

# Representing the Occupation in the Novel of the 1950s: *Ne jugez pas*

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It has become something of a truism in critical discussion about the Occupation in France to say that 1944 saw the creation of a “Resistance myth,” carefully promoted and nurtured by de Gaulle and the French Communist Party. This mythic narrative of the French united in their resistance against the German occupiers, apart from the clearly identified traitors of Vichy and Paris, held sway, it is argued, until the late 1960s, when the convergence of several strands: the film *Le chagrin et la pitié*, the death of de Gaulle, the Modiano novel *La place de l'étoile* and other creative manifestations collectively dubbed *la mode rétro*, and the translation of Robert Paxton's *Vichy France: Old Guard New Order*, opened the doors to a many-faceted challenge to this dominant story. However, a careful reading of the large numbers of novels on the Occupation published in the 1950s presents a serious challenge to this critical narrative. The aims of this article are to show how these novels, far from endorsing a story of heroic Resistance and a united nation, foreground confusion, division and moral complexity, and to point to some of the thematic configurations—such as a critique of heroism and male subjectivity, and a crisis of patriotism—through which the moral *aporia* of behavior and commitment is played out.

The context for this article is a major research council-funded project that is re-examining the fiction of and about the Occupation since 1939.<sup>1</sup> Having constructed a database containing thematic and bibliographical details of the texts (primarily fictional and filmic, but including some plays, autobiographies and memoirs), we want to explore how we should remap the landscape and examine whether fictional production across the decades supports this notion of historical reality being suppressed or might be considered as one of the vectors of a heroic Resistance myth. Because of the size of the corpus, I am concentrating here upon the 1950s. 1950 marked the outbreak of the Korean War, a major intensification of the Cold War. The domination of the aftermath of war is being replaced by decolonization and the Cold War. There is a new literary

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<sup>1</sup> The FRAME (FRAnce roMan guErre) project: *Narratives of the Second World War and Occupation in France 1939 to the present: Cultural Production and National Identity*, led by Professors Margaret Attack, University of Leeds, and Christopher Lloyd, University of Durham, and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. For more details, see [www.frame.leeds.ac.uk](http://www.frame.leeds.ac.uk).

generation beginning to make its mark. The year 1944 is far enough away for the novel about the War and the Occupation to be historical and historicizing. Of the 1,990 texts logged in our bibliography, over 300 were published in the 1950s. Some of course are by well known writers, for example Simone de Beauvoir and Louis-Ferdinand Céline, but many have disappeared from literary history, even though in some cases they were quite popular and successful at the time. Literary readings of the Occupation in France have in fact relied on a relatively small canon.

The key work of historical analysis that has defined this vision of French post-war attitudes to the War and the Occupation for a generation now is Henry Rousso's *Le syndrome de Vichy*, published in 1987. Rousso's analysis of the weight of memory and nature of references to the Occupation through the post-war period is singularly more complex than the simple plot that literary and cultural history seems to have retained from it. Important to my thesis is the way the historian maps the evolution since 1944, contrasting representations before and after 1971-74. Rousso sets up four stages: "Le deuil inachevé 1944-1954," "Les refoulements 1954-1971," "Le miroir brisé 1971-1974," and "L'obsession (I. "La mémoire juive;" II. "Le milieu politique"). He tracks the trials, amnesties, the major political and cultural controversies about the Occupation from the 1940s to the 1980s, and the multiple and contradictory evocations from the wide range of political and personal positions which the differential investment in the period involved. Indeed his definition of the "Vichy syndrome" is precisely "l'ensemble hétérogène des symptômes, des manifestations, en particulier dans la vie politique, sociale et culturelle, qui révèlent l'existence du traumatisme engendré par l'Occupation" (18)—these symptoms and manifestations are the substance of the book. The Vichy Syndrome is noise, not silence. But the "noise" in the period of "Les refoulements" is, Rousso contends, less intrusive than that of the first period. Pursuing the medical rather than the psychoanalytical side of his metaphor, and supported by what appears to me to be a rather unscientific diagram plotting the "moments of high temperature" and "periods of remission", it is suggested that the controversies post-1954 are lesser in intensity, not absent but quieter, than those pre-1954 (252).<sup>2</sup> However, literary and critical analysis has on the whole focused upon the notion of the repression of taboo subjects, to the exclusion of everything else, and back-projected this across the entire 1944-1971 period. Examples of this received critical view are not difficult to find. Deborah Sanyal states:

In the aftermath of Liberation, however, the shocking memory of France's official collaboration with Nazism was erased. Instead, under the leadership of Charles de Gaulle, post-war France cultivated the vision of a 'true' French Republic that had never ceased to exist. . . . This mythic view of a France wholly united in its opposition to the

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<sup>2</sup> Rousso looks at film as cultural support and vector of myth, but not the novel (253).

Third Reich remained largely in place until the 1970s, when a series of books and films began to explore this era's ambiguous interplay of collaboration, Resistance, accommodation and *attentisme*. (84)

Concerned to show that the realities were much more complex than any simple binaries as they were remembered in some local contexts, Robert Gildea, nonetheless, writes: "Over the next few decades, locally as well as nationally, the story of the heroic Resistance of the French people was rehearsed and communicated. The 'bad French' were marginalized and 'poor French' were recast as extras supporting the 'good French.' Discordant voices wishing to tell other stories were drowned out" (19). For her part, Rachel Edwards underscores that: "The *mode rétro* came into being precisely to challenge the official view of the Occupation which championed the 'myth' of the Resistance. . . . Although the 'Hussards' had attempted to challenge this myth in the 1950s, it remained intact until the demise of de Gaulle, de Gaulle being the man largely responsible for its origin and perpetration" (20).

Since the dominance of the myth is a given, other kinds of narrative have necessarily been presented as occasional, marginal and ineffective. There are, however, two areas of post-war literary production from the 1940s onwards that are increasingly being recognized by some literary specialists as presenting a challenge to the thesis of a dominant post-war Resistance myth, namely "les Hussards," as already noted by Edwards, and crime fiction. "Les Hussards" was a group of young lively rightwing novelists (Antoine Blondin, Jacques Laurent, Roger Nimier, Jacques Perret) famous for their espousal of literary over social values and their virulent rejection of any kind of existentialist commitment. They were flamboyantly transgressive, carrying out a systematic dismantling in their texts of what are presented as pious pro-Resistance platitudes. François-Jean Authier has drawn attention to their frequent use of the figure of the "milicien," "partisan innommable et scandaleux" in this regard (187). Michel Jacquet devotes *Une occupation très romanesque* to the Hussards and their literary associates and heirs in subsequent decades, exploring the devices and themes they deployed to destroy what they present as moral pieties and taboos.<sup>3</sup> In terms of literary "capital," the kind of writers they championed are those who had fallen foul of the *épuration*—Paul Morand, Jacques Chardonne, and above all Louis-Ferdinand Céline. There was a very deliberate positioning and use of the Occupation on their part, and particularly the *épuration*, to build a cultural platform for themselves and articulate their difference (Dufrey 53).

The other significant strand that is beginning to receive sustained critical attention is crime fiction. It has recently been realized how many *romans noirs* of the 40s and 50s took the Occupation as their subject and setting, exploring its darker and less

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<sup>3</sup> For analysis of the "logique contestataire" of this group of writers, see Hamel 127-208; for analysis of the denunciation of the Resistance as a myth in the fiction of the 1940s, see Atack 208-231.

heroic aspects in keeping with the priorities of the genre. Furthermore, the atmosphere of menace, criminality, and suspicion and the violence and murderousness of the genre are admirably suited to the exploration of the divisions, hidden rivalries, multiple identities, and treacherous appearances of the Occupation and its aftermath.<sup>4</sup> It is however worth noting in passing that a key driver for this return to the past in the critical literature was the appearance of *romans noirs* in the 1970s and 1980s staging complex crimes that to be solved involve precisely a return to the past, to the hidden history of State and/or establishment criminality (Forsdick; Gorrara *Roman noir*). A key figure here is Didier Daeninckx whose novels in the 1980s turn on buried secrets and silence and demonstrate the impact, whether the “mode rétro” and “Resistance myth” arguments are right or wrong, of this historical model on creative writers. As new historical or critical views on previous decades in their turn generate primary creative material, it is a telling reminder of the complexity of historicization.<sup>5</sup>

But “les Hussards” and crime fiction do not at all exhaust the ways in which post-war novels display the period as a time of appalling difficulty and moral complexity. In fact, the real difficulty has proved to be finding heroic narratives. So far I have identified a very small number, which can be divided very schematically into two groups: “the picturesque” and “the class war.” By picturesque, I am thinking of novels set during the phoney war and the debacle, which are often an enjoyable romp through national stereotypes as French and British military work together against the Germans and against each other (Daninoss *Les carnets du Major Thompson* is their spiritual brother), or Guy des Cars’s *L’amour s’en va-t-en guerre*, where three generations of women living in the same house defy the enemy and hide an French resister parachuted in from London, with whom the youngest falls in love. The second category is often produced by Communist writers, or those ideologically close to them, and clearly shows the Resistance as selflessly heroic on the side of *le peuple*, fighting the good fight, supported by narrative context and structure, against a clearly defined enemy, against the bourgeoisie, and at times the aristocracy, both portrayed as cowardly, self-serving, on the side of Vichy or the Germans, putting personal financial interests above those of the nation, involved in the black market and always prepared to collaborate. The Resistance is thus situated as part of a wider battle against oppression and inequality, one that is shown to be continuing in the post-war period (Farge, Boussinot, Vailland, *Jeune homme, Bon pied*).<sup>6</sup>

But in most narratives of the 1950s, the Occupation is a confusing and confused time, with Resistance as either one option among many, a seriously flawed option

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<sup>4</sup> Claire Gorrara has recently shown, in an analysis of *romans noirs* by Léo Malet and Hubert Monteilheit, the extent to which popular culture in the late 1950s and early 1960s engaged with the realities of Jewish war-time experience (“Forgotten Crimes?”).

<sup>5</sup> The quest for the recovery of a hidden or “disappeared” past of troubling secrets is also a generator of fiction outside the crime genre (Modiano, *Dora*; Grimbert).

<sup>6</sup> See Fréville for an excellent example from the 1940s.

because of the self-serving interest of the resister(s), or the fact of a small minority where most of the French are at best indifferent until the final battles, when suddenly in massive numbers “resisters” flood the streets: “C’est les gens de la ‘R.M.S.’ (1) qui réussiront, planqués à Paris. . . . (1) : Résistance du Mois de Septembre” (Chevallier 269). It is to reflect this time of confused values that my title includes “Ne jugez pas,” as in so many cases the novels are constructed to thwart clear moral divisions of right and wrong.<sup>7</sup>

It is hardly surprising that the question of judgment is so clearly articulated throughout the fictional production and its reception, because in the social and political spheres, exhortation to make particular choices, with consequent condemnation of other choices, was pervasive. Furthermore, if it were not for the Resistance myth narrative, I do not think we would be surprised either that, with the greater distance from the events and greater scope for reflection, moral issues become more contradictory and multi-faceted, without the same kind of “for or against” solutions which were driving so much pro-Resistance fiction. Even so, the consistency of a vision that is not only complex but also often sad, bitter, sour, and disillusioning, is worthy of note. Camus offers a very clear example of the kind of shift involved: *La peste* identifies one guilty man who has failed to meet the patriotic and ethical standards inherent to Resistance (so clearly established by Rieux and Tarrou), and who is arrested and taken away. *La chute* in 1956 not only thematizes the complete failure of any attempt to construct a secure position of moral authority and superiority, it also slowly turns the table on the reader, as the *narrataire* moves from being an interested listener to a confession to finding himself in the dock of the accused and the text destroys any sense of secure vantage point from where negative judgments could be safely delivered without implicating the judge. Compare this to the final point on the back cover of Simone Chevallier’s *La première pierre* which as the title shows is thematizing the *aporía* of judgment:

L’auteur. . . s’est moins appliqué à juger (ici, le collaborateur et le résistant, le trafiquant de marché noir et le héros composent le visage même de l’Histoire) qu’à provoquer, par le rassemblement des faits et des passions, la conscience du lecteur, de tous ceux qui ont participé, volontairement ou non, à cette épopée. Lequel d’ailleurs aurait le front de s’ériger en juge ? “Que celui d’entre vous qui n’a jamais péché. . . .”

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<sup>7</sup> There are other thematic groupings which are not explored here; while the greater part of the 50s novels are set in France, a number are focused upon Germany (prisoner of war camps, the army during 1944-5 campaigns and beyond; the occupied territories; the flight of collaborationists and others to Germany in 1944) or upon German characters. A number are set in part or in whole in the colonies, or major characters leave for the colonies as an exit from their narrative impasse. The overwhelming majority are traditional realist narratives.

To be able to portray French society during the Occupation as a battleground of cruelly competing interests, many novels put forward a setting that operates as a social microcosm supporting a wide range of different characters: a town or a part of a town, an extended family,<sup>8</sup> a group of young men who are friends from school, an industry or a firm (Brenner, Ikor, Rolland, Chavardès, Chevallier, Merrien, Boule, Conte). In Resistance novels, such as Beauvoir's *Le sang des autres*, or Vailland's *Drôle de jeu*, the characters are brought together by a common purpose. In the novels under consideration here, contingency rules the grouping of characters who happen to live in the same area or work in the same factory but take all sorts of different paths in a context of family conflict, business rivalries, passion and jealousy, all part of a maelstrom where death and destruction are commonplace.

*Aluminium* by Pierre Bernard and David Gillès's *Jetons de présence*<sup>9</sup> both explore the world of industry, where individuals maneuver to gain best advantage for their firm and for themselves. This world of financial, industrial, and international political intrigue, a world of manipulation and maneuver, of bluff and counter-bluff, is dominated by the language of warfare. The first opens in 1935 in front of the Bourse with speculation affecting firms dealing in copper and aluminium. The second, set in Brussels, is centred upon those working for the large chemical firm Chimobel: they are extremely affluent, living the expensive high life in spite of the Occupation, and corrupt—everyone involved driven by self-interest. In each case characters take a variety of options (Vichy, Resistance, including a network for London, collaboration) but never forget their own interests: for example the Resister in *Aluminium* makes sure anti-German industrial sabotage on machines is taking out the old ones to position the firm strongly for post-war revival with their own new machines. The top management in *Jetons de présence* uses the situation to wreak revenge on competitors. When one manager fails to buy out another factory and is insulted as a collaborator by its owner, he eventually has his revenge by arranging, through contacts, to have the factory denounced and bombed by the English. Others maneuver to be involved with the local Resistance run by a colonel Croiset (whom they have helped to free from prison when arrested by the Germans as an 'insurance' for the future). The mass of the population is presented as indifferent to the war, interested only in food and survival: "Quatre-vingt-quinze pour cent de fraudeurs, et cinq pour cent de patriotes qui pensent surtout à l'après-guerre" (237).

Fifties novels can thus be seen to offer intensive coverage of many of the taboo areas supposedly silenced by the myth of heroic Resistance: collaboration, overt and

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<sup>8</sup> Gorrara argues that the family as site of conflict fulfils an important function at this time, and "can be read as a discursive screen on which broader national debates are projected" ("Forgotten Crimes?" 16)

<sup>9</sup> Gillès was Belgian but this novel and its sequel were published in Paris.

covert; the black market; anti-Semitism; and the indifference of the French.<sup>10</sup> André Hélène's *Le festival des macchabées* illustrates the ordinariness of these kinds of negative judgment:

Autour de nous la conversation continuait. Ils parlaient maintenant des Anglais, des Russes, du débarquement. Ils espéraient tous être bientôt libérés de cette engeance pourrie. Mais libérés par d'autres, pas par eux-mêmes. Question de donner, quant à soi, un léger coup de main, fallait pas y compter. D'abord c'était trop dangereux. Et puis c'était de la folie. Les Allemands étaient encore forts, fallait pas s'y frotter. Que les autres aillent au casse pipe et viennent débarrasser leur maison de la verdure, d'accord, mais si on leur demandait d'utiliser le fly-tox, ah ! mais non ! ils ne marchaient pas.

Ils me faisaient mal avec leurs salades, leurs petites histoires sordides de pantoufles, de charbon et de ravitaillement. (54-5)

The novel also exposes the sham heroism, which is such a key theme of this corpus:

Lorsqu'enfin, au bout de deux heures de cette comédie, nous arrivâmes à Béziers. . . . j'étais définitivement en boule. J'ai horreur des abrutis prétentieux. Mais comment aller expliquer ça à un monsieur qui, sous prétexte qu'il a eu une fois le courage de dire dans un compartiment de chemin de fer que Pétain était une salope, se considère comme un héros ? Et je ne savais pas encore les proportions que dans quelque temps il allait prendre, ce genre d'héroïsme-là. (55)

Is it because the heroism and patriotism of the Resistance is so well established in official ceremonies, large numbers of personal memoirs, and other formal

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<sup>10</sup> For the modern reader, one of the most sensitive areas of representation of the past is recognition of the appalling suffering of the Jews in the *raffes* and deportations to the death camps, and the attitudes and role of the French, particularly the French police, in Vichy's anti-Semitic policies. Anyone who has visited the *mémorial de la Shoah* in Paris, or read Hélène Berr's diary, cannot fail to be alert to issues of responsibility in the *raffes* (is it German soldiers or French police who are carrying this out?), and while there are frequent references to anti-Semitism, and to violence of all kinds to Jewish characters, explicit French involvement in Drancy and the deportations seems to be rare. Reference to Drancy is not unusual, and efforts to free Jews from it also, but the preponderance of representation and discussion does appear to relate to political deportations, rather than deportations of Jews in the context of the Holocaust. Further evidence of the difficulty of this subject appears in the fact that the film of Breitman's *Fortunat ou le père adopté* has removed the Jewish dimension from the centre of the narrative: in the novel, Fortunat takes a woman and her two children across the demarcation line. Her husband has been arrested and deported as a Jew. The Jewish appearance of their children is a major leitmotiv. In the film, directed by Alex Joffé, the husband is a Resistance leader and not Jewish; a Jewish family is befriended.

representations that heroism is such a focus in these novels, and unpicked so comprehensively?<sup>11</sup> That the nature of public discourse is so systematically demonstrated to be false, manipulated, and obeying its own logic? That the signs of heroism are cynically revealed to be more important than actual heroism?

Arthur Conte's *Tous les hommes ne sont pas des héros*, a familial drama that extends well into the fifties, bears its message in its title. In many other novels, the destruction of the image of the hero focuses on the father-son relationship. *Le soleil de Cavouri* by Jean Blot, a novel which recalls Troyat's *La tête sur les épaules* since in both a son has to come to terms with the reality of a shameful father, tells the story of Sylvain, a soldier in the British Army since he grew up in England after the divorce of his parents, who seeks out his father only to find him in Drancy, awaiting trial for having betrayed the sons of his workers to the Germans. Sylvain hangs on to the mantra "Tu ne jugeras pas" (14), not having himself experienced the pressures of the Occupation, though France is also described as "un procès incessant, attenté par chacun à tous, attenté par tous à chacun" (49). In Elizabeth Barbier's *Mon père, ce héros*, the image of the heroic father, a political deportee, has been destroyed in various ways for his son, Roger Villedieu, including overhearing a fellow inmate contemptuously describing his father as someone who survived the camp by denouncing others. Boileau-Narcejac's *La lèpre* takes the form of a letter from a father, a Resistance hero, to his son, explaining the truth of his Occupation past, and the lie he told upon which his public reputation as a hero was built. This son is fighting in Algeria, and volunteering for the most dangerous missions to live up to the expectations of his heroic father, whereas Roger Villedieu in *Mon père, ce héros* has been driven by a mixture of shame and bravado to take part in a crime. Most of the novel offers us his thoughts as he awaits his trial in a prison cell. Both novels undertake a complex investigation into the role of others and public discourse in the construction of identity—a hero is someone whom others have called a hero—and the difference between public and private morality.

Heroism is "unpicked" also from within, for the individual resister is often a problematic figure, a man out of control, whose Resistance activity thus becomes suspect as having been impelled by some dark psychological impulses. In André Hélène's remarkable *Le goût du sang*, Jacques Vallon is the son of the Président du Tribunal, frustrated with the poverty and mediocrity of his existence and the prison of life with his parents. The story traces his work as a killer for the Resistance, his lack of

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<sup>11</sup> See the comments of an American lieutenant in Bodin's *Envoyé spécial* in response to the question "Que pensez-vous de la Résistance française?": "Vos Résistants sont de bons garçons, dit le lieutenant. Ils vous permettront d'entretenir vos écoliers de l'héroïsme traditionnel de votre peuple. Nous comprenons que vous en parliez beaucoup. Dans quelques dizaines d'années nous lirons dans vos manuels que les Français, soulevés dans un gigantesque mouvement patriotique, ont rejeté les envahisseurs au delà des frontières de la Gaule éternelle" (95). The Americans will be written out. This is a novel that also puts into question the Collaboration/Resistance divide in "la haute société" in post-war France, where only the most openly compromised are in difficulty and the rest return to normal, having taken care to do a little something for the Resistance as insurance for the future (265).



success with girls, his hatred of all those more handsome and richer than he and who seem to be collaborating, and the intense eroticism of the experience of assassination. At one point a member of the Milice who could be his double in terms of angry resentment at the “gosses de riches” and sexual failure, stalks him to kill him, though Jacques triumphs again. The novel also chronicles the frustrations of his father, his limited career, and wasted life. His son’s activities will have definitively ruined it. Typical of this scenario, Jacques is unable to put a stop to his killing after the Liberation and the novel proceeds to a predictable and bloody finale. The Resistance—or indeed the Milice—appears little more than a pretext to provide a response to personal inadequacy.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, moral *aporia* is also thematized, and Brice Parain’s *La mort de Socrate* is an outstanding example. Parain was a philosopher with a particular interest in language. His novel offers a subtle reflection on the distortions of discourse and public judgment, with an anguishing gap between motivations, personal judgment and ideas on the one hand, and their public expression on the other, at a time when the battles lines are so drawn (the novel opens in 1942) that simple clear-cut choices necessarily impose themselves. Socrate, the main character and a priest, has no doubt in his choice of Resistance, yet his choice implies a certainty about judgment and ethics under the Occupation that he not does feel at all. He discusses the complexity of his feelings and uncertainties with his friend Jacques Barthélémy, a collaborator who is as driven as Socrate is by feelings of “ennui,” of the inadequacy of language and the fundamental reality of death, and who seems to be deliberately taking on a sacrificial Judas-like role for France. As in *La première pierre*, where characters behave at times in ways inconsistent with their political or ethical choices, Barthélémy is not a negative figure. Socrate approaches him to use his influence to get a Jewish friend’s daughter out of Drancy. Barthélémy is obliged to refuse because he is already committed to trying to negotiate with the Germans for another Jew being held there. In another important thematic strand, Socrate is immensely troubled by the accusation of treachery and betrayal leveled at a young member of the Resistance group, anxious about the evidence for this interpretation of his behavior. *La mort de Socrate*, like so many of these novels, conforms well to Hamel’s category of novels of “la conscience inquiète”, that “brouillent de différentes manières la bipolarité éthique” (33):

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<sup>12</sup> See also Belleval, *Jean des autres*. Jean suffers from an abusive, extreme-right wing father (and grandfather) who even denounces him on discovering his Resistance activity. Jean finds the Resistance to be “comme au cinéma, cowboys et indiens, bons et méchants” (95) and sees the violence at the liberation, a crusade against traitors, including the shaving of women’s heads, as serving primarily to endow them with the public persona of the hero—for the real army of liberators had just sniggered at them and their barricades (89-93). He plunges deeper into becoming a hard man, finally going to the colonies after the war, his alienation becoming ever clearer in his murderousness and violence.

La conversation avec Jérôme avait rappelé cette incertitude première de sa pensée. L'exactitude ou le gaspillage. La paix ou la guerre. La culture ou la barbarie. La mort ou la vie, en somme, la science ou la littérature. Et de chaque côté, l'impossible au-delà d'une limite que rien ne traçait. Naturellement, il y avait au fond de tout cela l'éternelle question du « ne jugez pas », et pour cause. S'il ne fallait pas juger, c'est parce qu'on n'avait pas les moyens de juger juste. (28-9)

So what conclusions can we draw about these aporetic narratives, frustrating simplistic judgments about behavior during the Occupation? It is overwhelmingly obvious that masculinity and a dissection of the male persona is a dominant theme, though there are many variations. Mária Minich Brewer has suggestively pointed to this in her reading of Claude Simon's experimental novels about the defeat of France:

Simon is exemplary of the European male writer who, instead of becoming an unquestioned heir of the Western tradition, was cut off from its full privileges and sacrificed to a dying world as it transformed itself into the modern technological world order. Certain of the promises of empowerment made by traditional master narratives of male subjectivity and heroism were not kept. (113)

The collapse of a master narrative of heroic male subjectivity, and particularly the difficulties created for the son of the non-hero, is a major strand in this corpus.

The Algerian war is only occasionally mentioned in these novels, though their focus on political and personal choices and behavior in a confused situation, which is murderous without being a traditional war, resonates profoundly with other contemporary debates. *Vents de terre, vent de mer* (Merrien) is pointing clearly in this direction with the following section headings: "Où est donc la patrie?" and "Est-ce cela la patrie?" The novel is set in Brittany, with one character committed to the movement for autonomy even though it is supported by the Germans. The back cover makes an interesting connection here: "Le mouvement breton' si mal connu, et que ce livre éclaire, à un moment où les événements d'Algérie lui donnent une sorte d'actualité." A novel which problematizes the question of patriotism, national allegiance and national identity, which defies the reader to decide which of the many choices is the morally superior one, and which challenges us to ponder the following "Mais existe-t-il une patrie géographique ou idéologique qui vaille de mourir?" (back cover) is making rather explicit the power that such narratives take on, at a time when the French nation is divided about its legitimacy, and invoking the moral superiority of the Resistance on both sides.

If the Algerian war is a crucial context for these issues of behavior and national identity, it is not the only one. These are the years when issues of sense and significance, rationality and meaning, are under scrutiny in many fields, often related to the traumatic impact of the Holocaust and Hiroshima, as the theoretical and existential assumptions of humanism are fundamentally put in question: the theatre of the Absurd, the nouveau roman, the quest for a new cinema in the pages of *Les cahiers du cinema*, and structuralism all bear witness to this crisis of interpretation (Higgins). Novels about the Occupation are no island of triumphalism and assurance at this time.

The nation is also changing out of all recognition under the pressures of consumerism and the march of *les trente glorieuses*. The 1950s also saw the rise of ethnography devoted to France itself: what France is now has become an urgent sociological and anthropological question. The function of the return to the past that Richard Kuisel saw operating in the 1980s, an expression of a need to counter the Americanization and affirm a national identity (4), could be at work here, but in the case of the 1950s' Occupation novel it is not a cozy or nostalgic history, rather a history of dissension, conflict, and anxiety. Where is the right path? Where is the nation? Which is the right camp? How should men behave? How inadequate and flimsy these heroic reputations are proving to be, when should they be a guide to the current generation of soldiers? Who can say whether what appears as heroism now will be considered as such in the future, by our sons?

The very insistence of these questions in so many novels about the Occupation in the 1950s shows how they take their place as a major vehicle for the exploration of nationalism, patriotism, and national identity in a decade when the intense anxieties of the Cold War, the wars of decolonization, the aftermath of the Holocaust, and the bewilderingly fast transformation of French society under the pressures of consumerism and industrialization, have come together in an extraordinary configuration. Most interesting of all, these are novels that, on the whole, offer no answers.

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