond a technique, that has to do with intuition, with the subconscious, something that is essentially intangible, even divine. However, he did agree with Tolstoy on the point that Art had to reach the people, as many as possible, uniting the classes separated by artificial conventions. In direct contrast to the poets of the Symbolist School who wrote only for an elite, a select few, an art of the people had to be created. Romain Rolland did attempt to create just such an art. But too far ahead of his time, he failed in his effort. His "Théâtre du Peuple" came too soon: there was no people yet!

How did he propose to reach the people? He explained it in his preface to the Théâtre du Peuple, written in 1903: simply follow the examples of those who had done it successfully, of ancient Greek authors and of Shakespeare. Their theme was history, that is a reality that concerned all men; their form was drama. The historical plays involved the national spirit and the masses, then what he called "drame héroïque" would deal with man revealing him completely, forcing out all the passions a human soul is capable of but which in daily life

²¹Ibid.

are suppressed, so that both types of drama would necessarily be understood by all.

Despite his lack of success, Rolland understood that society was changing, that it would create a new people and this people would, in turn, create a new art. Since this art had not yet come into existence, he recognized the opportunity to offer a medium through which the people would be able to express themselves. He then conceived the role of the writer as one who serves and guides the great democratic movement that was coming into being in France.²² And so he combined Art and Action.

The Dreyfus Affair had been an impetus in the development of Romain Rolland's thought. Many of his ideals were formulated as a result of it. When the Affair ended in a compromise which did not solve any of the problems it brought out, a handful of young men, Charles Péguy among them, motivated by the need for purity and unity in political life, raised their voices against the lies and crimes of a corrupt government that was destroying civilization. They expressed their outrage in a publication of socialist persuasion, Cahiers de la Quinzaine, founded by Péguy in 1901 (during the Dreyfus Affair which lasted from 1894 to 1906). They joined together, including Rolland, to purify the stained goddesses of the French Revolution, "Patrie" and "Humanité" and, with religious zeal, called for a "mystique

²²Lettres à Malwida von Meysenbug, p. 271.

de l'action", "le sacrifice entier à sa foi".²³ Armed with ideals and high moral standards, they expected nothing less than to save human civilization.

In 1914 however, it was clear that the past was gone and new ideals had to be formulated. The time had come to discard those of the French Revolution, cherished for so long, especially "l'idéal national", and to replace them with the more urgent "idéal humain". The First World War had begun and, on November 26, 1914, Rolland wrote that the solution to end the war lay specifically in the forsaking of the "idéal national".

This had been a most sensitive issue. French socialists were torn between two contrasting forces: pacificism and patriotism. They finally decided that it was their patriotic duty to fight imperialism before they could aspire to peace and brotherhood of all nations. But Rolland stood firm. When his article Au-dessus de la Mêlée was made public he received their blows. They turned against him with a violence that could only be interpreted, according to René Cheval (Romain Rolland, L'Allemagne et la Guerre),²⁴ as an attempt to cover-up their embarrassment for not having taken his position in the first place. Whatever the interpretation, it was a fact that Rolland did not have many friends supporting his views and he was then "l'un contre tous".

²³ Rolland, "Adieu au Passé," Quinze Ans de Combat: 1919-1934 (Paris: Les Editions Rieder, 1935), p. 147.

²⁴ René Cheval, Romain Rolland, L'Allemagne et la Guerre (Paris: Presses Universitaires, France, 1963), p. 32.

As it was mentioned, Rolland's ideals evolved through personal contacts with people and his readings. He extracted those ideas that best expressed his own thoughts and feelings. Nourished by German artists first, Goethe, Beethoven, Wagner . . . then by Russian novelists, especially Tolstoy and Dostoevsky those "colosses de génie poétique et de grandeur morale", who, significantly, "m'ont fait mon âme",²⁵ he aspired to found an international culture with a basic unifying ideal of "la Fraternité Universelle".²⁶ Faced with a grave crisis, the war, Rolland did not abandon his ideals but instead, in those critical times, put them into practice.

First he continued to show fairness to those nations considered enemies of France - Germany and Russia - whose culture had molded his soul, by defending them against, in his judgment, unjust vilification. Then he pointed to the real source of the troubles. The people were not guilty, he said, they did not want war. The fault lay not with them but with the statesmen and governments. They should be the accused. In Au-dessus de la Mêlée he named those responsible for the tragic state of affairs and he proposed to take action to prevent it from recurring in the future. Most guilty were Prussian militarism and the monster called imperialism, that will to dominate and absorb, subject or break. These must be destroyed first.²⁷

²⁵Ibid., p. 24.

²⁶Rolland, Au-dessus de la Mêlée (Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorf, 1915), p. 2.

²⁷Ibid., p. 33.

He called on the intellectuals to unite and to take action, together. He proposed to create "une haute cour morale", "un tribunal de consciences", a United Nations of sorts that would make sure the rights of people were not violated in the future.²⁸ At a time of great conflicts, artists and writers, priests and thinkers, the leader of men, ought not compromise their integrity, ought not give in to the forces of evil. "L'esprit est la lumière. Le devoir est de s'élever au-dessus des tempêtes et d'écarter les nuages qui cherchent à l'obscurcir."²⁹ He would not accuse the German people and he would not abandon his friends with whose countries France was at war. For this stance Rolland was severely criticized. In his thinking, it was morally wrong to crush a whole people when the guilty were a few, and cowardly to abandon his friends. This is a sample of moral integrity that is admirable and proves Rolland was sincerely concerned with ethics and lived by the moral code he tried to safeguard.

In 1916 Rolland returned to the public eye with the article Aux Peuples Assassinés - a turning point in his thought. He broke completely with the capitalistic and bourgeois order that bred the war. René Cheval, in his scholarly work on Rolland and the war, summed up the transition of 1915 as the fading away of the intellectual who judged history according to his own moral values and the emergence of a man in search

²⁸Ibid., p. 34.

²⁹Ibid., p. 36.

of himself who would like to participate in the tragedy of the masses and serve them. But this was not a simple matter for a man of his high moral standards and his equally high conception of the role of the intellectual as the leader of men. He would have liked to see Europe regenerated by intellectual means yet he realized that the movement of the masses was more efficient. He was not anti-revolutionary, he simply would have like to avoid the unpredictable developments that necessarily accompanied any movement that was not controlled. He will eventually resolve his dilemma by rationalizing that peace would come about through revolution.

He took the side of the masses, he took the side of the Revolution but he refused to join any organized group, determined to remain independent and free to think and judge for himself. In fact he appealed to all intellectuals to exercise their right of independence of thought. It was more than a right, it was a duty. This attitude was to become a hallmark of the man who will be remembered as the "Conscience de l'Europe".³⁰

During the war, few had been able to resist the overwhelming force of nationalism imposed on them and amidst the passions they lost or gave up their ability to reason. Out of this experience Rolland saw the need to protect what he considered a vital right and drafted a Déclaration de l'Indépendance de l'Esprit to which many prominent figures added their

³⁰ Rolland, Textes Politiques, Sociaux et Philosophiques Choisis (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1970), p. 149.

signatures in support of his action. The manifesto was printed in the newspaper l'Humanité on June 26, 1919. "Independence of thought" meant: not to be subjugated or oppressed by outside pressures, especially propaganda and political threats. As leaders of people, the intellectuals had a duty to maintain their objectivity at all times so that it could be used as a tool with which to observe and guide the armies out of the battles of one day. This attitude is very significant judging from his later writings; it is his most basic and constant ideal.

A few of those who had been able to remain objective or at least lucid during the war, joined forces with Rolland to stand united in defence of the highest moral values, humanity, liberty and truth. There was a particular urgency and need to stand up for values that protected a humanistic civilization in view of the Revolution that was sweeping away the old order and with it, possibly, those very values without which it would not survive.

The Revolution did not, of course, meet with unanimous approval in France, but some did sympathize with it, and hailed it as the hope for the future of mankind.

On Dec. 6, 1917, Rolland wrote in his diary: "La victoire de la Revolution Russe nous paraît capitale pour l'avenir de l'Europe".³¹ He had been promoting the ideal of a humanism

³¹Rolland, Journal des Années de Guerre, p. 1370.

that embraced all mankind: "Nous devons prendre aujourd'hui l'humanisme dans sa pleine acceptation qui embrasse toutes les forces spirituelles du monde entier: Panhumanisme."³² He had hoped to build an international community upon a foundation of individual freedom. Now he looked toward Russia as the way to achieve his goal. He intended to join the vanguard of Europe, the Revolutionary heroes of the Soviet Union to work toward the moral and social reconstruction of humanity and the creation of "l'Union des Travailleurs Prolétariens".³³ The difficult task would be to reconcile the needs of the Revolution and those values he could not abandon or compromise, those gods he called "humanity" and "liberty" in order to serve, just the one god, "revolution".

Many French intellectuals were not initiated into the writings of Marx and Engels and did not understand what the Revolution would do for the spiritual life of the individual and as a result conceived it to be opposed to "liberty" that is freedom of thought and action. They did not understand that a new social structure would provide for a spiritual and cultural life and that it would evolve from an economic base. Hence the conflict of the double passion for the Russian Revolution and for liberty.

Once he has accepted the need for the Revolution, Rolland faced the agonizing problem of reconciling the economic and

³²Rolland, "Pour l'Indépendance de l'Esprit," Les Précurseurs (Paris: Edition de l'Humanité, 1920), p. 201.

³³"Adieu au Passé," p. 187.

social needs with those of spiritual freedom.³⁴ But first why did he who feared a revolution because it was an unpredictable movement now reverse his position proclaiming his support of it? Rolland was concerned with humanity and human progress. Progress, he believed, was a matter of chronological though not continuous evolution. It stops every now and again until it is jolted out of its complacency to move onward. This jolt can be provoked by revolutions made by any nation. France, for example, move civilization a step further in 1789. Then it was the leader of humanity. "Chaque peuple à son tour guide l'humanité"³⁵ and now it was Russia's turn to open up a new age. The work of the French Revolution had come to an end; the era of the bourgeois society had passed.

In the Revolution seemed to lie the hope and answer to peace and unity among men but not the assurance of spiritual freedom. There was a difference between living in harmony with each other and retaining one's individualism and spiritual freedom. Rolland stressed the need for both: "Je crois que chaque être est un monde et que si ces mondes doivent chercher à s'harmoniser dans l'univers, aucun n'a le droit d'imposer à un autre ses lois ou celles de son système solaire. La liberté à laquelle j'ai voué mon amour et mon énergie toute entière est la liberté morale. Elle ne se trouve pas plus assurée par

³⁵Cheval, p. 632.

le socialisme ou le bolchévisme que par le capitalisme."³⁶

It was of foremost importance to assure this freedom.

He debated with those socialists who argued that this was not a priority or even a necessity. Max Eastman, the director of the journal The Liberator in New York, refused to sign the Déclaration de l'Indépendance de l'Esprit because he believed that "l'esprit n'a pas le droit d'être indépendant"³⁷ and that it was necessary to commit oneself entirely to the Communist Revolution. To do that, replied Rolland, one would have to have great faith in it, believe in it religiously. Since he followed in the tradition of Montaigne, always doubting, forever in search of truth, he could not feel the same way about it. "Je cherche la vérité," he said, ". . . Je ne sais quelle est la vérité . . . mon rôle est de la chercher et de la dire, telle que je l'entrevois."³⁸

It was on similar grounds that a controversy arose between Romain Rolland and Henri Barbusse who otherwise were pursuing the same goal, namely fighting Reaction whether political, social, moral, or intellectual.³⁹ The editor of Clarté called his attitude "rollandisme", which stood for anarchy because he criticized the new order without offering any constructive suggestions for replacing the old one and because he was continually opposing organized systems or movements under the

³⁶Journal des Années de Guerre, p. 1389.

³⁷"Journal de Romain Rolland. Extraits Inédits: 1919-1920," p. 184.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Textes . . ., p. 200.

pretext that they were just different forms of tyranny and oppression.

In reality, what Rolland was criticizing were the evils he believed existed in Russia at the time, specifically the subordination of everything to the needs of the state and the sacrifice of vital moral values of humanity, liberty and truth in the process of achieving their aim. At this time, 1921-22, in the "ends versus the means" dilemma, the "means" still outweighed the "ends". The "end", rarely achieved, modified only the external rapport among men. The "means" however, were fundamental in the formation of the mind and of behavior and thus the decisive factor in their choice between the use of justice or violence in their modus operandi. This is why it was so essential to protect moral values particularly in times of upheaval when the spirit was most apt to change. It was those very values which would avert the tyrannies and oppressions of tomorrow.

The Communists reacted to the controversy between Rolland and Barbusse with insulting and abusive language against those who expressed opinions not in keeping with their credo. To Rolland's dismay, they considered the debate a petty one. He did not ignore their outburst and responded with an attack on their dogmatic attitude and their refusal to consider advice to correct their system. They should be eagerly analyzing the issues of debates, such as that one he said studying them closely to find some truth that would improve their order.

In conclusion, Rolland remained adamant in his defense of the independence of thought. The problem was to find a viable solution that would enable the legitimate needs of the socio-economic Revolution to coexist with the just as legitimate needs of spiritual freedom. Marxist dogma was too limited by the economic and materialistic considerations, blinded by the rapid development of technology and capitalism it had failed to take into account the needs of the soul which, of course, Rolland considered the most important factor in human progress.⁴⁰ To explain his thinking, he used the illustration provided by Rudolff Steiner in Dreigliederung des Sozialen Organismus or The Triple Aspect of the Social Question (1919). Steiner had compared a social organism with a human one. Just as the human organism is composed of three distinct but vital systems: cerebral, respiratory, digestive which coexist but are also independent of each other, so too the economic, political and intellectual lives must all contribute to the social organism - but independently.

It was clear that Rolland had not studied Marx (he will not do so until 1929) or he would have discussed his ideas in relation to the superstructure that is determined by the base and which is supposed to create the New Man. Regardless of whether he had or not, he was still protecting the right to independent thought and against sacrificing it for any reason

⁴⁰ Rolland, "La Révolution et les Intellectuels. Lettre aux Amis Communistes," Textes . . ., p. 233.

whatsoever because the outcome of such an act could only lead to the exploitation of the individual, to a society of masters and slaves.

In the early stages of the Revolution, Rolland spoke out against using any means to achieve the ends no matter how noble they were. He would not remain inflexible on this point. "Le progrès humain . . . s'achète aux prix des millions de sacrifices."⁴¹ He will come to condone some of the injustices and crimes of the Soviet Revolution as the necessary price of progress. Like Gide, Rolland referred to the Revolution as a birth, as the bringing forth of a new order. In it lay the hope for mankind. As with any birth, there was great suffering: "cet ordre nouveau est tout sanglant . . . ainsi que l'est le fruit humain qu'on vient d'arracher au ventre de la mère. Malgré le dégoût . . . l'horreur . . . les erreurs féroces et les crimes, je vais à l'enfant . . . il est . . . l'espoir misérable de l'avenir humain!"⁴²

He was completely aware of the developments in the Soviet Union when he gave his support to the efforts of the Revolution: certain political procedures that smacked of reactionary policies, precisely that against which he was fighting; the "narrowness" of its doctrine; the atmosphere of a dictatorship with its censorship and secret police. In spite of it all, he recognized

⁴¹Rolland, "Réponse à Constantine Balmont et à Ivan Bounine," Quinze Ans de Combat, p. 96.

⁴²Quinze Ans de Combat, p. 28.

its greatness and historical necessity: "je crois qu'elle est la puissante avant-garde de la société".⁴³

By 1927, Rolland had found a common denominator that answered the needs of his vision of the new social order and corresponded to the real situation. Create a new "god". Work. It would make all men equal and thus unite them as brothers.⁴⁴

Work would become the basic principle of life: he who worked ate, and he who didn't, simply had no right to eat. The task at hand was to distribute work equitably and allow millions of people the right to leisure, give them the possibility of individual development.⁴⁵

How does such a materialistic attitude correspond to the idealistic one Rolland stood for? If thousands of people are willing to sacrifice for "materialism", aren't they, in fact, "idealists"? A man should not be judged by his ideas but by his actions. He believed that socialist construction in the Soviet Union would improve society, make it more human and just. The aim of all should be to protect the new society against the parasites that were impeding its growth. He who could eradicate them, whoever he was, Christian, Idealist, Marxist, Materialist, or Gandhist, if he was like an experienced gardener who knew the soil, as Lenin and Stalin did, then he should be trusted. It is clear why Rolland had confidence in Stalin and did not question his tactics until 1936.

⁴³Rolland, "A Lounacharsky," Quinze Ans . . ., p. 82.

⁴⁴Rolland, "Réponse à l'invitation par VOKS," Quinze Ans . . ., p. 84.

⁴⁵Rolland, "Lettre à Serge Radine sur le Matérialisme Communiste," Quinze Ans . . ., p. 131.

Rolland followed the developments in Russia since before the Revolution, first through the works of novelists, then the Russian people he met and corresponded with and, also by reading accounts about it in reports by those who had been there.

In 1916, he met Anatol Lunacharsky, a revolutionary and a refugee at the time in Switzerland, who would become the Commissary for Education after the Revolution. It was through him that Rolland came to correspond with Gorki. There developed over the years a fruitful relationship. Jean P rus in Romain Rolland et Gorki,⁴⁶ studied the role played by Gorki in informing Rolland of the life in the Soviet Union and in shaping his conception of the new society. Poor health had prevented Rolland from accepting many invitations to visit the Soviet Union until 1935, so that for many years he followed step by step the construction of socialism through various sources of which Gorki was a significant one. He did not however depend solely on it. He came into personal contact with visitors to the Soviet Union, people of all nationalities and races, French, English, American, German . . . people who could on occasion be mistaken in their conclusions, but whose sincerity and freedom from party affiliations made them reliable witnesses. He paid particular attention to professionals such as economists, scientists, doctors and educators, because they

⁴⁶Jean P rus, Romain Rolland et Maxime Gorki (Paris: Les Editeurs Fran ais R unis, 1968).

were used to reading meaning into signs, they belonged to what he called "cette franc-maçonnerie" of professionals "qui se comprend à demi-mot d'un pays à l'autre."⁴⁷ Among them were Georges Duhamel and Luc Durtain. Although his knowledge of the Soviet Union was based on secondary sources, these were numerous and carefully chosen and provided, therefore, a most accurate picture and enabled him to get as close as possible to the truth.

When Rolland did make the trip himself to witness the results of the Revolution at first hand it was of great disappointment for this reader to find that the published accounts of his reactions and impressions were contained in an article only five pages long and revealed very little. There were a few comments about the contagious atmosphere of enthusiasm unknown in Europe and the superiority of soviet socialism to fascism,⁴⁸ not a very flattering remark if that was all he had to compare. The diary to which he had committed his thoughts, observations and impressions were not to be published, not to be revealed to the public.

We know that prior to 1935 Rolland had been aware of internal developments that seemed dangerously close to reactionary politics - censorship, spying, secret police - but he always judged them in terms of necessary evils which would bring about a great liberal society, and he compared this to the Herculean

⁴⁷"Lettre à Balmont et Bounine," pp. 88-89.

⁴⁸Rolland, "Retour de Moscou," Commune (Oct., 1935), p. 129-133.

labor of cleaning the Augean stables, unpleasant but necessary. The older generation, millions of people, must make the sacrifices for the benefit of future generations.

It is true that Rolland condoned the policies of the Soviet Union but is also true that he wrote: "le progrès humain . . . s'achète aux prix de millions de sacrifices"⁴⁹ in 1928, before the events such as the Moscow trials which earned greater and greater criticism from the West. Still, even after 1936, he continued to maintain a silence that for many was hard to understand. Perhaps the decision itself to withhold his views from the public together with a few comments made here and there do, in fact, reveal something of the nature of his reaction and attest to his sincere beliefs as to what extent any means can be used to achieve human progress and whether it was being accomplished in the Soviet Union.

André Malraux once said, "l'homme n'est pas seulement 'ce qu'il fait' mais 'ce qu'il cache'".⁵⁰ Rolland had hidden his real thoughts, his reaction to a reality as he witnessed it. It is not so much what he hid from the public as the fact that he did conceal his thoughts that is significant. Obviously, had he returned as enthusiastic and optimistic as he claimed, he would have no reason not to disclose his reactions. He admitted that there was information he did not want published. Assuming

⁴⁹"Lettre à Balмонт et Bounine," p. 96.

⁵⁰Cheval, p. 59.

that what he wrote was critical, the question becomes, why did he not publicly condemn or denounce those acts?

It is common knowledge that Rolland was indeed puzzled and troubled by the harshness of the Soviet policy following Kirov's assassination: death sentences for children of twelve years of age (April 12, 1935), the principle of family responsibility (June, 1935) as opposed to individual responsibility. In an article printed in l'Humanité on October 23, 1935, "Aux Calomniateurs", Rolland went so far as to defend Stalin whom he had personally met in Moscow. He had said, incredible as it may seem, that it did not please the Soviet leader to condemn these men!⁵¹ It is not out of naïveté or a special loyalty to Stalin that he make this comment. One must take into account his consuming desire for social progress, as well as his characteristic loyalty in times of difficulty. He was still true to the statement he made in a letter to Barbusse in 1932: "je ne cesserai . . . de combattre pour la défense de l'U.R.S.S. et pour la Révolution prolétarienne."⁵² It was not Stalin he was supporting, it was never an individual but always a people, always an ideal.

He saw his ideal being realized in the Soviet Union. He knew that the achievement of a new social order required unity and that any discord would hamper the construction and

⁵¹Pérus, p. 249.

⁵²Rolland, "Lettre à Henri Barbusse," Par La Révolution, La Paix (Paris: Editions Sociales Internationales, 1935), p. 63.

could lead to war. He would not jeopardize its success. His commitment was not to Stalin, only to the cause of a free people. In the Soviet Union he saw and admired the vitality and enthusiasm that were in evidence everywhere. He received many spontaneous and very sincere expressions of enthusiasm that were not, he stressed, imposed by a dictatorship, rather, he said, they were caused by a collective psychosis of faith, joy and certainty in the truth and victory of their cause.⁵³

This public posture of support did not mean that his conscience was free from torment. First the contradiction between the march toward democracy coupled with an increasingly pervasive secret police system; then the development of the individual coupled with a contempt for basic individual freedom were danger signal he could not ignore. As he said himself, he was "frappé de stupeur"⁵⁴ by the Moscow trials (end of August, 1936) and repelled by then: "Staline et sa cour ont-ils perdu le sens?"⁵⁵ and the enigmatic words: "beaucoup de choses s'éclaircissent maintenant, pour moi, de ce que je savais l'an dernier."⁵⁶

Let us not forget that Rolland was also active in European politics, struggling since 1932 against the threat of war and against fascism, calling for unity of all people regardless of their political beliefs or social classes. Intellectuals and

⁵³Rolland, "Retour de Moscou," p. 130.

⁵⁴Perus, p. 332.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

workers were urged to join forces in safeguarding peace. In June 1933, Rolland was named honorary president of the International antifascist Committee. He participated in exposing the trumped-up trial of Dimitrov and setting him and his companions free.⁵⁷ The following year he did the same for Thaelmann, persecuted for being a Communist.⁵⁸ He spoke out against Hitler's antisemitism and racism. The only hope, as he saw it, lay in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In spite of its mistakes, its weaknesses, it was the incarnation of the dreams of all people, the way to social progress. If it fell, the world would be covered with "la vague de boue et de sang de l'asservissement"⁵⁹ for centuries to come. It had become a matter of choosing between Stalin and fascism.

Stalin and his bolshevik companions represented optimism; they were working for the future and they were convinced theirs was the answer to a better society because science was on their side. The Marxist doctrine demonstrated the laws of human development were inevitable.⁶⁰ The Italian fascist leaders on the other hand were egotistic, fighting only for their glory and selfish ends at the expense of the future generations. That is why the only solution he saw was to defend the Soviet Union or else it was the end: "c'est pourquoi je dis: - 'La défense

⁵⁷Rolland, "Appel au peuple d'Allemagne pour l'aquittement de Dimitrov et de ses compagnons Torgler, Popov, Tanev," Quinze Ans . . ., p. 211.

⁵⁸Rolland, "Pour Thaelmann," Quinze Ans . . ., p. 214.

⁵⁹Textes . . ., p. 92, quoted from "Comment Empêcher la Guerre."

⁶⁰"Retour de Moscou," p. 131.

de l'U.R.S.S. ou la mort!"⁶¹

It should be pointed out that Rolland viewed socialism and communism as the continuation of the French Revolution, that is, they were taking over the task of bringing about Liberty and Humanity. These were always the fundamental goal for Rolland. He was never a politician, never formally joined any party. He was first and foremost an idealist in the moral sense, and somewhat of a mystic. He was interested in Tolstoy and in Budha because they had a particular insight into truth. They were "messiahs" who stood above the crowd and showed the way to light. There can be no doubt that he wanted to continue their work.

When in December 1933, Rolland was asked in a survey conducted by the periodical Commune, the organ of the Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists, why he was writing, he answered because it was his means of action. When asked for whom he was writing, he answered, for those who were fighting to establish a community of men without borders, without classes, an international brotherhood. The Communist party was the only one actively involved in working toward achieving this goal. That is why he was supporting it, that is why he was defending it. He did not embrace a Communist ideal, he supported a doctrine that he thought was striving to achieve the same goals he was. His role was to stimulate the rest of the world to adopt these goals and fight to achieve them.

⁶¹Textes . . ., p. 92.

How did Rolland perceive of the role of the writer in the present society? The writer must participate in the combat, when there is one taking place, as there was, and not shy away from responsibility by using such excuses as the belief in art for art's sake or the need for meditation as justifications for the refusal to participate in social or political action.

True to his word, Rolland also appealed to those who called themselves fellow-travellers to write for as wide a public as possible and not for a select few. He had tried to put this idea into practice before the Russian Revolution, in 1903, when he described his new aesthetics in the Introduction to his Theater of the People. The ideal was praiseworthy but premature. Europe did not yet have a people that was not crushed by misery and work. The U.S.S.R. had created a people. It had done it through positive action. Europe had to follow its example with writers participating in fighting for liberation and humanity with their most potent weapon, their pen. The artist, a privileged being because of his ability to see further, feel more deeply than others, should be called upon to form a general staff to head an army or, as Stalin put it, to become the "engineers" of the human soul.

The order of the day as Rolland saw it was "reconstruction" and to complete it, an elite was needed, who, nourished by the enthusiasm, the fervor, would struggle for the people, would lead them onward, just as he himself attempted to do.

In his preoccupation with the construction of socialism, his loyalty to their cause, he did not ignore or stand away from the threatening political developments in Europe, especially in Germany. He sternly called for action against Hitler whose fascism, far worse than Mussolini's, he condemned for its violence, racism and suspension of basic civil rights. Again, as he did in 1914, he did not hold the German people responsible but only their leaders and leaders were here today and gone tomorrow.⁶² He played a major role in attempting to maintain peace by awakening public opinion, organizing a world congress of all Parties against the war and presiding over the "Ligue internationale des combattants de la Paix" (1932). Through their organ, La Patrie Humaine, they directed a campaign to arouse not the individual intellectual but those who would be most effective at stopping the war: the workers in factories, munitions plants and transportation.⁶³

All efforts failed but Rolland did not lose faith in the possibility of a better future. In 1944, just a few months before he died he wrote: "Je crois . . . que l'Age de la Haine sera surmonté, et qu'un jour les hommes seront réconciliés."⁶⁴ Throughout his life, he remained constant to his ideal of a "brotherhood" of man, fighting the evils of nationalism, imperi-

⁶²Rolland, "Contre le fascisme en Europe," Quinze Ans . . ., pp. 199-204.

⁶³Par la Révolution, la Paix, p. 38.

⁶⁴Rolland, "A Wolfgang von Tripitz," Un Beau Visage à Tous Sens. Choix de Lettres de Romain Rolland: 1886-1944 (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1967), p. 378.

alism, capitalism, fascism. He looked to the U.S.S.R. as the new order which would save mankind and, therefore, defended and protected it against its enemies, always cautioning the world never to lose sight of the most important right of civilized man, the necessity of independence of thought.

The main problems that disturbed him, that he had to come to terms with concerning the Soviet Union from its inception, were ethical ones: does the end justify the means? should the individual give up his right to independent thinking? the Moscow trials and the problem of justice. Whatever inner torments they caused him, Rolland remained loyal to the U.S.S.R. and faithful to his ideals.

In 1965, the periodical Europe, which Rolland had been instrumental in establishing 42 years earlier, paid him a tribute by issuing a special edition devoted entirely to him and in which he was described by almost all as a committed writer, a brave and lucid man who exerted considerable influence on young people and, most importantly, as "apôtre de la paix". To quote from one article which expressed the thoughts of most:

"Etre seul contre tous, avoir le courage de résister au courant, se dégager du flot pour s'engager, seul dans la voix de la sagesse et de la raison, c'est exactement ce qu'il a osé faire."⁶⁵

⁶⁵Bernard Clavel, "Jeunes Frères Ennemis," Europe (Nov.-Dec., 1965), pp. 35-39.

The lesson he taught was well-learned: "Il importe de n'être jamais un troupeau aveugle . . . que nous restions lucide comme il le fut."⁶⁶

Work had always come first in Romain Rolland's life, work that he hoped would benefit mankind. Not a healthy man, it is amazing to what extent he involved himself in his work, how much he was able to do and to produce. His physical frailty was compensated by strength of the will, frequent physical fatigue by a tireless mind. Always well-informed, constantly aware of what was happening in the world, he had an ability to appraise accurately the events of the day by considering them from a broad perspective.

He had formulated his ideals early in life. At the turn of the century he dreamed of uniting men into a Panhumanism. He was realistic enough not to speak about utopia but, making a choice from what was available, he opted for the lesser evil, Communism, which at least set out in the right direction of transforming society into a more just and humane force. He committed himself to the Soviet Union because its goals corresponded to his own and he gave it his support, rousing an often antagonistic public opinion in its favor. The Soviet Union appeared at all times a better alternative to fascism. The United States, a capitalistic country, was never a choice for him. A concerned man, he worked ceaselessly toward achieving a

⁶⁶Ibid.

lasting peace by speaking out against the war and using various means of preventing it: uniting the intellectuals of the world to lead the masses, organizing peace congresses, studying Gandhi's method of non-violence.

He stood up to his beliefs and stood by his friends in times of crises, impervious to pressures against him, because he was convinced he was right. He had the inner strength of a martyr, the conviction of a deeply religious man, and the dedication of a saint. His one human flaw, it seems, was pride in himself. He did like to draw attention to the fact that he was among the first to accept the Revolution, just as he was the first to introduce Indian thought to Europe. It is a forgivable flaw since it gave him the motivation to work.

Thanks to his mother and Malwida von Meysenbug, he built up confidence in himself; he owed Spinoza his peace of mind, as well as his faith that was religious in essence but universal in character; Tolstoy showed him the importance of morality.

Rolland embodied the best qualities of an intellectual: a keen and perceptive mind, an objectivity that enabled him to deal wisely and reasonably with the burning issues of the day, to look beyond these matters "d'un jour". His willingness to involve himself actively at the risk of being severely criticized for thoughts that ran counter to traditional attitudes, was an act of independence and courage.

He was consistent in his role which he saw as freeing man from oppression in whatever form and guiding him toward a

better future. If to be a revolutionary meant, as he put it, to be on the constant lookout for signs of tyranny and oppression and then to fight them, then he surely was a revolutionary.

He did not live in an ivory tower protected from the world at large but urged his fellow artists and writers to join him in the struggle against injustice and intolerance which threatened civilization, about which he had learnt during the Dreyfus Affair. He set an example of how they could be effective in their task by using their particular weapon, their pen, to arouse public opinion and denounce corruption.

He proved that it was possible to combine creative work and active participation in the troubles of the times without compromising art. He produced for example two multi-volume works of fiction, l'Ame Enchantée, for which he received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1915, and Jean-Christophe.

In his support of the Soviet Union, which he believed was attempting to build a society based on justice and humanity, he was really supporting his old ideals of the French Revolution, Liberty and Humanity. When the new social order seemed to betray those ideals, Rolland, afraid of destroying fragile new hope, kept silent.

Despite World War II, Rolland did not lose faith in the future. "Ayez confiance," he wrote in 1944, just before he died, ". . . l'époque n'est pas médiocre - ni dans le bien, ni dans le mal. . . . dans la littérature clandestine, comme dans

la presse délivrée, on a déjà entendu de grandes voix, - pour la plupart, jeunes et émouvantes. - J'ai confiance."⁶⁷ The answer lay with the young people who were taking over the role of guiding men: they were the new leaders.

⁶⁷Un Beau Visage à Tous Sens, p. 382.

CHAPTER IV

JEAN-RICHARD BLOCH: THE MODERN HERO

Much of Jean-Richard Bloch's published works comes under the general heading of "Essais Pour Mieux Comprendre Mon Temps". This should not be surprising since he was a historian by training even though his first impulse and intention had been to become a creative writer. The two happily combined to produce a critical observer, chronicler and analyst of the turbulent events of his time and their effect on existing social and artistic forms in such collections of essays as Carnaval est Mort (1920), Destin du Siècle (1931), Offrande à la Politique (1933) and Naissance d'Une Culture (1936). A traveller, he brought back impressions and experiences (although unfortunately not of Soviet Russia) which he set down in Sur Un Cargo (1924) and Cacaouettes et Bananes (1929). He also fulfilled his inner need to invent in a number of short stories, novels, plays and even poetry. . . . Et Compagnie, Lévy, La Nuit Kurde, Le Dernier Empereur are among his artistic creations which testify to a fertile imagination and a talent for all genres. He received recognition from respected writers - Romain Rolland, Roger Martin du Gard - and was noticed by critics in the 1920's as a promising artist.

Bloch planned many more literary works that he never completed mainly because of the time he devoted to social and

political causes that he considered in more urgent need of his attention, the fight against Fascism and the defense of Socialism to name but two. This chapter will study Jean-Richard Bloch, the man and writer who, more than any other included here, managed to unite militant action, commitment to social and political causes of the Left with literature.

Born in Paris in 1884, around the same time as Duhamel and Romain, he also attended the same school, Lycée Condorcet, but was set apart from them by his Jewish origin. Even his dear friend Romain Rolland, without a trace of condescension, did emphasize the difference that existed between a true Frenchman, a pure one, and a Jewish one. He had written in a letter: "J'ai vu à Genève un de vos homonymes qui est un des types les plus intéressants de votre race (my italics)".¹ In an introduction to . . . Et Cie, Rolland praised the work very sincerely and added: "no figure of our age has realized as ably as he had Bloch that harmony of the proud virtues of art and intelligence of those two ancient but always renascent people, of those spiritual aristocracies, the Orient and the Occident, France and Israel."² For Rolland race was an indelible mark that had a determining effect on man. Yet Bloch did not want to consider himself or be judged as a Jew alone. Although his early works ... Et Cie and Lévy did study the life of Jews in France he

¹Jean-Richard Bloch, Deux Hommes Se Recontrent: Correspondance entre Jean-Richard Bloch et Romain Rolland, 1910-1918 (Paris: Albin Michel, 1964), p. 61.

²Romain Rolland, "Introduction," . . . Et Cie., trans. C.K. Scott-Morcrieff (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1929), p. vi.

explained:

"je ne veux point etre celui qu'on
nommerait 'le romancier juif' . . .
Encore un roman . . . quelques nouvelles,
et je serai débarrassé de ce que je dois
dire de ce côté. Entre temps et par la
suite naîtront . . . des oeuvres qui
m'arracheront à la propriété exclusive
d'un parti ou d'un genre . . . Je suis
Juif, je suis Français, mais avec ces deux
éléments je n'aspire qu'à fonder mon
statut d'Européen et plus encore d'homme."³

In his short story Lévy two features do stand out: one that the "I" in the story, the point of view is that of a Frenchman, a Christian, and, two, that Lévy, the immigrant menaced by antisemitism, would not run away from violent hatred and abuse he suffered in France. Instead he remained to fight for his human rights and became a prominent citizen, one who had been integrated, but not assimilated, into the community, who had been accepted by its members as a peer. It is Lévy's successful struggle against uncontrolled passions, his willingness to become actively involved in community affairs that showed he was, as we will see later, Bloch's hero. Like Lévy, Bloch wanted to be recognized as a human being above narrow categories but,

³Bloch, Deux Hommes . . . , p. 257.

ironically, he would pay a far heavier price for his origin, which he was never to reject.

At the time of the Dreyfus Affair, during the impressionable years of adolescence, Bloch was the target of antisemitic abuse. He would come home battered and bloody from fighting in the streets. He learned then what hate, ignorance and sectarianism could make men do. It was then, at the turn of the century, while still at the lycée that he came under the strong influences of political and social developments. The Affair awoke the social consciences of many men among whom were Rolland and Bloch. Such leaders as Jaurès, Guesde and Péguy brought to the fore an enthusiastic following of the ideal of commitment to social problems. Simultaneously, Tolstoy's ethical writings were being read and their effect deeply felt: "Ce qui domine dans les souvenirs de ma jeunesse, ce sont d'interminables discussions de morale et d'esthétique."⁴ More importantly, "à la base de toutes nos discussions un nom, une pensée, une influence se retrouvent sans cesse: Tolstoï."⁵

Another work that profoundly stirred the young was Rolland's Jean-Christophe, particularly because Jean-Christophe represented a contemporary dilemma and the universal problem of the conflict of opposing desires: the free development of individual versus the loyalty of the individual to society. On the one hand - revolt, on the other - integration. Tolstoy and Rolland, Péguy

⁴Bloch, Destin du Siècle (Paris: Editions Rieder, 1931), p. 74.

⁵Ibid.

and Jaurès moved these young people to take upon themselves social obligations and moral duties.⁶ Bloch was very impressed by these ideas and in 1903 proved how effective they had really been when he joined a group of collectivist students belonging to the Unified Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste Unifié).

During the same year, he came under the influence of another figure - his world-famous uncle Sylvain Lévi, a professor of Sanskrit at the Collège de France. In the midst of artists and scientists who met in Lévi's home, in the stimulating atmosphere of discussion, Bloch was exposed to the concept that the efforts of man in the search for beauty, in literature and art, were actually childish activities, and that the only worthwhile pursuit was Science. This belief was soon offset by another one. Denis Saurat, a friend and author of La Littérature et l'Occultisme, introduced him to the cabala and Bloch began to take a renewed interest in the occult and in religion after having rebelled against them at the age of fifteen.⁷

By 1905, the year he earned his degree in history, the intellectual ferment around him had motivated him to reflect and make a serious choice as to the kind of life he would want to lead: between commitment to social and political causes or the comfortable and quiet life in a small town as a teacher and writer; between entering the twentieth century looking

⁶Ibid., p. 77.

⁷Denis Saurat, "Conversations avec Jean-Richard Bloch," Europe (mars-avril 1957), pp. 38-39.

ahead or holding on to the past. Like his character Moravie, he made a clear and uncompromising choice. When the 1905 Revolution broke out in Russia, he was at the forefront of those men who declared their unqualified support. Together with his friends he organized a meeting at the Sorbonne and secured a manifestation of sympathy. He had written in his appeal:

"Les Russes se sont dressés pour offrir en masse le sacrifice qu'ils offraient obscurément depuis un siècle à la cause de la liberté. . . . reconnaissons nos semblables - nos maîtres dans cette foule qui vient d'inscrire en lettres de sang le nom de la Russie parmi les Républiques! . . . Rappelons-leur que dans le prolétariat de France et du monde entier une espérance unanime attend le jour de leur triomphe . . . Recueillons autour de nous des adhésions . . . Vive la Révolution!"⁸

A resounding appeal, forceful and sincere in its simplicity and enthusiasm. Certainly Bloch was on the side of the masses and naturally he now looked to Russia as the leader in their liberation.

One could easily interpret this as youthful zeal and idealism, an outlet for the eagerness to serve humanity, a very moral and most worthwhile endeavor. This is partly true but his action cannot be explained away simply as excess energy or the sway of

⁸Bloch, Europe (mars-avril 1957), p. 142.

ideas in the air at the time, or as the loyal follower of the much-admired Jaurès, the ideal socialist. This action spelled commitment and was one example of a life-long principle.

There is no need to speculate what his immediate reactions to the October 1917 Revolution would have been had he not been busy fighting at the front in the war which engulfed the rest of Europe. The victim of several serious wounds, time and time again he returned to active duty on the front, his spirit never dampened. After the War he became an official member of the Party in 1920 and, when it split at Tours in December of that year,⁹ he organized the first Communist section in Poitiers where he lived. In 1923, he officially became a member of the Communist Party. His life-long adherence to Communism did not originate in a utopian dream nor was it based on the hope that it would solve the most permanent problems of poverty and disunity. It was based on certainty. Bloch knew what socialism intended to accomplish; he believed the Marxist theory that the time had come as the result of social evolution for the beginning of a new era. He thought it necessary, just as Romain Rolland did (and as he noted in Cette Grande Lueur à l'Est), to understand what was happening. After World War I people were confused by

⁹Herbert Tint in his book France Since 1918 (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970) explained that the Socialist Party was in disarray and unable to pursue a united policy because of the different attitudes its members had adopted toward the Russian Revolution. The majority of the Congress had voted for solidarity with the Communist International. As a result, the minority withdrew and effectively split the Party.

the new elements that appeared in society. The reshuffling of values produced new sets of priorities and new traits that had to be defined. Bloch set himself the task to "nommer les choses", to describe and explain the forces at work, their cause and effect. This is the reason for the subtitle "Essays for the better understanding of my time" of his works: Carnaval est Mort, Destin du Siècle, Offrande à la Politique and Naissance d'une Culture. In Offrande à la Politique he wrote:

"Nous cherchons à comprendre. Pour arriver à embrasser les phénomènes singuliers que nous présente notre époque, nous essayons de discerner les mouvements qui les parcourent ou les entraînent, nous tentons d'isoler les composants qui les forment."¹⁰

To develop his own thesis about the contemporary world and the destiny of our century, he applied Guglielmo Ferrero's method of seeking for answers in the past and sketching a parallel with the present. In Grandeur et Décandance de Rome (1902-1907), the Italian historian (1871-1943) argued that the principle of authority was the key to civilization and that anarchy would bring about its downfall. The ancient world collapsed as a result of a "crise d'autorité" and such a crisis was menacing the modern world as well. Bloch's criticism of Ferrero's conclusion centered around two main points. Firstly, the identification of the ancient and modern worlds was not completely valid because the differences between them were far too significant therefore

¹⁰ Bloch, Offrande à la Politique (Paris: Edition Rieder, 1933), pp. 199-200.

rendering the parallel inconclusive. A civilization without the printed word, based on a rudimentary economy, lacking a technology, with a speculative science, just could not be compared to a society that had a printing press which gave thought universality in space and duration in time; a science that was experimental, discovering the laws of nature; and a growing industrial technology. Secondly, Bloch noted the serious omission: Ferrero ignored Marxism as a doctrine and again, his analysis incomplete, his conclusion was unacceptable. Bloch thus took it upon himself to continue where Ferrero left off. He marked the turning points in history as his predecessor did. Ferrero had tried to show that Christianity had upset the intellectual and ethical bases of the ancient world by preaching spiritual equality. The French Revolution, Bloch explained, was also a turning point:

"(elle) libéra la puissance cosmique qui dormait dans l'individu, refit de chaque homme un fauve, de la société une jungle, le principe que tous les éléments constitutifs de la société étaient interchangeables".¹¹

These lines contain his diagnosis, his explanation of the detrimental effects the French Revolution had on man and society. Whether he was right or wrong is not the issue here. This view was and would always be Bloch's central argument for change.

¹¹Bloch, Destin du Siècle, p. 260.

Before that Revolution, man lived within imposed boundaries. He was limited to them and forced by them into moral, civic, religious, economic and political subservience.¹² The source of the significant transformation that took place was to be found in the Declaration of the Rights of Man that offered all individuals new freedoms. Napoleon was the first type of the changed man, the first to exploit the limitless possibilities allowed by this new decalogue. He revealed to the world that man was free to do as he willed. There were no boundaries imposed upon him any longer other than those of his own audacity as he went on to challenge the world. The consequences, of course, and Bloch stressed them, were immeasurable. Henceforth man served no other law than his own needs, guided solely by his self-confidence, his ambitions and inner compulsions. The passions were unleashed. Nietzsche, in turn, would remove completely any scruples that might still be left in the exercise of this new power.

Materialism, as the doctrine propounded by Marx, served as another turning point in history. Its significance and distinction for Bloch lay in its aim. First of all it embodied "le plus récent effort de ce regroupement de valeurs permanentes de la civilisation",¹³ in opposition to the napoleonic world and "Napoleonic" here stands for those qualities and characteristics that had evolved since Napoleon. It was "le seul qui

¹²Ibid., p. 259.

¹³Ibid., p. 289.

ait tenté . . . de freiner (my italics) sa terrifiante accélération".¹⁴ The word "freiner", restraint or brake, must be noted. Bloch's argument in favor of Marxism is, in great part, due to what he believed was a vital need for restraint. The "frein" can be, I think, considered the equivalent of Ferrero's "authority" and its certain effects on social and political development, the necessary ingredient without which civilizations cannot endure. In fact Bloch was convinced that communism "est né de l'angoisse que dès le milieu du 19e siècle quantité d'esprits européens ressentirent devant l'individualisme effrené du système napoléonien".¹⁵ Here he contradicts himself. If he believed in the scientific basis of Marx's theory of historical evolution then he would not seek for answers in the individual search for solutions to problems. The vital question remained: would Marx's doctrine offer the "frein" that the human mind, let loose, required?

Tied in with the problem of the individual was the problem of society. In Bloch's analysis, although he seemed to separate the one from the other, they were not separable. He did emphasize a particular duty the individual had in relation to society that was not altogether Marxist. Men had to find for themselves a balance of those psychological features common to all and evolve an inner judge whose imperatives would con-

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 286.

trol reckless behavior, restrain the passionate and powerful drives.¹⁶ According to Marx, the New Man would result from the changes in society. Bloch agreed that society determined the man. He blamed it for producing the destructive phenomenon, the emphasis on the self, which was leading to the eventual fall of civilization. Yet he suggested a solution that depended on individual will: each one was to change himself.. This ideal of self control and the implication of civic duties can be seen more certainly as originating from the old French tradition rather than Marxism and it is no wonder that Bloch considered Montesquieu and Voltair as precursors of Marx. In his prescriptions, Bloch was expressing his Weltanschauung which was not really new but which he believed to be crucial for the building of a better society. He admitted that "sensitive souls" of the Romantic Era, Schiller, Michelet, Hugo, would find Marxism hateful because it was contrary to their conception of the world and man's place in it. Doing away with the idea that man had free will, that society was the creation of that will, it showed instead that society was governed by laws which must yet be proven. Because of those laws, man must be restored to a condition not unlike that of a cell blindly yielding to the requirements of the great body - society. Again, if man does not have free will how can he change social reality? Let us see in this a value

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 314.

system rather than a philosophical one. Thus the priority set by Bloch was the social over the individual.

The difference between this thought and Romain's concept of man as being part of a whole, like a cell in a body, lies in the word "soumission" - yielding, submitting. For Romain, man's feelings are determined by those emanating from the people around him and by the environment. It is the individual sharing and participating in a collective feeling because the collective dominated in the particular urban society of the twentieth century. For Bloch, man must submit, just as he did in other historical times to a force that led the way, be it King or Church, only now it was Determinism. Still the submission is of a different nature, it is voluntary. Crucial is the idea contained in the phrase: "nier le pouvoir transcendant du caprice intellectuel ou de l'impulsion sentimentale quand ils sont dirigés à rebours de cette rigoureuse évolution".¹⁷ This would have to be his justification of conformism so detested by Gide but explained by Bloch's fierce reaction to the possible outcome of uncontrolled behavior.

What was, on the whole, the contribution of Materialism? It was, Bloch told us, three-fold: firstly it attempted to wrest mankind from the mortal consequences of the Napoleonic system, its ethic, economy and politics; secondly, it made evident the dynamics of capitalism and imperialism and brought

¹⁷Ibid., p. 230.

to light the "vice" that was undermining society; lastly and most importantly, it proposed a solution to end the existing ills. It provided the road to salvation. The solution was to exclude from its own ethic and economy the "vice" or the propelling motive of private interest.¹⁸

Pointing to the inevitable evolution of society according to scientific laws, Marx's doctrine provided man with the certainty of a better future. With the coming-into-being (Bloch indicated that it had not yet come about) of a "science" of societies "constituée à l'exemple des sciences de la nature"¹⁹ groups of men would no longer find themselves at the mercy of chance, or the prey to empirical panacea. "Ces réflexions expliquent pourquoi nous sommes si nombreux à observer l'expérience russe avec attention".²⁰

Obviously Marx failed in his prediction of a world-wide revolution. Still, Bloch refused to see in this a failure of the whole theory, explaining that Marx had not foreseen capitalism taking upon itself to initiate and carry out economic reforms that, for one, prevented the course of events in the Western world from culminating in revolution.

Bloch admitted he never considered Marxism as faultless. After all it was only a theory. He was convinced, however, that the laws discovered by Marx although not as yet proven, would one day work because they did not take into account such

¹⁸Ibid., p. 290.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 236.

²⁰Ibid., p. 290.

variables as the differences of race, the influence of the environment or the action of individual men. "Peu à peu vérifiée . . . elles commenceront à produire des résultats si exacts . . . si surprenants pour l'intelligence des phénomènes sociaux qu'elles légitiment l'enthousiasme pathétique qui les accueille".²¹

Certainly, as Bloch pointed out, it was the scientific basis of the theory that explained the great enthusiasm for Marxism in the Western world at the turn of the century. It gave validity to the prediction of a better life for all and answered man's longing for stability and security, an end to misery and a beginning of a unified world. Why then did the Revolution not extend into Western Europe just after World War I when the Soviet Union was regarded with hope by the young people, with faith by the masses, with approval by the intellectuals and with great fear by the bourgeoisie? Bloch was as baffled as any one by this turn of events. He had used the terms "tornade", "typhon", "raz de marée" to describe the elemental nature of the Revolution, a force beyond the control of men and, as a historian, he had to look hard to find acceptable reasons. He proposed many possible causes for "cet extraordinaire renversement de la fortune",²² none of them, he admitted, satisfactory and as such they could be disputed forever. Some reasons lay in the exhaustion of the soldiers after the War, in the split within the Socialist Party,

²¹Ibid., p. 236.

mistakes in Bolshevik tactics, etc. Despite the outcome, Bloch did not abandon his commitment to a future along Marxist lines. He did not, however, accept the doctrine on blind faith nor approved all of its aspects.

There was a difference between Marxism - the theory - and the application of the theory in the Soviet Union. First of all in concretizing the revolutionary dream, by imposing it in the form of a very real government, it took away its mystical and symbolic qualities. As it did that, the Soviet Union killed its own myth and thus opened the way for the birth of a new one. What would it be?

"Le mythe du 20e siècle . . . est en chaque homme qui passe. Il est en chaque machine qu'on achève, dans chaque loi qu'on vote, dans chacune des pensées que nous formons. Nous ne le distinguons pas encore parce que personne ne l'a nommé ni désigné".²³

Meanwhile in the application of Marxism Bloch brought up new problems. He clearly perceived the contemptible methods of the Napoleonic era namely the imposing of a dictatorship and exacting obedience, justified in the noble cause of public interest. "La politique du matérialisme," he commented, "apparaît comme l'image retournée du monde napoléonien".²⁴ In denouncing

²³Ibid., p. 177.

²⁴Ibid., p. 298.

divine right it imposed its own strict rule. For Bloch this was contrary to the idea of social revolution and he concluded that until justice, morality, happiness, all of which were perpetually sought by mankind and which, once found, would constitute the ideal world, until these were mastered by man and transferred from the realm of the transcendental to the real, that is, reduced to the laws inherent within them, the idea of a social revolution would continue to contain the disturbing contradiction and many would protest it.

Bloch himself was most disturbed by the U.S.S.R.'s attempt to establish and impose a dogma, an absolute system of government. In his view, "le domaine des révolutions politiques ou sociales n'appartient pas à l'absolu, mais au relatif . . ." ²⁵ Materialism, unlike Christianity, was not a doctrine based on divine mystery but on a theory evolved by men, by scientists. As such it represented human research and thought that could be verified through experimentation. This explained the difference between the "absolute" and "relative". Something that has yet to be verified and confirmed by others in the future cannot be "absolute". This was both a clarification and warning on his part of a particular aspect of Marxism as well as an assessment of the situation, but in no way a denunciation or condemnation of the whole. Bloch had no doubts that his own time in history would be honored by future generations as one in which the pro-

²⁵Ibid. p. 230.

cess of transformation in the march toward Progress had begun. He predicted that: "la science politique, les prescriptions de la justice, les commandements de la morale, l'art du bonheur humain échapperont un jour au monde de la transcendance et deviendront . . . les humbles conquêtes d'une science expérimentale."²⁶ Science was the key to Progress and a world as he envisioned it, based on Science, would come about. In this belief Bloch was a student of Marx.

Not everyone had faith in Science nor in the type of society Marx foretold. Many feared Communism as a social form and an alarming vision was provided by Maurice Maeterlinck in The Life of Termites. Maeterlinck argued that man would be condemned, like the termite, the ant and the bee, to increasing mechanization of movements. Bloch did not accept that theory because of the biological distinction that existed between man and insect. Insects inherited the genes of only one parent, they were identical to that parent. Man, however, was endowed with a combination of genes from two different parents which made him unique and this condition was the safeguard against all men becoming alike. In other words, Maeterlinck's prediction was a biological impossibility.

What were Bloch's impressions of the concrete working of Communism as exemplified by the Soviet Union? His response is truthful and impartial. They varied, he said, with the different

²⁶Ibid., p. 300.

times such as, for example "war communism" or NEP, or the uncertain but "grandiose" enterprise of the Five Year Plan.

Generally speaking he was not in favor of Communism in one country. Citing Trotsky's argument for a permanent revolution as a means for the Revolution to spread, that is provoking turmoil within the Soviet society, Bloch admonished the Communists of Europe for being such docile servants of the policies of Stalin and his collaborators. Instead of helping them establish stability in the Soviet Union they should be inciting ferment so that the Revolution would catch on in their own countries.

Still, he added, whatever the shortcomings, anyone capable of objectively viewing the situation could only conclude that he was witnessing a heroic historical event, a moment in time when man believed in the greatness and perfectibility of his fellow human being.

In his evaluation of Marxism as a political doctrine, Bloch tried to differentiate between politics as the "least evil" and the "highest good". His approach was one of relativity. Materialism failed to provide a valid system of thought but it was still superior to the present policies of Europe which were leading the people to an open grave.

Throughout the years that Bloch involved himself actively in politics he did not completely abandon literature. At the age of 25, he combined both his political drive and literary interest in a "feuille de combat littéraire" which he founded

in 1910 and called l'Effort. The two, art and politics, would always be interrelated. "Sans politique la question de la portée spirituelle d'une oeuvre, de la valeur sociale de l'art, cesse de se poser. Ars et res publica dans la mesure où il est res publica."²⁷ L'Effort, or Effort Libre as it was later called, declared itself to be a "revue de civilisation révolutionnaire." It proposed to unite the proletariat and the intellectuals, to create a "foyer de cultures", "une maison fraternelle", "un signe ardent de ralliement".²⁸ Consistent with his beliefs, he fought to "jeter bas une société pourrie, disperser les idéologies sur lesquelles reposait la morale de la jouissance, lui substituer une civilisation qui aurait pour origine, pour but, pour loi, la morale du producteur (ie: the proletariat organized in unions) avec ce qu'elle comporte de nécessité, d'ordre, d'équilibre et d'amour, c'avait été mon rêve."²⁹

This idea of a new civilization to come-into-being was a permanent feature of his creative writing and predominant in his "Essays toward the better comprehension of my time", as we saw earlier, together with his appeal for balance and order and individual restraint.

In 1910 too he met with the young poets of the Abbaye group, among whom were Georges Duhamel and Jules Romains. He

²⁷Bloch, Carnaval est Mort (Paris: Edition de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1920), p. 252.

²⁸Ibid., p. 264.

²⁹Ibid., p. 259.

believed as they did that the "culte du Moi" was "malsain".³⁰

"L'art n'est pas une floraison malade de nos neurasthénies. Il est chose sociale, l'émanation de la souffrance ou de l'espoir public."³¹ For this reason Bloch praised Jules Romains as an innovator. Romains depicted man integrated in an urban society, the man of the city, the man in the crowd who, because of this proximity to others is seldom alone but participates constantly in the souls of others. Because this man was so much a part of their contemporary life, Romains' attempt appeared as the way of the future. "Jules Romains a beaucoup d'ennemis," wrote Bloch, "pour nous . . . nous avons tenu à marquer notre attention à l'égard d'un des écrivains les plus travailleurs de notre génération. Un de ceux dont il faut que le public apprenne le nom."³²

Georges Duhamel "un visionnaire du monde intérieur"³³ was another important writer according to Bloch because he discovered that which was most significant - the inner workings of modern man. As a poet, "Duhamel est le plus fort de nous tous",³⁴ he declared. In both cases Bloch praised writers of "today" and "tomorrow" not "yesterday".

³⁰Ibid., p. 248.

³¹Ibid., p. 252.

³²Ibid., p. 92.

³³Ibid., p. 187.

³⁴Ibid., p. 188.

New thoughts and experiences brought with them new forms. The present society was one that had no equivalent in the past. Built on class relationship of production all else derived from it and was conditioned by it. This transparently Marxist view of the economic substructure as constituting the base of society and determining the superstructure, including artistic production, explained why the theory of art for art's sake belonged to the past. "Une théorie de l'art pour l'art ne prend naissance qu'en des groupes nombreux de gens riches, uniquement adonnés aux recherches de la forme et aux subtilités de la pensée".³⁵ Now this could no longer be the case. "L'évolution du temps présent nous ramène à un état d'esprit révolutionnaire . . . Dans une telle société, l'art n'est pas un luxe mais un délassément obligatoire. Ce que l'esprit trop tendu y va chercher, c'est un repos . . . Le théâtre du peuple sera donc un lieu de délassément ou ne sera pas."³⁶ His essay "Le Théâtre du Peuple", which first appeared in l'Effort in June 1910, proposed that a new art be created for the masses and outlined some of the essential features it had to contain. The masses would only be interested in passions and social relationships that corresponded to their own. The two important rules for the new theater therefore would be to depict or express the passions of the proletariat at the beginning of the 20th century and to entertain.

³⁵Ibid., p. 27.

³⁶Ibid., p. 28.

This concern for a proletarian art seven years before the October Revolution in Russia showed Bloch's conviction that times were indeed changing, that the new audience should have an art directed at it, written for is entertainment. It is true that Bloch was not the first to speak of a new theater for the people. Rolland had already been doing that since 1896 or 1897.³⁷ Bloch, fully aware of this, had praised his predecessor for his efforts but criticized the Théâtre de la Revolution for using old situations instead of new and contemporary ones. "Quelle chimère de vouloir passionner une foule moderne avec la prise de la Bastille!"³⁸ he commented. The new myths, heroism and passions of the Social Revolution, of the International had to replace the old worn myths of "Liberté" and "Patrie".

These ideas about art formulated before 1919, expressed far in advance of the majority of French writers, the need for a new form of art and a different accent, one that would present the new reality of a socialist society and one that would evoke a response from the masses. This is why, when he went to the Soviet Union in 1934 to attend the First Congress of Soviet Writers in Moscow, he was so impressed with their efforts to achieve what he himself had prescribed.

He was, in general, greatly impressed by the Congress. A formidable gathering of six hundred writers (a situation, he

³⁷Jacques Robichez, Romain Rolland (Paris: Hatier, 1961), p. 115.

³⁸Carnaval est Mort, p. 36.

noted, unheard of in France) who were not merely artists, but revolutionaries and politicians performing a special task. Their pens were used to fulfill their duty of speaking for the revolutionary people, expressing their sentiments, their lives and destinies. At the same time, they were there as artists assembled to study and discuss problems of aesthetics. "Voilà la chose nouvelle,"³⁹ Bloch remarked. All of these men had the obligation of reaching the people in every corner of Russia and her satellites to satisfy the cultural needs of everyone. The goal of the Congress had been to discuss the methods of expressing revolutionary sentiments so that they could be understood by everyone.

Bloch's reaction to this congress was very positive: "Je crois que jamais un acte de pareille signification n'a été accompli dans aucun pays"⁴⁰ and "ce congrès est une date marquante dans l'histoire intellectuelle de l'humanité."⁴¹ He spoke as a historian who had studied other eras and could best evaluate this new development. "Ce que nous avons pu voir à Moscou, c'est un sentiment de base profondément socialiste et imbu du sens de la qualité humaine".⁴² When so many people now known as living in terrible misery, in a primitive economic state are told that they had a right to spiritual food, to literature and poetry,

³⁹Bloch, "Parmi les leçons d'un Congrès," Europe (Jan. 1935), p. 105.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 106.

⁴²Ibid.

this demonstrated to Bloch the acknowledgement of the worthiness of man in general and this, he thought, was a step in the right direction.

In France such an effort was lacking. "Nous sommes séparés du peuple"⁴³ lamented Bloch. He had always deplored this lack of communication between the writers and the proletariat, the masses. In France, the people's participation in its great culture was diminishing and the fault lay with the social structure, in the system of classes that created a gulf between two types of public that could not be easily bridged. In the Soviet Union this particular problem had not been completely solved but at least something was being done to eliminate the barriers between the classes. This attempt to make the public, the people, one, involved the writers. Their role was now defined, they had to transmit culture and they became, in Stalin's words "the engineers of the human soul".

His enthusiasm for such a promising social endeavor blinded him to the more precise meaning of Stalin's intentions. In fact, writers had no choice but to fulfill their tasks, to write according to a new and specific formula that Bloch never mentioned by name, that of "socialist realism". In his report he simply wrote: "le poète et l'écrivain soviétiques sont chargés d'exprimer le sentiment du peuple révolutionnaire à l'égard du destin et de la vie."⁴⁴ Publicly pronounced at the

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 100.

Congress by Andrei Zhdanov, Stalin's cultural aide-de-camp, Bloch must have been aware of the exact wording:

Socialist realism demanded of the artist
 "the truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development. Moreover, the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic representation of reality must be linked with the task of ideological transformation and education of workers in the spirit of Socialism".⁴⁵

He either chose not to take into account the implications of the phrase "ideological transformation" or honestly did not notice it. He was not completely duped by the implications of writing in accordance with specific requirements because he responded with a speech suggesting a margin of artistic freedom be allowed the writer, a speech that he said was received with warm applause. Furthermore, Bloch sincerely believed in the revolutionary spirit. It may not have occurred to him that not all the writers present were of like mind nor could each one create according to an imposed formula even given a margin of freedom. Inspiration and creativity have laws all their own in spite of what Marx said. Bloch did not know that those who failed to perform the definite task assigned, that is, who did not subscribe to the "method" would not see their works in print. Along with the

⁴⁵Abram Tertz, On Socialist Realism, trans Georges Dennis (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), p. 148.

formula came that which enforced it: censorship.

Bloch did not pick up the inherent contradiction in the formula of the two mutually exclusive qualities: "revolutionary enthusiasm" and "objective depiction of reality". In his mind the two were compatible and he proved it himself when he analyzed contemporary reality in the Soviet Union, criticized its weaknesses and faults yet never wavered in his conviction of eventual success.

His enthusiastic reaction to the Congress was with the over-all aim which he saw as being essentially his own and which he had discussed since the days of l'Effort, namely that art must be made to reach the greatest public, that it must express the passions of the masses.

Let us examine Bloch's own concepts of art and the role of the writer since the 1920's. In his view how must the artist respond to the new demands of the times? Is he exempt from responsibilities to society?

In a speech he gave in 1946, Bloch summed up his life-long position in the key words: Commitment and Responsibility.

"Responsabilité sur le plan de la perfection littéraire, mais indissolublement, responsabilité sur le plan de la clairvoyance politique, du courage civique et de fidélité au peuple et à la nation. . . . La défense de la démocratie se confond avec la lutte pour la paix. Démocratie, paix, honneur, devoir de l'écrivain, à nos yeux, tout cela ne fait qu'un. . . . C'est

en cela que consiste notre engagement."⁴⁶

It is this belief in the voluntary participation in the social and political destiny of his country that led a critic to define Bloch as "l'homme public au deuxième degré"⁴⁷ opposing him to his old friend Roger Martin du Gard who, in 1945, wrote: "Je me sens vieux, vieux et totalement dépassé par mon temps."⁴⁸ Not denying the greatness of his work, Martin du Gard was a man turned inward, one who belonged to the past. Bloch, "mêlé à son temps" would not allow events to get ahead of him. That is why it would have been impossible to speak of the works of Bloch without relating them to his social and political involvements and beliefs. As a result of this, he had first hand knowledge of what was happening. The urge to understand the significance of events led to the critical observations and reflections, the rigorous but personal analysis of his essays in order to attain his object: "nommer les choses".

Not content with that, he attempted to project into the future. It was not without reason that his favorite books were the critical and prophetic visions of forces to come, such as Gogol's Dead Souls, Cervantes' Don Quixote, Rebelais' Pantagruel, and so did more than merely mirror the then contemporary manners

⁴⁶Bloch, "Responsabilité du Talent," Les Plus Belles Pages (Paris: la Bibliothèque Française, 1948), pp. 289-297.

⁴⁷Pierre Gamarra, "L'Optimisme Tragique," Europe (juin 1966), pp. 9-15.

⁴⁸Ibid.

and customs.⁴⁹ In a particular age, one in the process of becoming, the writer must be a prophet:

"Sur les ruines de la civilisation qui l'entoure il lance des personnage purement imaginaires, presque mythologique, héros chargés de hâter la disparition du passé et d'introduire violemment dans le présent les conceptions, les idées-forces du monde à venir."⁵⁰

Bloch happened to be in such an age. "Nous sommes au commencement de tout" was the leitmotif of his essays in Naissance d'Une Culture and by it he meant both in terms of scientific discoveries and in terms of social development.

Science had created a state of permanent mobility. For some this was a sign of decadence for they did not believe the human mind capable of adapting to new rhythms of existence. Such was Duhamel who, in his Scènes de la Vie Future, made known his pessimistic view that technological advance represented a set-back primarily because man tended to stop thinking for himself. Bloch argued that Progress in fact consisted in the subordination of the material conquests to man's nature and his society. Man must and would adapt to his purposes the uses of science in order to attain a higher state of well-being and the most out of man's fate and intellect. "Progrès est

⁴⁹Bloch, "Actualité de Don Quichotte," Europe (juin 1956), p. 88.

⁵⁰Ibid.

technique convertie en dignité".⁵¹

In terms of social development, the effort had begun in bringing to the masses the poetry and literature once only written for, and available to, a select few and this represented in Bloch's view "un coup d'audace sans précédent dans l'histoire humaine".⁵² This was without question revolutionary and a step forward. Thus strongly disagreeing with Paul Valéry who regretted the art destined for "le profond, difficile et désirable lecteur".

When asked: "Pour qui écrivez-vous?" Bloch gave an answer that revealed his notions of the essence of a writer's work and his role. His thoughts on the subject were not solely theoretical but constituted the working guidelines he actually followed. He considered the question itself as a most serious and vital one, and around which he constructed his own philosophy of art and his creative works.

On the premise that a writer wrote because of an inner need, he built an argument for converting the personal need into creating a bond with the masses. This, as we saw earlier, was being done, enforced, in the Soviet Union. There, however, class distinctions were being made to disappear whereas in Western Europe the writer faced the problem of unbridgeable gaps in the audience so that his writing could appeal either to the masses or to a restricted elite, with one automatically eliminating the

⁵¹Bloch, Naissance d'une Culture (Paris: Edition Rieder, 1936), p. 158.

⁵²Ibid., p. 164.

other. There were two possible solutions to this dilemma proposed by Bloch: one, the artist could turn inward and express himself without concern for the public; two, he could turn to the masses. The latter option required a great deal of faith in humanity on the part of the artist because he had to believe that society was indeed changing and consciously desirous of surpassing itself, demanding poets and writers to reflect its particular situation.⁵³ "Le plus fort," he concluded, "serait celui qui unirait en lui les deux courants, les deux besoins, les deux exigences."⁵⁴

It was necessary though, and he made this point at the Congress in Moscow in 1934, as stated earlier, to grant the writer that margin of freedom to permit the individual temperament and imagination to function. After all, the creation of a literary work was dependent on them. However, let it not be forgotten that inasmuch as the writer drew his inspiration, the vital impulse, from the society that nourished him, his work was also a "fait social".⁵⁵ In other words, a writer summed up the currents of his own time. The aim of the work should be: "une alliance durable et permanente . . . entre le créateur et la masse."⁵⁶ This could not be done in a country, like France,

⁵³Ibid., p. 85.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Bloch, Destin du Théâtre (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1930), p. 11.

⁵⁶Naissance d'une Culture, p. 99.

where this alliance was still based on the old value of individualism. That is why the world must follow the example set by the Soviet Union where this ideal was being carried out.

In his own works Bloch was faithful to his convictions and earned a place in literary history as the precursor of what was described as the new realistic poetry of social struggle. Jean Spangaro in his Manuel d'Histoire Littéraire de la France characterized him as the "écrivain qui a ouvert le roman comme le théâtre aux réalités nouvelles de son époque",⁵⁷ and remarked that "l'œuvre de Jean-Richard Bloch est une des grandes initiatives"⁵⁸ because the content of his works was relevant to the then present-day public.

Let us turn to the creative works of Bloch's to see if he carried out his theories. To begin with, a novel, the first and only volume of what was to have been a two-volume novel under the general title of L'Aigle et Ganymède, the continuation of . . . Et Cie, could be described as a "spectacle des idées". The Russian Revolution examined from various points of view against the background of the French upper middle-class society and artists' circle of 1924. The role of art was explored at a time of Socialist construction. In addition there were characters to provide the author with an opportunity for a psychological study of women and it is no coincidence that the names of his

⁵⁷Jean Spangaro, "Le Témoin de l'Aurore," Europe (juin 1966), p. 24.

⁵⁸Ibid.

heroines appear as titles. The first part called Sybilla (for Sybilla de Ferris) would have been followed by Clotilde.

Throughout the novel there are, primarily, two points of view: that of a male writer, as such the "analyste du coeur féminin", the very conservative and full of self-importance Adrien de Vallade, and the other, that of a dancer born in Russia, the strong and willful half-woman - half goddess, Sybilla de Ferris also known as Daria.

Adrien de Vallade, in awe of Sybilla's personality and talent, immortalized her in a book which, out of conceit he proudly presented as a gift to Clotilde, then his fiancée, in order to properly impress her. A young and impressionable woman, she of course immediately saw in Sybilla a serious rival until, and here is where the intrigue and complexities begin, the turning point in her life, the first meeting with the dreaded personality. The effect is as overwhelming as it is unexpected! Clotilde, the faithful and consistently reliable wife was suddenly transformed by the meeting. What had happened? At the sight of Sybilla in motion, dormant forces within her came surging out. "Frappée de stupeur, elle assiste au prodige. Ainsi jadis la suppliante devant l'autel pythique. Elle voit sous ses yeux, les éléments se substituer, le souterrain au respirant, le divin à l'humain . . . (Sybilla) échappe au règne terrestre".⁵⁹ Bewildered, the poor woman can only express her feelings not

⁵⁹Bloch, Sybilla, Vol. I of L'Aigle et Ganymède (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1932), pp. 129-130.

explain them.

The plot, as it unfolds, revolves around the changing relationships - Adrien - Clotilde - Sybilla, their effect on one another. The introduction of secondary characters such as Poupée, the Simlers and the German, allows for diversion from the main conflict creating suspense and adding greater uncertainty in the outcome. Sybilla's devoted and jealous shadow, manoeuvred her mistress away from possible emotional attachment with Clotilde. Sybilla's own desire to protect herself and Clotilde resulted in a sudden, unannounced departure which ~~confused~~ everyone and especially Adrien and Clotilde. The latter, confused by the action, questioned the possible motives. But she was no longer sure where she stood, what she meant to Sybilla and in a moment of doubt and distress very unlike herself she left abruptly for her mother's home in the country. The relationship between Adrien and his wife was affected by all the commotion and he had been noticing a change in her behavior. Trying to understand her, he would not admit to himself that the cause was her overpowering attraction for the dancer until someone directly suggested it. Although the thought had occurred to him he dismissed it as absurd. His "instinct d'homme" could not consider Sybilla a lesbian: "elle n'a fichtre pas l'anatomie plate, la psychologie anhydre de ces femmes-là".⁶⁰ Such analysis does not show Adrien to have a very profound knowledge of women.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 281.

Once he gave way to Freudian thinking, analyzing systematically all of the data, all details connected with the situation, reconstructing the events piece by piece that led to Sybilla's sudden departure, which, in turn was followed by his wife's, then he had to face the fact that his wife was no longer the woman of five days ago, before the now accepted "coup de foudre".

Freud's influence on Bloch is evident in the complexities of behavior he chose to study, behavior that defied simple, logical explanations, that did not follow "normal" patterns set by stereotypes. Aside from such psychological explorations, the delving into the workings of the female mind, so contrary to the rational and logical, Bloch also dealt with the social problem of the future of the Revolution.

Lenin's death, this is why the date 1924 is noteworthy, gave the author the opportunity to offer three points of view of the situation: those of the Bolshevik Jacquoli Simler, the Russian emigré Antipe Sousloff and, interestingly enough, of Sybilla or the intuitive woman, the non-intellectual. The news triggered reactions of the various characters who heard it and this led to discussions and speculations as to the future of Communism and the inherent worth of Marxism.

Jacquoli is a "bolchéviste du salon" and the value of his commitments were undermined by Adrien's appraisal:

"Comme c'est élégant de jouer au communiste
quand on s'appelle Simler, qu'on est riche

à millions, qu'on a un père
ministre . . ."⁶¹

Antipe Sousloff was the spokesman for the intellectuals. While he did not approve of Soviet Russia's form of government, he considered both sides of the argument and was fully aware of the significance of events taking place:

"Quelle est la seule mort, importante au monde, et le seul pays aujourd'hui où une mort puisse être un événement tragique et décisif pour tous les peuples de la terre? . . . Enterrez tous les grands hommes de vos vieux pays, fanés, anémiés, et Lloyd George et le Clemenceau, le Wilson, l'Ebert, même Mussolini, et puis observez le monde ensuite. S'il a bougé de ça, je veux être pendu. Il n'y a qu'en Russie, qu'un événement et un individu peuvent être immense aujourd'hui, même dans l'abjection."⁶²

Despite the greatness of a Lenin, the Revolution, as he appraised it, would expire in a convulsive agony.

Adrien asserted that Sybilla's conception of the future of the Communist society was far more valid because she had, since 1917, visited the country several times. Sybilla was far

⁶¹Ibid., p. 65

⁶²Ibid., p. 103.

more modest. She admitted that her reactions were impressionistic, provided by feelings and instinct rather than the result of objective examination. She said:

"Je ne suis pas communiste . . . Je suis une pauvre danseuse bête et illetrrée. . . . Mais je sais où sont les gens qui ont besoin, les gens qui appellent et, de ce côté-là je suis."⁶³

The woman, guided by irrational forces, was speaking here, but more than that, she was the Mother alert to primal needs of mankind.

Having known poverty herself, she understood misery and, guided by her instincts, aspired to serve the people. That was her aim in life and that explained why Lenin was her hero. She had known him and heard him utter the decisive words: "Nous passons maintenant à l'édification de l'ordre socialiste."⁶⁴ From then on she was on his side together with the peasants, soldiers, sailors, and workers from all over. Her response to his death was typical of her response to any strong emotion: she did not cry or faint or talk, she danced. Through the expressive movements of her body she demonstrated what this death meant to her. She chose not to mourn him but to glorify the immortality of her hero.

Watching her, Sousloff interpreted the dance as a ritual -

⁶³Ibid., p. 126.

⁶⁴Ibid.

the worship of an idol! He chided her for her misguided misconceptions:

"Le socialisme , . . n'est pas né, comme vous nous le disiez de la pitié pour le peuple humilié, pauvre et faible. Il a été conçu pour la formation et l'exaltation d'une nouvelle classe ambitieuse aux yeux de laquelle on a fait miroiter l'empire du monde et la suprématie politique, militaire, économique, ecclésiastique . . . le socialisme est impérialiste."⁶⁵

He went on to explain that in its aim to redeem man from the sins of capitalism, the Revolution resorted to the same evil strategies of oppression and dictatorship. Furthermore, Marxism had set out to eliminate individual qualities in man by negating the soul and replacing spiritual dreams with desires that could be immediately satisfied because they were down-to-earth. Here it was Bloch himself protesting. Dreams and the soul were a necessary part of man: "toutes ces fleurs vivantes sans lesquelles la société n'est plus qu'un désert minéral et un chaos."⁶⁶ Here then were expressed some of Bloch's objections to Marxist materialism. As a doctrine it was imposing a system of thought and this he could not accept. The possible nightmarish outcome is suggested in a dream, or rather a nightmare, Sousloff had in

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 184.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 185.

which Sybilla incarnated the Spirit moved by pity for humanity to give of herself to mankind. Pursuing her was the God of Science - the Machine - driven by Progress. The Machine accidentally got out of the control of the driver, and here is where the significance of the idea of "frein" comes in: it was about to crush her. Science must be given a direction and controlled if there is to be Progress. Furthermore, Progress tried to stop the Machine from crushing the Spirit, which means that it is necessary for the future society if there was to be Progress.

To this vision Sybilla quietly uttered:

"Tu es le premier qui m'ait jamais
comprise à ce point!"⁶⁷

Bloch endowed his heroine with more than talent, with a soul, the intangible, unexplainable spiritual qualities through which she exerted a powerful effect on people. As a performer, she was fully aware of its implication: "Mon âme," she said, "a-t-elle plus d'élan, plus de robustesse que la vôtre? Alors c'est vous qui me suivez."⁶⁸ It was so. Someone commented about her: "aucune créature qui ait approché cet être extraordinaire n'est plus ce qu'elle était . . . il a modifié tous les passages spirituels."⁶⁹ Her powers were real and they radiated through her art. Sybilla's dancing transformed the

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 189.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 190.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 334.

sensual, uncontrolled physical ecstasy into a controlled series of movements, into artistic motion, that, through form and rhythm eloquently displayed her deepest emotions raising them to a higher, spiritual plane.

When describing Sybilla's dancing, Bloch becomes very lyrical as he conveys by means of the written word the visual qualities of form and rhythm, the beauty of this art and the implications inherent in it. He informed the reader how it took years of work and training to make the muscles obey the mind, but it took genius to make it follow inspiration and faithfully reproduce intense feelings. Sybilla's best performances followed closely any experience that aroused strong emotions and she was sublime when, in the excitement of sexual stimulation, she would transpose not into words but movement, the depth of her passion. This was not seen by the public. To them she offered but a pale reflection of the heights she could reach.

Could this art be understood by the masses, by others than the cultured elite? Sybilla was sure that it could be and that this was her particular gift to humanity, her contribution to their self-respect. It was an important task, central in Bloch's conception of the role of the artist. He described Sybilla's role in the following way:

"Elle lavait de leurs petitesesses et de
leurs souillures ceux qui avaient

commerce avec elle, de la même façon
 qu'elle ennoblissait les foules devant
 lesquelles son corps magnifique traduisait
 les pulsations de sa grande âme. Elle
 apparaissait ainsi, au 20e siècle, pour
 réincarner l'esprit de l'humanité naissante,
 à l'époque où celle-ci concevait l'image de la
 mère à la fois terre et femme, épouse et
 déesse . . . créature parfaite et monstre."⁷⁰

Sybilla was Bloch's answer to the Soviet "engineer of the human soul". She transformed people by the spiritual qualities of her art and, through the silent eloquence of motion, accomplished what Bloch had prescribed: she communicated with the general public.

Throughout the novel Bloch attempted to remain detached, impersonal and objective. He gave many-sided arguments to actual political and social problems; he did not, however, speculate about the future of Soviet Russia. There is psychological truth in his depiction of characters and their behavior; this behavior is complex and, in Soviet terms, neither "normal" nor socially useful. Through his heroine he was able to present naturally the problem of art and society. He showed that he was opposed to the Soviet policy, consciously or not, of imposing a method of writing, a formula.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 74.

The source of art still had to be inspiration. While he agreed that art had to be directed at all people, he disapproved of the specific goal of educating them in the revolutionary spirit. He would rather it simply gave them a sense of worth and dignity. This was, for Bloch, the revolutionary ideal.

The weaknesses of the work are mainly in the dialogues. It is hard to differentiate between Sybilla and Sousloff, for example, when they are discussing politics. Bloch tells us that Sybilla has an American accent and makes mistakes in French. These are very hard to detect. Then there is entirely too much of the purely intellectual discussion for its own sake that does not advance the plot. There are too many minor characters who do offer a picturesque interlude but they appear suddenly only to disappear without any impact on the main action. It could be that Bloch had intended the novel for a general public which would explain the fact that it contained something for everyone - the bourgeois, the intellectual, the artist and the people.

The beginning, the death of Clotilde's father, is unnecessary. It is reminiscent of the construction of Madame Bovary in which Flaubert evoked Charles Bovary's boyhood which had so very little to do with the body of the work and, although interesting in itself, was superfluous.

Sybilla revealed the early influence on Bloch of both his uncle and of Marxism in the belief that Progress lay in

Science, that of Tolstoy in the willingness to serve the people and also of Denis Saurat who stressed the need for the spiritual.

Bloch's poetry was also intended for the general public and in some poems he depicted the stark reality of the proletariat world. For example:

"Pour que to sois au chaud dans ta chambre
Il faut que les mineurs aient travaillé
dans le fond de la mine
Et que leurs familles vivent en pénurie dans
de tristes corons . . ."71

He also wrote of the history in the making:

". . .
Octobre quarante et un
Toi qui viendras un jour t'aligner auprès de tes
aînés
Comme celui du coup au coeur
Mais celui du coeur plus fort que le coup,
Celui de l'ennemi sous Moscou
Mais celui où, sur la place Rouge,
Hitler ne fit pas devant lui défiler ses S.S . . .
Octobre quarante et un,
Tu sera plus tard cité parmi les octobres
Les plus beaux et les plus glorieux . . ."72

⁷¹Paul Jamati, "Jean-Richard Bloch Poète," Europe (mars-avril 1957), p. 88.

⁷²Bloch, Les Plus Belles Pages, p. 124.

This poem, "Octobre 41" was written in 1941 in Soviet Russia as the events were taking place. Bloch used "octobre" here as a symbol for "being and not being", an expression he often used. All of the past victories of war and Revolution have been gains for mankind and these could have become meaningless except for the courage exhibited by the French and Soviet people in their fight against Fascism. He predicted, three years before the end of World War II, that October 1941 would be a date to remember, a time when the "patrie" was in danger but also when it was saved.

The tone of the poem is too matter-of-fact, too straightforward in its diction. It does not flow nor does it read well nor is it pleasing to the ear. It lacks the imagery and figures of speech necessary to give it power, to give it an epic quality Bloch must have intended, a quality that would carry it into the realm of the poetic and away from the literal and cerebral. There is a harshness in many sounds especially in the alliteration of the following line:

"Vous voici revenus Octobres gravés au granit
de l'histoire"

and the line:

"Octobre des nuits blanches au fonds des
villes noires"

is really uninspired. Not satisfied with writing it once he added it elsewhere in the poem as if it were a particularly

happy line or an important factor to stress. There is no sense of anger raging through the lines, no bitterness, no cry of pain. It reads more like a statement of facts, a documentary. He fails to communicate the atmosphere of fear or doubt or horror. There is no emotion but only a calm certainty in the controlled lines:

"Nette comme un acte de foi pure
 Au fond des doutes et des revers
 En vous j'ai mis ma confiance . . ."⁷³

It isn't that he is incapable of a graceful and lyrical turn of phrase. There is great sensitivity in the prose poem called "Un poème à déchirer, une fleur à jeter" (1934). He reveals more feeling and greater subtlety in the flow of the lines even though at first glance it seems to be strictly prose.

"Tout un mois, l'ouragan du Sud-Ouest a heurté
 à ma porte, et moi je lui ouvrais, voulant sous
 les grandes pluies chercher la violette que je
 vous destinais.

Mars cette année fut un dieu en folie et les
 champs nus couraient cheveux au vent, des
 cheveux d'hiver si blonds que mes yeux lourds
 de vous ne pouvaient s'en détacher."⁷⁴

⁷³Ibid., p. 125.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 121.

By introducing the mythical figure of Mars, Bloch imparted a timeless quality to the poem. To express the overwhelming feelings for a woman whose image he could not erase from his eyes, whose memory affected his senses, he personified the fields. It is emotion that alters his perception of reality and he offered the reader a very personal and poetic reaction.

There aren't very many poems of Bloch's available but it can be said that some, such as his Hai-Kai et Outas are more successful than those whose main characteristics were the expression of social and historical reality and the struggle for peace.

In his plays he also tried to present current reality. Toulon, written in the Soviet Union, like "Octobre 41", was the dramatization of the actual events taking place. It was performed both in the Soviet Union and North Africa. Naissance d'Une Cité presented on stage in 1937 turned out to be too difficult to produce because of the crowd scenes, music, singing, circus acts, cycling . . . "Il cherche à briser les cadres traditionnels, à renouveler le théâtre par l'expression d'un nouveau symbolisme de contenu à la fois social et individuel".⁷⁵ The theme is the workers' revolt against the evils of capitalism, war and hunger, to establish a world they dreamed about. But, "cette tentative audacieuse n'eut en France aucun lendemain."⁷⁶

⁷⁵Pierre Bernard Marquet, "Jean-Richard Bloch et le Théâtre," Europe (mars-avril 1957), p. 109.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 108.

In his play Le Dernier Empereur, completed in 1919 but produced only in November 1926, Bloch dealt with the conflict between the political structure and the new ideal of socialist reforms, or working for and with the people, the struggle of one man against many. The central character, Prince Moravie, attempted, singlehanded, to reform the traditional role of the emperor by working with and for the people and, in spite of his good will, he failed. Bloch explained the situation thus:

"cet homme semblable à nous, faible, chimérique et de bonne volonté est transporté subitement dans la zone de commandement où pitié, faiblesse ni chimère n'ont plus d'acier, Moravie est le héraut de notre désir d'héroïsme. L'acier fin de l'individu se heurte à des masses brutales, celles des intérêts, celle de la foule."⁷⁷

It is another play "à thèse". A social and philosophical tragedy given epic proportions by the theme, the use of crowds and mythical figures at the introduction to many of the scenes. For example the Palace was called "Olympus", the ruling party, "Titans". The characters themselves are "flat" just as the author intended. He gave instructions that Janvier would represent the intelligent instructor, Del Monte "Revolution", "Love", "Glory" . . . , Woéikoff, an old Russian terrorist, and Longpré, the Chancellor, stood for monarchy.

⁷⁷Bloch, Destin du Théâtre, p. 91.

Moravie came to power unexpectedly when the Emperor and his son were killed in an accident. Unprepared by years of indoctrination, Moravie did not fit the official mold, he did not follow the tradition of the Emperor before him. Without transition from the state of an individual with ideals he had had the freedom to cultivate, he took up the burden of the state. Now that he held the ultimate powers, or thought he did, he proposed to effectuate change. Little did he understand about the realities of politics. To Longpré, the Chancellor he inherited from his uncle's rule, Moravie and his ideas were heretical and mad. They were antithetical to one another. To Moravie's question of who composed the Empire, Longpré answered, predictably, the elite of course, the people who were superior because they were talented and had a sense of order and continuity. To this Moravie replied: "Le jardin est fait pour ses roses . . . Mais le jardinier il travaille plus souvent dans le terreau et dans le fumier. . . . C'est moi désormais le jardinier."⁷⁸

Bloch favored this image of the people as the necessary element in any worthwhile production, the fertilizer without which nothing could grow. Tolstoy and Gogol were examples of those who had been able to write for a select few at the expense of the moujiks and the serfs. Like Moravie, Bloch intended to work for and with them, not use them.

With the intrigue approaching a climax, when a choice

⁷⁸Bloch, Le Dernier Empereur in La Petite Illustration (mars 1927), p. 18.

had to be made between war and peace, a conflict artificially produced by the scheming Longpré who had been dismissed, which meant in fact a choice between becoming a dictator and enlisting the support of the ruling class; the Empress, the ministers, the Army, or a prophet and gaining the support of the people, Moravie, aware of the plot against him, acted in favor of peace. He sided with the people and was accepted by them. But as they prepared to return him safely to the Palace, he warned them: "ce n'est pas de me remener dans mon palais qu'il est question. Ce qui est en jeu pour vous, c'est d'être ou de ne pas être."⁷⁹ In order to be, that is, to be taken into consideration by those in power, it was vital to put up a fight. Truth cannot triumph alone. It needed the support and sacrifice of the people.

At this most emotional point of a leader, accepted as such, making a crucial appeal for sacrifice in a noble cause, eliciting successfully loyalty and trust, there occurred two lines of dialogue that disrupted the atmosphere of exaltation, of collective emotion, as a young worker's strident voice is heard above the din: "Ah! On restera! On ne demande qu'à mourir pour vous."⁸⁰ Then, turning to Pauline, the woman in love with Moravie, she added: "N'est-ce pas madame?" The effect is comical as it is intended to be. But the line "on ne demande qu'à mourir pour vous" shows that the people have not understood the appeal. It should^{not} have been "pour vous" but for

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 43.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 44.

the cause. She was implying a cult of personality, not unlike a woman from a psychological point of view, but which did cast a doubt on the feelings of the people in general. Did they realize what the ideals meant? There is no doubt that she added a popular flavor to the scene and provided the comic relief.

The people lose in the end because the Emperor is killed. Bloch took the play off the stage because he was not content with the outcome, with Moravie's failure. Moravie represented for him the "héraut de notre désir d'héroïsme le messager de notre faiblesse."⁸¹ Bloch's view is quite pessimistic when he shows that man is weak, that he cannot win alone in the struggle against the machinery of society.

In spite of his own appraisal the production was successful and the critics hailed it as a shakespearean-type play with Moravie a Hamlet-like character;⁸² as a "théâtre cerebral" which was not necessarily bad; many flattering remarks about Bloch's intelligence and ideas. When one critic wrote that the psychological side was barely sacrificed, it was, I think, going a little too far. There is very little psychology indeed. The characters are "types" used to illustrate ideas. Feelings were not the principal matter nor was the conflict an emotional one, but purely intellectual: that of the struggle between ideal and reality. Moravie was not a Hamlet-like figure; he lacked

⁸¹Destin du Théâtre, p.

⁸²La Petite Illustration, p. 47.

depth, was not guilt-ridden or filled with tormenting doubts. The play is far more Cornelian than it is Shakespearean.

Moravie is one aspect of the hero Bloch had intended to create for a series of novels he was planning. These intentions were never carried out but some notes indicated what it was that he had in mind to do.

Based on the premise that the present civilization and morality were dying and that man cannot change his nature ("nous ne pouvons pas cesser d'être ce que nous sommes"⁸³) it was therefore necessary to find new forms to replace the old one, forms that would apply or fit the people as they were. In this respect he differed somewhat with the Marxist prediction that the New Man would be created from the economic base of society. Bloch seemed to imply that man would always be the same because his permanent and universal characteristics were determined not by society but by nature. However, man could be motivated by the aims that he set for himself, to choose certain qualities within himself, and make them the dominant features. Bloch's new type would have been a "chevalier" characterized in the following way:

"un être assoiffé du besoin de servir,
de s'exalter, de se grandir, de se pacifier,
de se sublimer dans le service . . . A
travers la mesquinerie, la paperasserie des

⁸³Bloch, "Projets," p. 161.

administrations, des intérêts privés,
des petites gens, il voit toujours
l'intérêt public. Il est tout le
contraire d'un évadé."⁸⁴

The model for this "chevalier" was his father and the novel, Le Faiseur de Fédérations, would have been the biography of the hero. This project, though unrealized, set Bloch together with Rolland, Martin du Gard, Duhamel and Romain in the tradition of Balzac and Zola of writing a series of works bound together by either a common title, theme or characters.

Bloch's involvement in politics did not leave him enough time to complete the task he had set himself. In the thirties he was fighting the fifth column, those who intended to establish fascism in France for Hitler and Mussolini, and in support of the Spanish Republic. He had no doubts of the priorities: "L'heure est aux combattants, non aux historiens. L'heure est aux actes et non à la méditation sur les actes."⁸⁵ In 1937, together with Aragon he founded the evening newspaper Ce Soir and thus became a journalist in order to more efficiently and vociferously defend the Spanish Republic and combat fascism.⁸⁶

His anti-fascist activities, his Jewish name and his participation in the Resistance brought the Gestapo after him

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 162.

⁸⁵Jacques Duclos, "Aux Obsèques de Jean-Richard Bloch (mars 1947)," Europe (Mars-avril 1957), p. 13.

⁸⁶Pierre Cot, "Tel qu'il m'est apparu," Europe (mars-avril), p. 49.

and he had to flee from France. By 1941, invited by the Soviet Union, he sought refuge there, and with his wife lived in Moscow until October 1944. He was not idle during those years. Twice a week France heard him on the radio urging his countrymen to fight and this was done in spite of the real danger from the Nazis to his family and friends. His role in the Soviet Union was appraised by Pierre Cot (French Minister of Aviation in 1936 when he first met Bloch, and who spent six months in Moscow with him): "Seul écrivain français à Moscou, il fut l'ambassadeur officieux de la pensée et de la culture française auprès de ceux qui supportaient alors presque tout le poids de la guerre."⁸⁷

In all of his political activities, whether in favor of the Soviet Revolution, or protesting against imperialist aggression in Morocco in 1925 when he took an anti-colonialist stand and accused Moscow of being responsible for the war⁸⁸ or in favor of Republican Spain and against those Frenchmen who did not support it, always, the goals of democracy and freedom for all as well as the fate of France, his country, were foremost in his mind. Above all, he loved his country and it is touchingly clear in a poem he composed for a lasting friendship between the Soviet Union and France a friendship he deemed a political necessity. It was called "Poème pour la fête de

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 50.

⁸⁸Claude Morgan, "Notre Maître, Notre Camarade," Europe (mars-avril 1957), p. 64.

l'Aviation rouge":

. . . "Je vous salue, chevaliers de la
liberté du monde . . .
Et frère je vous donne
Le remerciement profond et le salut
De ma France elle aussi douce et terrible,
De ma France aujourd'hui muette, invisible,
résolue,
Dont le grondement de vos trente mille hélices
Est la trompette qui sonne,
Sur les lieux de votre abnégation
Et de son supplice,
La résurrection."⁸⁹

Bloch's commitment to Communism was one primarily of conviction that the time had inevitably come for a society based on new principles, for the Revolution to spread through the world and bring a better life to all. This belief was founded on the certainty offered by Science and hence Bloch was not a Utopian but a Marxist Socialist. The beginning of the 20th century represented the beginning of a new civilization. Society would continue to evolve and the future was already present within everyone. Someone had to stop and analyze the new features of post-Soviet Revolutionary era, as he had done for the turn of the century period, and offer some insights to the ever-changing reality.

⁸⁹Paul Jamati, p. 87.

Bloch was not simply a Marxist or Socialist or Communist. He was the product of many currents: the French 18th century Philosophers, Tolstoyan ideals, Freud's discoveries and the fact that he was a Jew. He noted that he was a total revolutionary; as a Jew, with no roots in France, no ancestors, he had no past and therefore nothing to lose. Given the hope of Progress, of freedom and equality, Jews would fight wholeheartedly. It was not true that all French Jews were like himself with no past in France. Bloch exaggerated. André Maurois, Julien Benda and André Suarès, for example, could not be included in his sweeping generalization. For Bloch gains lay in the promises made for the future. He saw himself as "une monade jetée en désespérée dans un monde qui ne l'a pas faite, son action est excessive, arbitraire, toujours tragique."⁹⁰

After all the years of militant action and combat, Bloch returned home in 1944, physically spent and ill, only to find members of his family murdered or missing and, in spite of all he had gone through, in spite of the failures, he was still hopeful, although his hope was now colored by despair. He did not give up. It was not in his character to do so. And that is why the description of "the tragic optimist" would fit him so well. He took up where he had left off before the War and continued to work at the newspaper Ce Soir. He had no need to invent a fictitious "chevalier", he had only to write about

⁹⁰ Bloch, "Projets", p. 164.

himself. The New Man was Bloch living out the principles he believed in, mainly to be of service to mankind and, those who had known him, remembered the humanitarian moved by love and pity for man, the innovator of a new realism in literature, a committed citizen of the world and a most courageous and dedicated Frenchman.

CONCLUSION

The six diverse, influential, significant French writers were moved by the Soviet Revolution to seek outside their own country and culture in the new type of society to which it had given birth for answers to the problems of a threatened civilization, one which was no longer responding to the needs of a rapidly changing world. All of them reacted favorably to the efforts and ideals of the Revolution, some sooner than others, some more fervently than others, because, initially, it corresponded to their humanistic vision of the future. Before their actual quest, it had triggered in each responses that were both shared and individual. A general outburst of approval and support resulted in the active involvement on the part of Rolland and Bloch, the more passive reaction of Gide and the purely objective interest of Duhamel and Durtain. By the end of World War I they had come to the conclusion that it was time for the artists and intellectuals to leave their decaying "ivory towers" and lend their talents, influence and energies to a human cause. This was a change from the accepted tradition of the artist separated from social and political matters involved solely with his art. From Romain Rolland, the first to have attempted to put into practice his beliefs, to André Gide, the late arrival to this view, all emerged as active participants in the social and political arena. It is this renewed concept of their role as writers, their respon-

sibility as intellectuals that is the crucial element and significant factor in their relations with the U.S.S.R. during the 1919-1939 period.

Their involvement had consequences on literature as well. Gide, Romain, Duhamel and Bloch made attempts to depict the atmosphere and conflicts around the issues posed by Communism creatively in plays and novels. Their good intentions and good will produced poor results except for Duhamel. Romain's work lacked warmth and neither he, nor Gide, nor Bloch had been able to do what Duhamel did - namely, to fuse ideology and characters into an organic whole. Unlike Duhamel, they had been unable to create characters who soar independently, who have vitality or independent life which is the hallmark of art.

In their search for answers to improve civilization, the future of mankind, it appeared that uppermost in the minds of all except Rolland and Gide, was the concern for France, her culture and traditions. Gide's greatest preoccupation had to do with spiritual values which transcended nationalities. Rolland dreamed of uniting all peoples. Romain, Duhamel and to a lesser degree Bloch, discoursed at length à propos the two nations and set up dual standards in their analyses of the Revolution and socialist construction. The common motive that made them turn to the Soviet Union was their preconceived notions of Progress: what it meant, how to achieve it. The link between them was the desire for peace and an end to poverty and the misery of

the masses, the system of classes or privileges which divided the people and the substitution of the right to equal opportunity for self-fulfillment, in other words, for happiness. Communism as an ideology promised to achieve these goals, hence, its development was to be closely followed.

Although every one of the writers had evolved a personal philosophy that grew out of the combination of their temperament, the intellectual, social and political influence to which they had been exposed during their formative years and their life experiences, they each stressed the same themes although they differed primarily in the degree of emphasis: Rolland and Bloch were the idealists who considered the brotherhood of man as vital; Durtain, the doctor, did so too out of human compassion; Romaine believed it was up to France to find her own solutions and show the way to others; Gide and Duhamel held the growth of the spiritual life of the individual to be the most meaningful criterion by which to measure the value of a civilization and to gauge any improvement made by society.

As part-time journalists, part-time philosophers, all, except Romaine, undertook the voyage to witness, examine and evaluate the achievements of the Socialist construction, to bring back reports that would be instructive and perhaps valuable. Having examined these reports, or lack of them, a meaningful conclusion can be drawn about the reactions. Everyone had been concerned primarily with the human aspect, the people, their

adaptation to new values, their morale, their style of life. Except for Duhamel and to a certain extent Durtain, they were impressed by the enthusiasm and the gift for happiness of the Russian people, their friendliness. These, together with the liberalization of marriage and divorce laws, the improved status of women since the equality of sexes became legal, were concrete and positive signs of improvement.

No less admirable were the efforts to bridge the gaps between classes, eliminate the idea of privilege and bring about general social equality and through it unite the people. One method for bridging the gap was to use artists as engineers of human souls; this means was praised by Bloch who chose to see it as a means for reaching all human beings. To present literature to them, he felt, meant to endow them also with dignity. Gide, however, rebelled against the censorship that accompanied Stalin's literary policy, exposing it as harmful for the Revolutionary cause. Another method was conformity to a doctrine that affected all areas of life. Durtain noted in 1937 that equality was becoming evident in the growing uniformity of physical appearances. Gide at first thought it made people happy but soon discovered that regulations were being imposed on them and it became, as a result, one of his most serious objections to the regime.

Durtain and Bloch had reassuredly, optimistically spoken of the 1936 Constitution that would ensure, they thought, a

more democratic form of government. In fact the Purges, the Moscow trials, led Gide and Duhamel to speak out instead against the existing dictatorship which they condemned as perverting and corrupting Revolutionary aims. Furthermore, the bureaucracy that had been evident to Duhamel in 1927 and to Gide in 1936, the hierarchy that existed in every organization, including the Army, meant there was an inequality built into the system.

Stakhanovism at first was mentioned by Durtain and Gide as a clever way to shake up the lazy workers. But Gide later came to realize that it exploited workers and created differences between them. The Five-Year Plans were also supposed to have converted the Russian's love for working on projects into a means for moving the country forward economically; they turned out instead to be a means for oppression.

That which stood out above all else on the negative side was the surveillance by the secret police. Arbitrary imprisonment, censorship, blacklisting resulted in an oppressive and fear-ridden society that rewarded informers. Was Rolland justified in excusing these methods as necessary sacrifices that would result in a better future? Was this simply an unavoidable means to a yearned-for noble end? The Five-Year Plans did produce a leap forward. Both Rolland and Bloch kept silent. Their attitude was a manifestation of despair. It could not mean continued support of Stalin's methods. Duhamel and Gide on the contrary had spoken out against them, the former more mildly

than the latter. Time had proven them to have been correct. Rolland and Bloch as idealists continued their support of Communism because it was, in their view, the alternative to fascism and the only way to salvation.

Communism was supposed to have given everyone the opportunity to speak out freely, to grow and attain their potential and therefore happiness. However, Soviet society was not granting this natural right. This was one of the central issues of Gide's critique and Rolland's silent disillusionment.

The examination of the attitudes of each writer toward the Soviet Union is essential to illuminate the Franco-Soviet relationship from a human and intellectual point of view. The willingness to speak out on issues that were not strictly literary is a reaction against the tradition of the isolated artist. What they said became fascinating and valuable contribution to literature and literary history and sociology. There are many statements and documents, not all published yet, that have been left for posterity. Of great interest were the letters written to friends and family not meant initially for publication, such as those between Romain Rolland and Jean-Richard Bloch, Jean-Richard Bloch and Roger Martin du Gard, Roger Martin du Gard and André Gide. The diaries kept by Rolland and Gide gave personal insight and immediate reactions to events that throw light on the spirit of the author. Duhamel's reminiscences, Lumières Sur Ma Vie, served a similar purpose. He also attempted

to recreate the atmosphere of the time; there was, of course, much wisdom to be gained from hindsight. Durtain's account L'Autre Europe . . . was the work of a methodical writer who provided an in-depth examination in such a rational, controlled manner that it is hard not to accept it as completely honest and unprejudiced.

In evaluating the writings of each, we may note the barriers such as nationalism, national pride, that blinded some, Duhamel and Romain, to understanding the soul of a people, as an obstacle also to objectivity, to admitting the possibility of another nation as leader or guide for humanity. In this respect Rolland, Gide and Bloch were far more open-minded.

We must also remark that their solution for a better civilization was based on the individual - not the collective. Certainly all believed a New Man had to make an appearance but it was up to the individual to change himself.

The final purpose of the trip itself had not been to make known one society or one people to another. Underlying this undertaking was the sense of a mission to be accomplished. The writers went as doctors attempting to find a cure for an ailing civilization rather than as adventurers exploring unknown territory, and in this respect their reports are more like Diderot's Voyage de Bougainville than Custine's La Russie de 1839.

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