

CALVARY OR CATASTROPHE? FRENCH CATHOLICISM'S FIRST WORLD WAR

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Professor Gerald Prince

The battlefield crucifixes that lined the Western Front powerfully connected industrialized warfare with the Christian past. This elision of the bloody corporeality of the crucifixion with the bodily suffering wrought by industrial warfare forged a connection between religious belief and modern reality that lies at the heart of my dissertation. Through the poignancy of Christ's suffering, French Catholics found an explanatory tool for the devastation of the Great War, affirming that the blood of the French dead would soon blossom in rich harvest. This dissertation argues that the story of French Catholicism and the Great War uncovers a complex and often dissonant understanding of the conflict that has become obscured in the uniform narrative of disillusionment and vain sacrifice to emerge in the last century. Considering the thought to emerge from the French *renouveau catholique* from 1910 up to 1920, I argue that far from symbolizing the modernist era of nihilism, the war in fact *created* meaning in a world that had lost touch with its God. At the same time, my reasoning is sensitive to the manner in which the application of Catholic dogma to modern war constituted a form of resistance to the encroaching secularization of French society following the separation of the French state and the Catholic Church in 1905. Through a survey of the major authors associated with the French Catholic revival – Ernest Psichari, Francois Mauriac, Léon Bloy, Paul Claudel and Henri Massis to name but a few – this dissertation aims to recover a different account of the war in the French tradition than the now canonical visions of the conflict inspired by the novels of Barbusse, Cendrars and Céline. In particular, this

study aims to question why the major players of the French Catholic revival have fallen so dramatically from the canon given the radical nature of their postulations at the beginning of the twentieth century. More broadly, it seeks to probe the persistence of the vision of the Great War held in the collective imaginary, asking why this myth repeatedly rejects alternative narratives of the conflict. In foregrounding the resurgence of faith, I suggest that French Catholicism allows us to climb out of the trenches to see an altogether different war.

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Introduction

Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

Colossians 1:24

The Great War, which killed ten million people and wounded thirty-six million others, was, we are often told, catastrophic. However, faced with this instance of massive bloodletting, those who affirmed a "moral order" fundamentally rooted in a triune God whose presence is proclaimed in and through the Gospel had little difficulty in justifying this hecatomb. Instead of bemoaning the war as evidence of Nietzsche's famous dictum that God was dead, they saw the war as a real-life Calvary in which God's presence was writ large. Some years earlier, registering discontent with the seemingly unstoppable juggernaut of positivism, a group of French Catholic intellectuals such as J.K Huysmans and Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly had turned their gaze away from *fin-de-siècle* decadence towards Catholicism's rendering of mortality and suffering. Chief amongst their proclamations was the necessity of anguish to fully experience God's grace. The Great War, with its unprecedented devastation, was to provide ample suffering for their interpretation of Catholicism to be transformed, quite literally, into flesh and blood. However, after the pain came the belief in regeneration, renewal and the second coming of the Lord, a belief rooted in the hope of the resurrection.

The central question of this dissertation is: How did the French Catholic revivalists manage to make sense of the Great War in their collected works? I argue that

the suffering of the cross, never far from their work, offered an explanatory model that validated the sacrifice of the slain as testaments to the glory of France, the Catholic Church's eldest daughter. As a counterpoint to this assertion, I also interrogate the durability of this interpretative model as it came under pressure from a war so bloody that it exceeded imagination. By acknowledging both the power and the instability of religious dogma to offer a panacea to the devastations of war, I aim to shed light on the commemorative politics that impose a single reading of the experience to the exclusion of all others. My research asserts that answers to these questions can only be found by considering how "new" narratives of total war were shaped by "old", long-standing conceptions of identity.

In providing a series of linked chapters structured around four themes in French Catholic Great War writing – heroic enthusiasm, divine wrath, dolorism and resurrection – and signposted by the chronology of the war itself, I explore the ways in which the First World War might provide a helpful lens for thinking about the French Catholic literary revival, and, in turn, how Catholic dogma, with its insistence upon the hope of resurrection, might provide a reconsideration of the standard narrative arc of disillusion to emerge from the conflict. Both approaches challenge the standard teleological perspective that sees the gradual extinction of Catholicism as the consequence of the remorseless advance of industrialisation, modernism and secularisation. However, understanding the relationship between Catholicism, the French Catholic revival and the First World War as reciprocal involves more than simply superimposing a Catholic reading onto the war and insisting upon its validity. Rather, in making sense of this relationship, a whole host of

literary and political determinants are exposed. These determinants point backwards towards fin-de-siècle literary influences and the French secularization laws of 1905 and forward, to the inter-war resurgence of Catholicism that was able to respond to a society that mourned its war dead.

To proceed properly, it is necessary to offer some clarifications. My use of the term “Catholic” refers both to the institutional and organized religion and the more widespread spiritual impulse that seeks transcendent meaning. I stress this since the search for transcendence that those in the French Catholic revival desired was not always conceived of in theistic terms. Equally, the status of these writers as converts, atheists and lapsed Catholics, emphasizes their avowed need for a reconfiguration of “traditional” Catholicism. Catholicism’s *renouveau catholique* represented a golden age for the Catholic Church in the twentieth century but this came at the price of further pressure exerted on the widening gap between belief itself and the institution of the Christian Church.

Although the Catholic revivalists invested the doctrines of vicarious suffering and blood sacrifice with crucial explanatory power, these concepts are often blunt instruments that cannot fully convey the malleability of *souffrance* and *résurrection* in France’s early twentieth century. As the sole analytic framework, aspects of Catholic dogma can flatten the ways in which they changed as French politics and attitudes changed and resist representation as parts of a neat cosmological doctrine. For this reason, I locate my chapters within an historic framework to show how susceptible these ideas were to the

chronological contours of the war itself, since the idea of suffering in 1914 meant something very different in 1918. In doing so, I alert the reader to the adaptability of so-called “intransigent” Catholicism and its reach beyond the world of the Catholic faithful in the inter-war period.

In considering these chronological contours and diverse literary and political influences, I nonetheless aim to resist an exclusively determinist account of the French Catholic revivalists’ engagement with the Great War. As vital to my argument as the social and political moment was, there remain aspects of these writers’ works that resist straightforward cultural determination. Catholic revivalists such as Charles Péguy and Léon Bloy were undoubtedly determined by the external structures of history, but their creativity and originality were also generated by their prayer life and internal interventions. My resistance to an over-reliance on social and political causation is also due to the intense experience of epiphany that cannot always be neatly mapped onto historical narratives due to the imaginative terrain of religious devotion that privileges the inner life of the subject. As the pre-eminent historian of the Great War Samuel Hynes reminds us, wars, particularly those on the scale of the First World War, are not only extraordinary political and military events, but also extraordinary imaginative events. Acknowledging the imaginative, spiritual and irrational tendencies of these authors is therefore crucial to a more holistic understanding of Catholicism’s response to total war.

This dissertation is divided into four chapters. Each chapter combines close readings of literary texts with an exploration of a particular religious idea, drawing on

critical and theoretical material as it does so. The first chapter explores the spirit of the pre-war generation of Catholic intellectuals in the novels of Ernest Psichari and François Mauriac. In considering the meaning of the coming war for these writers, I question why pre-war French Catholic literature¹ is repeatedly read as the straightforward exposition of spiritual belief that led French Catholics into a profoundly religious war. As the novels I examine in this chapter illustrate, fictional incarnations of French Catholic youth rarely confront the intergenerational crisis within pre-war French society with such bluster.

Rather, their trajectories through youth are disappointing and unfulfilled, lacking the narrative closure of such famous novels of adolescence and maturation as Balzac's 1835 *Le Père Goriot*. Although critics of these novels read them as straightforward examples of "heroic enthusiasm" that chart the mysticism that led French Catholics to sacrifice themselves to a Republic they did not believe in, in this chapter I propose quite the opposite, pointing to the tensions between a triumphant and a recessionary form of French Catholicism. In addition to an analysis of what I call the French Catholic Bildungsroman, this chapter will make a further intervention, considering the ways in which French Catholic literature does not always live up to its expectations, providing instead a dissonant imaginative configuration of the pre-war period, a theme taken up throughout.

Bellicosity and propaganda form the subject of my second chapter. Considering figures writing about, and not fighting in, the trenches such as Paul Claudel and Léon Bloy I argue that their "holy war" was a violent enterprise often exceeding the categories

¹ I limit this period from 1913-1914.

of Christian compassion to create a terrifying national energy. In this chapter I explore the founding principle of my first chapter more fully, examining the ways in which French Catholic writing produced in the early war period continues to disrupt standard narrative arcs associated with the First World War.² Moving forward chronologically, I turn to a set of texts written by prominent French Catholic revivalists Léon Bloy and Paul Claudel in order to examine the ways in which French Catholicism became what David Carroll has called an “aesthetics-as-ideology”.³ Since literature was the way in which French Catholic revivalists explored their faith, here I explore how their ideology intertwined itself with their literature. In doing so, I acknowledge the frequently made association between French Catholic revivalists and the architects of Vichy France.⁴ However, it is my contention that the French nationalism championed by Bloy and Claudel in their wartime writings was not the external application of politics to their literature but rather a totalizing impulse peculiar to their Catholicism and apparent long before 1914 in the very roots of the French Catholic revival.⁵

In shifting to the trench deadlock of 1916 to 1918 exemplified in the battles of the Somme and Verdun, sorrow is at the heart of my third chapter. This chapter considers the war memoirs of prominent French Catholic intellectuals Henri Massis, Jacques Rivière

² “In recent years, historians have argued persuasively against almost every popular cliché of the First World War [...] None of this has made the slightest difference to what most people actually believe about the First World War [...] In part this is a problem of imaginative inertia: the great human difficulty in jumping from one vision of the world to another. But it is also because of the functions that our shared beliefs about the war fulfil. They have achieved the status of modern mythology and as such are knitted into the social fabric.” Dan Todman, *The Great War: myth and memory*, London: Hambledon, 2005, p.xii.

³ David Carroll, *French literary fascism: nationalism, anti-Semitism, and the ideology of culture*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p.6.

⁴ French Catholic ideology is often assumed to be proto-fascist, see Carroll, p.6.

⁵ For an in-depth discussion of the revival, see Richard Griffiths, *The reactionary revolution: the Catholic revival in French literature, 1870-1914*, London: Constable, 1966.

and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. I consider them in this order as a way of establishing a spectrum of rhetorical confidence that slides from high-minded revival thinking to varying degrees of spiritual despair in the case of Rivière, and ending with a radically disruptive interpretation of the narrative of the Passion by Teilhard de Chardin. These testimonies constitute invaluable testimonies from those who were physically present in the theatre of war. In addition to written testimony of the fighting, I also consider the modern-day “hagiography” of various fallen Catholic faithful by French Catholic Henry Bordeaux and Massis. These works form a curious mixture of biography and hagiography that exhorts its readership to emulate the sacrifice of the fallen with similar suffering. By contrasting the two styles of writing I show how both genres make continued appeals to the Passion of Christ as an impetus to suffer voluntarily and a panacea to grief. Although different in style, both genres function didactically, exhorting their readership to validate the suffering of others by acting reciprocally.

My final chapter looks at the nexus of commemoration and transcendence, as negotiated by the Catholic Church in France in the wake of unprecedented loss, drawing upon the work of French Catholic intellectuals Georges Bernanos and Jacques Rivière. My argument here rests upon the importance of transcendental plenitude to mend France’s *gueule cassée* or mutilated face, suggesting that the reconciliation of the French State with the Vatican in 1920 was indicative of a longing for far more than political peace could offer. In this chapter I continue to observe the slippage between tradition and modernity, finding complexity and paradox in the French Catholic response to post-war reconstruction. Instead of a radical gulf between the Third Republic ideals of *la Patrie*

and the Roman Catholic vision of France - a subject addressed in my first chapter - this chapter locates the intersection between the French Catholic desire for tradition and the need to look towards the future. Emphasizing the coexistence of violence and healing, of adherence to the Catholic script and involuntary disloyalty to it, my analyses of Bernanos's 1926 novel *Sous le Soleil de Satan* and Rivière's *L'Allemand : souvenirs et réflexions d'un prisonnier de guerre* look to the ways in which they reframed their Catholicism around their own wartime experiences. Although both writers sometimes give way to the oft-discussed mode of disenchantment⁶ and irony (which according to Paul Fussell defined the war's "modern memory") they also expressed a desire to rehabilitate the hero and preserve motifs of French-ness in ways that fundamentally contradict the dominant mode of disillusion witnessed in the "war books boom" of 1928 to 1930.⁷

Within the field of First World War Studies one continues to find that the Catholic dimension of the First World War has not received the attention it deserves, despite its status as a major component of belief during a transformative event. The war's cultural legacy, dominated by representations of avant-garde modernism has left little room for narratives that do not see the war as a crisis in modern consciousness. Jay Winter's ground-breaking work of comparative and transnational cultural history *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European cultural history* (1995) has done much to realign an understanding of the Great War with more established motifs of classical,

⁶ See Andrew Frayn's introduction to *Writing disenchantment: British First World War prose, 1914-30*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014.

⁷ See Jay Winter, *Remembering war: the Great War between memory and history in the twentieth century*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, p.234.

religious, and romantic culture. Equally, Annette Becker's 1994 study, *War and Faith: The Religious Imagination in France, 1914-1930*, has highlighted the need to concentrate on more lateral religious experiences from the war than simply those of the national episcopates. However, particularly in France, where the secularization thesis persists, the French Catholic revivalists have been dismissed as harbingers of Vichy France and Fascist politics, and the story moves all too quickly from 1914 to 1940. Despite attempts to resuscitate French Catholic figures such as Charles Péguy by scholars such as Glenn Roe, their radical and original response to the epic moment in religious history that the First World War represents, has gone largely ignored. My dissertation attempts to redress this balance.

Pascal decreed that humanity must not sleep because Christ hangs on his cross until the end of the world. Despite the difficulty in fully locating the agony of Golgotha in a secular society, French Catholic revivalists heeded this cry. For these intellectuals, there could be no rational endeavour to grasp the collapse of European values ushered in by the guns of 1914 without reference to Christ's agony. This symmetry between God's kenosis and the Great War faded from the experiential horizon in the wake of the Holocaust and French Catholicism's lamentable association with anti-Semitism in the Vichy era. After the twentieth century, radical doubt hangs over the Christian message of love and salvation. I am persuaded however, that to obscure the association of salvific death with the battlefields of the Great War is to fundamentally limit our understanding of the conflict. As we mark the centenary of 1914-1918, fresh perspectives must now emerge.

Chapter 1

Forever Young: French Catholicism in the pre-war period

Images of youthful promise associated with the “generation of 1914” hold a privileged place in our conception of the First World War. In France, this pre-war arcadia⁸ was characterized by a fascination with youth. From 1912 onwards, Alfred de Tarde and Henri Massis published their notorious Agathon enquiry alongside Emile Henriot’s similar offering “A quoi rêvent les jeunes gens”.⁹ Public proclamations followed; writing in his *Cahiers* in 1913, Barrès exclaimed: “La nouvelle génération qui monte s'annonce comme une des meilleures que notre pays a connues. Vive la jeunesse française!”¹⁰ To add to this, Paul Bourget declared in 1914 that French youth were engaged in a glorious revival of ancient values:

Voici que des générations se lèvent pour qui le ciel est de nouveau peuplé d'étoiles, des générations dont leurs meilleurs témoins nous apprennent que, demandant, elles aussi, à la vie la vérification de la pensée, elles se sont reprises à croire, sans cesser de savoir, des générations qui se rattachent résolument, consciemment à la tradition philosophique et religieuse de la vieille France.¹¹

Focusing their energies on the young, French pre-war thought orbited around the figure of the youthful male as a means of classification. For France, recovering from defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, youth offered symbolic affinities with her society,

⁸ I limit this period from 1912-1914.

⁹ Émile Henriot’s survey was published in *Temps* in 1913.

¹⁰ Maurice Barrès, *Mes Cahiers, 1913-1914*, Paris: Plon, 1936, p. 66.

¹¹ *Discours prononcé à la séance publique tenue par l'Académie française pour la réception de M. E. Boutroux, le 22 janvier 1914*. Paris: Institut de France, p. 67.

becoming a master trope of transformation and burgeoning interiority. But, as Philippe Ariès reminds us, the phenomenon of “adolescence” was particular to the twentieth century:

The first typical adolescent of modern times was Wagner’s Siegfried: the music of Siegfried expressed for the first time that combination of (provisional) purity, physical strength, naturism, spontaneity and joie de vivre which was to make the adolescent the hero of our twentieth century, the century of adolescence. What made its appearance in Wagnerian Germany was to enter France at a later date, in the years around 1900. The ‘youth’ which at this time was adolescence soon became a literary theme and a subject of concern for moralists and politicians [...] Youth gave the impression of secretly possessing new values capable of reviving an aged and sclerosed society.¹²

It is remarked that literary adolescence and literary modernism developed a symbiotic relationship whereby the classic traits of adolescence, such as the muddling of identity and the assimilation of an individual into a group, became intertwined with the shifting narrative perspectives of literary modernism, culminating in Gide’s classic tale of literary adolescence *Les Faux-monnayeurs* (1926). In his study of French attitudes in 1914, historian Jean-Jacques Becker writes that the fascination with youth was a predominantly literary phenomenon,¹³ and indeed literature appeared to be the most fertile ground for youthful nationalism to take root. In the “romans alsaciens” of the early twentieth century, nationalism was often reduced to the antagonism of two races as evinced in René Bazin’s 1901 *Oberlé* and Barrès’s *Au Service de l’Allemagne* and *Colette Baudoche* published in 1905 and 1909 respectively. Within French Catholic literature, Charles

¹² Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of childhood: a social history of family life*, trans. Robert Baldick, London: Cape, 1962.

¹³ See J.J Becker *1914: Comment les Français sont entrés dans la guerre: contribution à l’étude de l’opinion publique printemps-été 1914*, Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, c.1977.

Péguy and Ernest Psichari are often cited as introducing the connection between youth and war. Blending nationalism with militarism, both writers are billed as welcoming war's unifying power to heal a society torn apart by the Dreyfus Affair and the 1905 secularization laws and exhorting young Frenchmen to die in a "just war" for "Holy France".

As such, pre-war French Catholic literature¹⁴ is repeatedly read along the following lines: the trenchant voice that crystallized around a group of young Catholic intellectuals such as Henri Massis faithfully reflected the intellectual currents of the time, namely society's confrontation with the secular Republican ideals and the enduring influences of Catholicism. Affirming their transcendence over the *fin-de-siècle* mentality of decadence, writ large in novels such as J.K Huysman's 1884 *À Rebours*, the Catholic youth of the early twentieth century held Barrès as their guide, championing a "spiritual health" rooted in an uncomplicated and ardent belief in Catholicism. So the story goes.¹⁵ But, as Psichari's *L'Appel des Armes* and Mauriac's *L'Enfant chargé de chaînes* illustrate, fictional incarnations of French Catholic youth rarely confront the intergenerational crisis within pre-war French society with such gusto. Rather, their trajectories through youth are disappointing and unfulfilled, lacking the narrative closure of such famous novels of adolescence and maturation as Balzac's 1835 *Le Père Goriot*. Although critics of these novels read them as straightforward examples of "heroic enthusiasm" that chart the mysticism that led French Catholics to sacrifice themselves to a Republic they did not believe in, in this chapter I propose quite the opposite. The novels

¹⁴ I limit this period to 1913-1914.

¹⁵ See John Cruickshank, Robert Wohl and Jean-Jacques Becker to name but a few.

in question persistently make use of the motif of wasted youth and frustrated spiritual ambition without the projection of an escape route from the effects of a secularized society.¹⁶

Whilst French Catholic writers and intellectuals such as Péguy and Psichari are framed as crusaders whose death on the Western Front assumed Christic proportions both within Catholic circles and without, it is my contention that this perspective obscures some of the wider currents at work, among them the early inklings of “disenchanted” war literature, so often cited as the principal literary vision of the Great War. Equally, whilst most scholars of French Catholicism in the first half of the twentieth century attempt to chart a middle way between French Catholicism and the Vichy period, refuting claims of an explicit ideological affinity between French Catholicism, nationalism, and right-wing fascism, there exists a tendency to move all too quickly from pre-war Catholicism to the beginnings of the Second World War. This somewhat Manichaeic and moralistic framework - a subject I address in Chapter Two of this dissertation - continues to exclude French Catholic writers from the cultural history of the First World War, even if the ratio of enthusiasm to reluctance was balanced in more intricate measures.

This chapter begins by examining Psichari’s most obviously bellicose novel, *L’Appel des Armes* (1913) before moving on to its unlikely peer, Mauriac’s *L’Enfant chargé de chaînes*, published in the same year. In grouping these novels together my intention is to examine the shared treatment of stunted growth or frozen adolescence in

¹⁶ It should be noted that Bildungsromane in the French literary tradition often feature protagonists that meet with a sad fate despite being enlightened by the novel’s close: Stendhal’s Julien Sorel, Flaubert’s Frédéric Moreau, Balzac’s Lucien de Rubempré, etc.

order to show how this trope dominates, and sometimes overrides, Catholic pre-war ideology. A comparison of these two novels has limits from the outset, especially with regard to the avowed Catholicism¹⁷ and later wartime trajectories of their authors. From the theoretical standpoint of the Bildungsroman however, these novels have striking affinities. Both Mauriac's Jean-Paul Johannet and Psichari's Maurice Vincent are each compromised by the close of each narrative, isolated from the collective mechanisms of society by their renewed engagement with Catholicism. If Jean-Paul is unable to exist within the collective body of the Catholic youth movement *Amour et Foi*, Maurice is equally incapable of belonging to the army instead relegated to the life of a lonely mandarin in Paris. Where Jean-Paul exposes the hypocrisy of the young Catholic apostolate, Maurice unmasks it indirectly by finding the true meaning of his Catholic faith in the deserts of the Sahara rather than in the pastures of his childhood France. In their various ways, both Jean-Paul and Maurice, young and vigorous French Catholic males, come to embody the negative effect of their spiritual epiphanies. In so doing, they radically disrupt the pre-war trope of active Catholicism, calling into question French Catholic ideas of destiny, a notion that came to be mobilized so successfully in the war years themselves.

In the years leading up to the First World War, adolescence offered the age not only a mirror of its own uneasiness reflecting back the crisis of identity, but also the promise of meaningful development. In making this argument, I am conscious that to generalize the "spirit of the age" in this way engenders the same kinds of criticism that

¹⁷ Psichari considered himself fully re-engaged with Catholicism after the publication of *L'Appel des Armes*.

Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism did, namely the accidental use of totalizing methods in order to negate monolithic portrayals of historical periods.¹⁸ However, my argument in this chapter is influenced by my belief in the shared affinities between literature and sociocultural phenomena such as war and religion. In this way, I lead into my analysis with a focus on the genre of the Bildungsroman, not so much as an exercise in formalist criticism but rather as a means of seeing how literature can encode social and historical issues.

Disenchantment is often associated with the literature that followed the First World War. Distinguishing between the contiguous and often confused terms of "disillusionment" and "disenchantment", Andrew Frayn defines the term as a product of the "social and cultural interactions between the traditional enchantments of faith and the modern enchantments of science, its practices and procedures."¹⁹ However, in line with Frayn, I want to suggest that disenchantment existed before the war, an observation that disrupts now-established narrative arcs surrounding the conflict:

Disenchantment exists before the First World War, continues during it, and endures following it. It does not appear in an instant following the Somme or the Armistice, the Treaty of Versailles or the failure to build 'a country fit for heroes to live in', the General Strike of 1926 or the literary precedents of Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* and R.C Sherriff's *Journey's End*. A long cultural context of writing across disciplines about decay, decline and degeneration, uncertainties and fears of invasion must be taken into account, along with the enchantments which were questioned, some believed shattered irrevocably, by the conflict. There was no pre-war idyll, and the language used to describe disenchantments before the war is mobilized in response to the conflict.²⁰

¹⁸ See *Practicing new historicism* by Catherine Gallagher, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, p.3.

¹⁹ See Andrew Frayn, *Writing disenchantment: British First World War prose, 1914-30*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014, p.2.

²⁰ *Op.cit*, p.2.

With this perspective in mind, this chapter proceeds from two separate, but interlinked, observations. I posit that through the deliberate manipulation of the Bildungsroman genre, writers that later came to be labelled as explicitly Catholic critiqued the Church through the stunted development of their young Catholic heroes, left isolated rather than liberated by the novels' close. To demonstrate the ways in which this position constitutes a break away from the rhetoric surrounding young Catholic males in the pre-war years, this chapter pays attention to the oft-cited "Agathon" survey published before the war in order to uncover the ways in which the values within it came to represent the pre-war myth of the "generation of 1914". By calling into question the "generation of 1914" myth, I propose that new light can be thrown upon the issue of literary disenchantment, previously thought of by First World War scholars as an exclusively post-war phenomenon. This contention cannot hold, as I demonstrate throughout this dissertation by charting the failure of French Catholic literature to conform to an increasingly delineated view of what constitutes "First World War literature", beginning with the pre-war exemplars published in 1913 and ending with Bernanos's 1926 *Sous le Soleil de Satan*.

Following on from their first enquiry into the culture of the Sorbonne,²¹ in the spring of 1912, Henri Massis and Alfred de Tarde, writing under the pseudonym Agathon,²² gave voice to the break within French society.²³ Claiming to have interviewed

²¹ See *L'esprit de la nouvelle Sorbonne; la crise de la culture classique, la crise du français*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1911.

²² Fittingly, Agathon was Socrates's disciple whose epithet was "good and brave in war".

²³ Agathon's original survey appeared as "Les Jeunes Gens d'aujourd'hui" in *L'Opinion*, 13 April 1912 to 29 June 1912. The following year, however, it appeared as a book, and the original text was supplemented by footnotes and appendices.

a number of elite young men aged between eighteen and twenty-five, Agathon reported that this burgeoning demographic represented one striking contrast to their elders: renewed faith. The elder generation of 1885 could only be characterized by their pessimism and negative energy, the unfortunate consequence of their defeat in the Franco-Prussian war:

Ce fut une génération intermédiaire, sacrifiée. Venue après celle du second Empire, forte de son orgueil matérialiste et de son crédo scientifique, et qui fut vaincue en 1870, elle supporta vraiment tout le poids de la défaite [...] C'est plus tard seulement, vers 1880, que commença de s'exprimer une idéologie de la défaite.²⁴

In line with Paul Bourget's condemnation of dilettantism in his 1882 essays,²⁵ the new generation rejected the political liberalism, pacifism and philosophical materialism of their forefathers, preferring instead energetic action and unswerving devotion to the Catholic Church and nation:

[...] la foi patriotique, le goût de l'héroïsme, le renouveau moral et catholique, le culte de la tradition classique, le réalisme politique. Ce sont là les principaux éléments de ce qu'on peut appeler une renaissance française. (21)

In his assessment of Agathon, historian Robert Wohl warns against treating the enquiry empirically, reminding us of Massis's literary ambitions:

Massis was using the generational idea as a sledgehammer with which to dismantle the reputations of his predecessors and to get his literary career

²⁴ Henri Massis and Alfred de Tarde, *Les jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui : le goût de l'action, la foi patriotique - une renaissance catholique, le réalisme politique*, Paris: Paris : Plon-Nourrit et cie, 1913, pp.5-6. Hereafter cited parenthetically within the text.

²⁵ Paul Bourget, *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, Paris: Plon, 1889.

underway [...] What was the “generation of 1885”, except a handful of writers, loosely grouped and vaguely defined, with whose values Massis disagreed?²⁶

Yet despite the caveats that surround Agathon’s enquiry into pre-war youth, it remained, up until the revisionist work of such cultural historians as Jay Winter,²⁷ an extraordinarily powerful image. Bolstering the “generation of 1914” image, France’s youth was said to be the impressionable material from which a nationalist revival was fashioned, fortuitously coinciding with the declaration of war in August 1914. As I show in this chapter, this “myth” has been challenged in recent years through a re-examination of the term “generation”. Critiques of the term have tended to emphasize the shaky foundations upon which generalizations about entire age groups rest.²⁸ For me, however, this misses the point. Theoretical concerns aside, I attempt to show how this “myth” appears in a distorted form in the Catholic literature of the period and the extent to which this pessimism surrounding the Catholic establishment is yet another example of the refusal of “Catholic literature” to conform to what constitutes the accepted ideas of First World War myth. Given this proposition I propose that, rather than abandoning Agathon altogether, we should consider it from a new perspective emanating from the following positions. Firstly, it behoves us to acknowledge the strength of Agathon’s enquiry for its contemporary audience and the radical nature of the proposition that (de) Tarde and Massis were asserting as an empirical given. Secondly, given the power of its message, we must also ask why Agathon’s propositions remained open to varying interpretation to

²⁶ Robert Wohl, *The generation of 1914*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980, p.10.

²⁷ See Jay Winter, *Remembering war: the Great War between memory and history in the twentieth century*, London: Yale University Press, 2006.

²⁸ See Alan B. Spitzer, "The Historical Problem of Generations," *The American Historical Review*, 78 (1973): 1358-85.

members of the French Catholic literati in the pre-war years and the consequences of this posture – both formal and otherwise - for a literature of development.

The Bildungsroman

Fictions of development, narratives of youth, and stories of becoming, all lead to the Bildungsroman. In his classic study of the genre, *The Way of the World*, published in 1987, Franco Moretti hailed the classical ideal of the novel of education as a triumph of synthesis, a narrative model that so successfully welded “external compulsion and internal impulses”²⁹ that the two became indistinct from one another. For Moretti, synthesis, or the “totalizing harmony” of the Bildungsroman, was the specific product of the eighteenth-century context that was able to combine individualization with socialization:

It is not enough that the social order is ‘legal’; it must also appear as symbolically legitimate [...] We will see in fact that here there is no conflict between individuality and socialization, autonomy and normality, interiority and objectification. (16)

Produced in an era where this cohesion should seem not only conceivable but also desirable, the Bildungsroman faltered at the turn of the twentieth century confronting a “ceaseless clash of values and an erratic development with no end in sight” (73).

Beginning with Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* (1795), considered the Bildungsideal, Moretti proceeds chronologically, charting the changes in the genre with reference to Austen, Stendhal and latterly George Eliot, arguing for the emergence of the realist Bildungsroman that privileged interiority. Moretti’s central thesis posits youth as the

²⁹ Franco Moretti, *The way of the world: the Bildungsroman in European culture*, London: Verso, 1987, p.16.

privileged symbolic form that holds the meaning of life for modern culture. By offering a thesis whereby literature serves the social order by making unpalatable truths palatable, the novel helps its readers to negotiate the pitfalls of modernity. But as critics such as Gregory Castle have since pointed out, Moretti's argument can only take us so far due to his presumption that the Bildungsroman had been exhausted by the beginning of the twentieth century. Despite this, *The Way of the World* offers important insights for thinking about the French Catholic pre-war Bildungsroman. Gesturing towards the ways in which "Youth is not a teleological course ending in a superior maturity [...]" (118), Moretti opens up ways of thinking about how the "modern world's unique valorization of unhappiness" (127) in the later Bildungsroman might fulfill, if not symbolic legitimacy, then a no less figurative function.

The modernist Bildungsroman

Nonetheless, it is commonly observed that in the modernist era, the novel of development reaches a strange impasse. One need only consider Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (1913) to see how the classic narrative of youth and maturation becomes distorted beyond all recognition in the first decades of the twentieth century. Altering narrative time to such a degree that the biographical arc becomes almost indistinct from early Bildungsroman examples, modernist fictions are masterpieces of distortion where characterization unfolds in "[...] proleptic fits and retroactive starts, epiphanic bursts and impressionistic mental inventories, in accidents, in obliquity, in sudden lyric death and in languid semiconscious delay."³⁰ As Castle notes in his 2006 study of the modernist

³⁰ Jed Esty, *Unseasonable youth: modernism, colonialism, and the fiction of development*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.3.

Bildungsroman,³¹ rather than exemplifying the virtues of education, social mobility, and individualism, its twentieth century incarnation instead defines itself by its specific resistance to these mechanisms. And yet, within the context of modernity, how did the Bildungsroman even survive? Amongst the ruptures of modernity how did a genre ostensibly associated with Enlightenment values retain its currency? Remaining loyal to the Bildung's roots in self-formation, the modernist version instead glorifies conceptions of growth and becoming that resist the status quo, shedding light on processes of disharmonious spheres of society. This much we know from Moretti's meditations on the genre. Yet, along with Castle, I propose that rather than simply seeing the modernist Bildungsroman as the negation of the humanist philosophy that underpinned the first Bildungsromane, we should see it as a challenge to the very philosophies of the genre from within its own boundaries. It is within this context of subversion that we can situate pre-war French Catholic novels of development.

The Catholic Bildungsroman?

Alongside these radical expositions of anti-developmental fiction, can we really place the conservative fictions of the French Catholic revival? And if so, what links the novels of the Catholic, monarchist, right to the avant-garde nature of the pre-war period? The answer lies in their endings, a defining feature of Moretti's analysis. Not one of these texts, radical or otherwise, narrates the passage into adulthood, a key dictate of the Bildungsroman genre. Rather, in self-conscious disavowal, the novels I consider in this chapter leave their young Catholic would-be-heroes dissatisfied and suspended in time.

³¹ Gregory Castle, *Reading the modernist Bildungsroman*, Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006.

Although each of the protagonists has received a classical aesthetic education in the Humboldtian³² sense, this has not elevated them spiritually. In the examples of Bildungsromane that I assemble here, the critique of secular, Republican society emanates from the stifled desires of the young Catholic men who are unable to “get on” in society due to the ideological wasteland that surrounds them.

This argument necessarily calls into question the Bildungsroman’s relationship to nationalism. As Jed Esty has pointed out, the concept of Bildung is inextricably tied up with the “discourse of the nation”³³:

From the beginning, of course, the concept of Bildung evolved within the intellectual context of romantic nationalism; the genealogy of the term begins with Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, and Herder and the philosophical milieu of late eighteenth-century Germany. This lineage establishes the genre’s roots in a burgeoning nationalism based on an ideal of organic culture whose temporality and harmony could be reflected in the developing personality at the core of the bildungsroman. (5)

Before Moretti - whose attention to the matter is less explicit - M.M. Bakhtin had linked the concept of “national-historical time”³⁴ to the Bildungsroman in such a way as to codify the genre’s realism:

Time is introduced into man, enters into his very image, changing in a fundamental way the significance of all aspects of his destiny and life. This type of novel can be designated in the most general sense as the novel of human emergence [...] everything depends upon the degree of assimilation of real historical time. (21)

³² The Humboldtian notion of higher education developed in the nineteenth century was characterized by the combination of arts and sciences with the express aim of providing a comprehensive cultural knowledge. In the novels examined here it is literature, not science, which produces the most discontent.

³³ *Op.cit.*, p.5.

³⁴ M.M Bakhtin, *Speech genres & other late essays*, Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1986, p.25.

For Bakhtin, the realism of the Bildungsroman (in its original Goethean formula) was rooted in the bounded narrative of the nation that was pitted in intentional conflict with the unbounded narrative of youth that would, by the close of the narrative have fused with that of the nation to produce symbolic legitimacy. Bakhtin's theory allows us to situate the foundational tensions in the genre. Here, however, I am hypothesizing that these tensions are undermined in the "modernist" French Catholic Bildung for a number of reasons, largely connected to French national identity. Firstly, the developmental logic of the novels examined here gives way to a crisis of national identity provoked by the separation of the Catholic Church from the French state in 1905. As the markers of national identity were threatened by Viviani's secularization laws, so the protagonists of Catholic fiction become increasingly uncertain of their identity within national terms. As such, and secondly, the French nationalism of the Bildung comes under pressure from the extra-national forces of Roman Catholicism and imperialism (particularly visible in Psichari) that disturb and threaten the successful passage of French Catholic youth into adulthood.

L'Appel des Armes

To begin to expand this argument from a more empirical base, let us take up Psichari's 1913 *L'Appel des Armes*, perhaps the fullest elaboration of mobilization in pre-war French Catholic literature. Written by the newly converted former Republican and grandson of Ernest Renan, *L'Appel des Armes* is, as critics such as Cruickshank have

pointed out,³⁵ the story of generational crisis, reflecting the intellectual currents that Agathon had so publicly put forward. Yet Psichari was in no way a simple writer of Bildungsromane. Distancing himself from *L'Appel* after its publication as a “Godless” work, he went on to write *Les voix qui crient dans le désert* followed by *Le Voyage du centurion*, published posthumously in 1916. Psichari’s novels make use of the exotic space of the desert as a plot function that extends the narrative of maturation across geographical boundaries and provided a fictional outlet for the autobiographical impulse of his work. Recalling the biblical land of Moses, the desert provides the spiritual authenticity that pushes the protagonists ever further in their quest for epiphany: Maxence in *Le Voyage du Centurion* pointedly notes that the return to the original land of Jesus brings him closer to the epicentre of faith: “Le désert est une terre bénie. Notre Seigneur y est allé.”³⁶ But the association between the Mauritanian desert, Catholicism and the formal strictures of the Bildungsroman reflects a more complicated picture of French society than at first meets the eye. Although the heroes benefit from the Spartan austerity of the desert and the proximity to Islam as a means of furthering their maturation to Catholicism, the very fact that this takes place outside of France suggests that spiritual reconciliation with the nation, and, by extension, the necessary developmental progress of the Bildungsroman, is arrested, as Esty points out:

Those spaces comport equally with the symbol of youth without-age; youth represents what never fully modernizes and what is always modernizing. In both cases, and in both spaces (sub- and supranational), the danger of narrative infinity or endless youth prevails over the stable (and national) temporal concept of bounded progress.³⁷

³⁵ John Cruickshank, *Variations on catastrophe: some French responses to the Great War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982, p.13.

³⁶ Ernest Psichari, *Le Voyage du Centurion*, Paris: L.Conard, 1916, p.111.

³⁷ *Op.cit*, p.69.

L'Appel des Armes is the story of Maurice Vincent. Frustrated by the aridity of his spiritual and philosophical surroundings Maurice joins the army following the lead of the elder army officer Timothée Nangès. Ignoring his schoolteacher father's pacifist leanings in doing so, Maurice seeks to find his way while Nangès seeks to make the young man into his disciple. Separately, both Nangès and Vincent experience an existential dissatisfaction only arrested by their campaign to North Africa where they remain for several years. Whilst in North Africa Vincent is wounded in a desert battle. Unfit for further action, he returns to Paris to work in the war office where he feels dissolute and without purpose, unsure as to whether he should abandon his fiancée Claire Monestier for good. At the close of the novel, Nangès finds himself rootless and loveless in Paris after his mother's death and escapes once more to the colonies.

With an injured hero and an adventurous but immature Captain as a model for emulation, *L'Appel des Armes* in no way fulfils either Bakhtin's or Moretti's formula for the Bildungsroman since Maurice does not progress either through marriage or through arms. Instead, Maurice remains somewhat worse off than when the novel began, enlightened by Catholicism but unable to realize his spiritual ambition in action. Much has been made of the conflict between the novel's father figures, Le Père Vincent and Nangès.³⁸ Both ineffectual in smoothing Maurice's passage from youth into adulthood, they embody the problems inherent in the never-ending and unsatisfactory Catholic adolescence. Whilst I acknowledge the convenient symbolic affinity of inter-generational crisis within the novel and Agathon, my analysis will privilege the classic Bildung figure

³⁸ See Frédérique Neau-Dufour, *Ernest Psichari : l'ordre et l'errance*, Paris: Cerf, 2001.

of Maurice as a powerful motif of the cancer within pre-war French society and the role he plays in the re-imagining of the French Catholic *raison d'être* post 1914.

To begin, I will explore the theme of nationhood and development through Psichari's persistent metaphorical treatment of French soil. In doing so, I suggest that Psichari's understanding of nationhood is consonant with a need to connect the nation to a primal continuity and cyclical chronology that is remote from more standard "historical" chronologies of France. These chronologies tell the story of the 1871 defeat, the moral crisis of the Dreyfus Affair, and the separation of church and state, all moments which disrupted notions of French, Republican, and Christian identity. Moving on from symbolic markers of nationhood and identity, my analysis will then consider the novel in more formal terms, arguing that the open-ended and anti-climactic nature of its ending signifies not only the failure of nationally-bounded systems such as the Army to produce a reconciliation between youth and adulthood, but also the "form-fraying" power of Empire to distort the form of the Bildungsroman. As such, and as I will suggest more broadly, the novel puts pressure on the progress of the nation as an allegory for adulthood, offering instead a supra-temporal spiritual ambition in its place that isolates rather than unifies.

From the outset, it is the soil that brings Maurice and Nangès together as they hunt in the Meaux. For Nangès the landscape of the small commune of Voulangis acts as an antidote to the disruption of everyday life, a form of grace that represents "la certitude et la logique" in an unruly world. Neither romantics nor artists, their appreciation of the

earth is “dans le détail” (14) in its “vie journalière” which receives them into a fraternity. France, her landscapes, and her soil, are thus established as a moral paradigm in counterpoint to the wavering values of an intellectual education:

Tous deux, à des degrés, avaient reçu une forte nourriture intellectuelle [...] Dépassant de beaucoup la culture assez simple de M.Vincent, L’Enfant s’y était pris d’amour pour les beaux livres, la belle prose, la belle langue, pour les idées [...] Mais il avait gardé le goût enfantin de la campagne. (14)

The French soil is “enfantin”, representing innocence and a purity removed from the “odeur sordide” of intellectualism, a stench that hangs in the air from the Dreyfus Affair:

[...] le capitaine Nangès avait pris les mêmes chemins, mais plus consciemment, en haine de ce qu’on nomme de nos jours l’intellectualisme, par opposition sans doute avec l’intelligence. (15)

Intellectual posturing, as practiced by public figures such as Zola, is portrayed as “fumeux”, as residual rather than tangibly material. The earth triumphs as a regenerative force that must be ploughed by the prostrate human, who bows before God:

Là, c’est une force divine qui se dégage, et qui nous appelle, et qui nous courbe, et qui nous ploie irrésistiblement. Là, l’intelligence échoue, comme la plus haute raison échoue devant la foi d’un Pascal. Là, nous sommes humiliés, abaissés vers la terre, et plus encore que le laboureur silencieux penche sur sa charrue, parce que la puissance qui nous prosterne descend du ciel lui-même. (87)

Psichari wills the ‘force divine’ to triumph over the intellectual currents and forces that threaten to overwhelm French society. As the above excerpt illustrates through its use of verbs – “courbe”, “ploie”, etc- this is a battle of strength in which God’s force will rise above the secular virtues of reason and intelligence. So too in *L’Appel des*

Armes, this longing is typically channelled into the atavistic metaphors of a simpler past, be it through metaphors of campanology or organic metaphors of harvest. However, this metaphorical formula quickly comes under pressure since a collective identification with the soil is complicated by a conflicting solipsistic urge obvious in both Nangès and Vincent. Repeatedly, Nangès searches for personal identification in collective systems. Bored with his mistress Valérie and their routine passion, Nangès seeks identification within the collective body of the army, something he experiences as an “article de la foi”(22). But the collective equilibrium of the army cannot satisfy all of his needs. Childless, he seeks out Vincent as a disciple who will fulfil his longing for validation:

Quelle belle occasion d’enquêter sur l’état moral de la France! Voilà un jeune homme dont il connaît les parents, le pays, l’ambiance [...] C’est une oeuvre d’art parfaite, et qui l’émeut, puisqu’il est fait de la même argile que lui [...] Et puis, il y a Voulangis, le beau pays là-bas. Nous aimons la grande patrie avec l’esprit et le petit avec le Cœur. Vincent, pour Timothée, est comme un morceau détaché de cette patrie. (101)

Although this passage could stand for an idealized conflation of the young Catholic male and the “beau pays” of the Voulangis that come together to form an aesthetically perfect work of art, I propose that there are more incompatible currents at work. For Nangès, Vincent represents a personal need for identification that is simultaneously wrapped up in the collective barometer of the moral state of France. In selecting a young man such as Vincent he links his own identity metonymically with that of the youth through the soil since they are both “fait de la même argile”. And yet the organic signifier of the earth is pulled back by Nangès for his own purposes, “un morceau détaché” just for himself. Throughout the novel the communal and interconnected narratives of ancestry, the army, and the nation, are stymied by Vincent’s inability to act as a simple reflection of these

values; his night with a prostitute in Cherbourg and his almost comic boredom at having to listen to Nangès's grandiose philosophizing on mathematics suggest the incompatibility of public and private agendas. This discordance is in part why the novel gives the reader no resolution: the call to arms leaves Vincent estranged rather than connected to his country and in no way resolves the spiritual crisis that Nangès feels in France, exiling him once more to the colonies.

Writing about the connection between soil and nationhood, critic Seamus Deane locates an organic sense of nationhood within the earth:

Soil is prior to land. It is actual and symbolic, the more symbolic because of its claim to sheer materiality. The romantic-nationalist conception of the soil, its identity with the nation, its ownership by the people, its priority over all the administrative and commercial systems that transform it into land, is the more powerful because it is formulated as a reality that is beyond the embrace of any concept. It does not belong to the world of ideas; it precedes the idea of the world as a politically and economically ordered system.³⁹

However, the very fact of being rooted implies a subterranean quality, an indifference to the contingencies of history and politics that bewilder Nangès and Vincent. Soil, therefore, exists outside of linear chronologies that define the peripheral characters in the novel; Maurice's father Sebastian is identified firmly within his generation:

Le père Vincent faisait partie de la génération qui avait eu vingt ans en 1880. C'était celle des hommes qui avaient vu la défaite – frêles enfants purs – et qui l'avaient oubliée. Avec des yeux frais, avec des yeux tout neufs, ils avaient eu cette vision-là et ils ne se rappelaient plus, et ils ne pleuraient plus à ces noms

³⁹ Seamus Deane, *Strange country: modernity and nationhood in Irish writing since 1790*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, p.77.

pitoyables: Niederbronn, Rezonville, Gravelotte, Bazeilles, Beaune-la-Rolande, Bapaume, Champigny, Buzenval, - car ils avaient perdu cette grande pitié. (162)

Traditional chronologies of France are the ones that tell the story of numerous cataclysms on home soil, not to mention the recent defeat of the Franco-Prussian war. As above, the rootedness of place names calls to mind an all-too-vivid sense of national shame and defeat. Vincent is haunted by images of the battle of Champigny that exist for him remotely in paintings: ‘Ces sonneries de trompette, d’une tonalité un peu fausse, en mineur, évoquaient pour lui des tristesses de champ de bataille, des retraites, des déroutes, comme dans un tableau d’Alphonse Neuville [...]’ (93). By contrast, the chthonic metaphors of the soil celebrate a past that is free from the strictures of generational conflict.

What is extra-temporal is revealed as the novel’s truth since it lies outside of the stultifying contingencies of intellectual and political thought. During the Mass, Nangès pits the eternity of the act of transubstantiation against the ebb and flow of generational movement:

Après deux mille ans, c’étaient les mêmes cervelles, et aussi à peu de chose près, c’étaient les mêmes gestes qui se répétaient, c’étaient les mêmes prières, c’étaient les mêmes mots qui sortaient des lèvres inchangées. Tout l’effort de la pensée humaine avait échoué devant la représentation sensible de ce crucifié [...] Et pendant tout le temps que durait l’oblation du pain et du vin, devant la foule prosternée, Nangès sentait l’immense vertige des générations, vagues roulées et déroulées vers le même rivage. (103)

In this way, the “malheurs de l’Eglise” (220) are as to nothing when set against the “perpétuité du catholicisme” which is a conservative movement that not only survives,

but triumphs over the crises of its time. So, too, does the army represent an institution that can overcome the contingencies of history:

Il sentait qu'il représentait une grande force du passé, la seule – avec l'Eglise – qui restât vierge, non souillée, non décolorée par l'impureté nouvelle. Les soldats ne sont pas des hommes de progrès. Le Cœur n'a pas changé, ni les principes, ni la doctrine. (33)

Numerous images in the novel link the army with the Church – “La cloche cristalline d'une église de campagne comme l'appel brutal de la trompette” (34) etc. – not least the sentiment that, like the Church, the army belongs to an ante-diluvian order. However, Nangès laments that “le règne des soldats est fini” (75) but consoles himself with having been a part of its glory, when Generals were demi-Gods “[...] l'époque où tout un peuple acclamait un général et le demandait comme maître.” (75). Like the linkage of identity with the soil, the coupling of the army and the Church reveals stubborn discordances at the level of (French) identity. While both represent institutions that offer transcendent horizons over the immanence of philosophical and intellectual ones, neither is able to crystallize the nostalgia for a lost community into a vision for the future, or able to affirm the identity of either Nangès or Vincent who, ironically, feel most free when removed from the soil they venerate.

At the midpoint of the novel, Maurice leaves France for the austere desert of the Sahara. Frustrated with garrison life in Cherbourg, Maurice's development accelerates in the arid conditions of the desert:

Heureux les jeunes hommes qui, de nos jours, ont mené la vie frugale, simple et chaste des guerriers! Les terres que Maurice parcourait étaient plus belles, les aubes plus radieuses. Toutes les terres sont belles pour un jeune soldat. Toutes les aubes sont fraîches, naïves, puisqu'on s'y lève joyeux, confiant dans sa force, audacieux. Des aubes pleines d'allégresse, des matines, le chant des matines, les réveils des moines et des soldats... (297)

Likening the military routine to the monastic, Psichari glorifies the promise of youth as the fertile earth of spiritual growth. Yet this passage is not as straightforward as it might seem; by expanding the geographical parameters of the novel into the colonial space, Psichari jars the allegorical relationship between nationhood and adulthood so central to the Bildungsroman in its strict formal definition. Put another way, by placing Maurice and Nangès against the backdrop not of France but against the radical alterity of the Sahara, Psichari forces the reader to re-investigate the genre's relationship with the nation. If, referring back to the symbolic infrastructure of the Bildungsroman laid in place by Moretti, we accept the Bildungsroman as a genre whose major function was to make palatable the passage into modernity, then we must concede that Psichari stops short of allowing these ideological constructions to function mutually by displacing his narrative as far away from France as possible.

Later in the same chapter, Nangès experiences a hallucination in which the Napoleonic hero of Vigny's 1835 *Servitude et grandeur militaires*, Timoléon d'Arc, appears to him in the desert. Interlinking nineteenth and twentieth century officers in an imaginative ellipsis, the passage strikes a peculiar note. Timoléon, stationed with Vigny in defeat at Vincennes after the collapse of Napoleon's army, assures Nangès that he will participate in the renewal of the French army:

L'âme de la France vit encore, puisque je la cherche, fantôme errant, et que je la trouve, et que, derrière tous ces sables, je l'entends qui murmure et palpite. Vous connaissez, vous autres, des grandeurs nouvelles. Vous avez dans le cœur la haine, c'est ce qui nous manquait [...] Vous vous trompez vous-mêmes en venant ici. Mais c'est cela que vous avez toujours au-dedans de vous. (305)

Timoléon d'Arc expresses the certainty of the regeneration of France's military grandeur in mystical terms: the soul of France lives on and makes herself heard to those who seek her in the surrogate form of the Army. This scene is interpreted by critic John Neubauer⁴⁰ as evidence of Psichari's "call to arms", of his direct reflection of the spirit of Agathon whereby vigorous energies such as anger would lead to the militaristic (and mystical) renewal of France. Yet looking beyond this reading, I propose that the inclusion of Timoléon within the colonial setting is evidence of a further challenge to the novel of development from within. By introducing an imaginary (but not God-like) figure from the past to address the avatar of frozen youth, Nangès, Psichari puts pressure not only on Bakhtin's notion of the "real historical time" of the Bildungsroman but also the passage of maturation through education by introducing the notion of a pre-determined future. The split-temporality of Timoléon's appearance marks the absence of modernization in both the desert and the army, further jarring the passage of youth into adulthood.

Upon his return from the desert after a period of several years, Maurice finds himself back in France, this time in Paris where, wounded after battle, he serves at the

⁴⁰ See "Making World War with Literature" by John Neubauer in *Challenging Humanism: Essays in Honor of Dominic Baker-Smith*, Tom Hoenselaars and Arthur F. Kinney, eds., Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005, pp.253-263.

war office. With one leg shorter than the other, dressed in the uniform of a civil servant, Maurice is now old:

On l'a réformé avec la pension no.1. Une place dans un ministère l'aide à vivre. Tous les jours, il va à son bureau, deux heures le matin, deux heures le soir. Il porte une redingote boutonnée, un haut de forme, un parapluie [...] Lui-même ignore à quoi il semblait prédestiné. Il est rentré dans le rang et il y restera. Rien n'est changé en France: il n'y a qu'un honorable fonctionnaire de plus. (316)

Although prematurely aged by the “blessure de guerre” that he is proud to display – “Quand il est rentré en France, il faisait le faraud, le glorieux” (316) – Maurice has not passed through the symbolic arch from youth into adulthood. This being so, the final passages of *L'Appel* undercut the mutuality of spiritual growth and adulthood in explicit terms. Returning to Voulangis, heartland of his youth, Maurice hears the bells ringing out in the village, a sound that creates the sensation of experiential synthesis:

Certainement les cloches devaient se répondre ainsi, d'un bout de la France à l'autre, de commune en commune, de paroisse en paroisse, et ainsi, à la même heure, jusqu'à Rome même... Les gens entraient à la grand'messe. Maurice était cloué sur place. Comme il venait d'effleurer des rêves troubles, comme il avait senti ce mystérieux frémissement de l'Islam, il lui fallait se ressaisir. Il avait besoin de ce simple tableau. Maintenant, il le pouvait comprendre. (318)

Leading us to believe that Maurice has achieved spiritual enlightenment through his exposure to the mysticism of the Orient, Psichari undercuts this resolution by juxtaposing it with the pathetic image of Maurice limping through the landscape of his youth torn between reveries of his past and the frozen vision of his future crystallized in the Saharan desert:

Maurice, lui, c'est déjà un vieux. Même Voulangis, il ne tient plus trop à le voir. C'est de là-bas, surtout, c'est d'Afrique qu'il comprenait son pays, qu'il le connaissait d'une pleine et mystérieuse connaissance. Maintenant, il est dans l'incertitude, battu des vents. (319)

Blown about by the wind, the colonial space of the desert continues to frustrate not only Maurice's development but also his desire to experience his Catholicism in harmony with the nation. This moment of recognition in the closing passages of the novel coupled with the physical disability of a young man, now old, converges to define the text's distortion of the Bildungsroman. Psichari puts pressure on the forward-looking logic of the genre, suggesting that to be Catholic and French simultaneously is no longer a harmonious enterprise. If Maurice Vincent seeks to discover the affinities of Catholicism and the army within the context of the Saharan desert, this dislocation from France herself comes at the price of a relegation to the margins of society.

L'Enfant chargé de chaînes

L'Enfant chargé de chaînes was Mauriac's first novel, for the most part ignored by his critics and missing from the now voluminous field of Mauriac scholarship.⁴¹ As with Psichari's *L'Appel des Armes* published in the same year, critics such as John Flower have traditionally read the novel along autobiographical lines, interpreting key passages as fictional renditions of Mauriac's involvement with the Catholic socialist

⁴¹ In a recent study of Mauriac's work by Elisabeth Le Corre, *François Mauriac: le prêtre et l'écrivain*, Paris: Honoré Champion, 2014, there is scant mention of the novel. Likewise for other studies on Mauriac published in the last ten years by critics such as Edward Welch, Kalin Mikhailov and François-George Maugarlone.

movement *Le Sillon* and his subsequent renunciation of it.⁴² Whilst this line of investigation is fruitful, I believe that situating the work against the theoretical backdrop of the Bildungsroman illuminates many of the consciously constructed tensions in the work that the non-fictional approach obscures. The central premise of my discussion of Psichari's *L'Appel des Armes* was the curious failure of the classic Bildungsroman alignment of nationhood and development. As I have argued, instead of creating a manageable narrative about Catholicism and modern society, Psichari extends the borders of his novel out to the colonial space of the desert thereby frustrating the developmental path of his hero. In what follows, I turn to Mauriac's forgotten novel, *L'Enfant chargé de chaînes*, as evidence of the same deliberate – and ironic – frustration of the youthful hero's progress due to the isolating influences of Catholicism that I take as evidence of a critique of French society from within the formal constraints of the Bildungsroman genre. As with my treatment of Psichari's novel, my analysis is driven by the peculiar stasis of the text's ending in which Catholicism, far from being the countertrope of youth, is in fact in direct opposition to it.

The novel's protagonist, Jean-Paul Johanet, a young, rich *bordelais* wanders Paris aimlessly searching for meaning which neither literature nor his cousin (and love-interest) Marthe Balzon can provide. Salvation comes in the form of Vincent Hiéron, a member of *Le Sillon*'s fictional avatar, *Amour et Foi*. An old school friend, Vincent recruits Jean-Paul to the movement in the hope of harnessing his self-absorption to a worthy cause.

⁴² See Flower in *Intention and Achievement: An Essay on the Politics of Francois Mauriac*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969, p.31: “[...] while a detailed tracing of certain influences observable in his early stylistic techniques would provide a testing exercise, more important for the development of his later writing is the emergence of standard themes and personal convictions from the heavy layer of autobiographical material that dominates these formative years.”

Tired of his isolation from the world due to his predilection for literature and abstract ideas, Jean-Paul enthusiastically joins the movement led by Jérôme Servet (an obvious caricature of Marc Sangnier). Through the meetings of the movement, Jean-Paul comes into contact with Georges Élie, a working-class carpenter from Bordeaux whose sincerity and devotion to Christ challenges Jean-Paul's snobbery. Quickly, Jean-Paul rejects the life of the apostolate and returns to Paris where he escapes into the debauched world of women and late nights under the influence of his boorish school friend Lulu. Torn between the life of the movement and his life in Paris, he attempts suicide early one morning only to be granted with an epiphany. He renews his spiritual bonds with the Church and promises to marry Marthe, who has languished during his wilderness period in Paris. Although an attempted reconciliation with Georges Élie is foiled by the workman's rejection of Jean-Paul, the close of the novel leads the reader to believe that Jean-Paul's faith has been awakened even if it will not flourish in the ill-starred movement of *Amour et Foi*.

Featuring stock aspects of the Catholic "coming of age" novel, *L'Enfant* blends the societal tensions of a newly secular France with the skeleton of the Bildungsroman. But this combination of Catholic-oriented social critique and Bildungsroman results in a break away from the narrative dictates of both genres: the Catholic church is satirized and by the close of the novel, the eponymous "child" remains in chains. In fact, the plot relates nothing so much as a maturity that is constantly being deferred, beckoned by the spiritual asceticism of the Catholic Church only to be intermittently halted by the narcissism of the focal character. Mauriac sets the story of arrested development against

the backdrop of the ill-fated youth movement of the Roman Catholic Church, shut down by the Vatican in 1910. Using the fictional *Amour et Foi* movement as a metaphor for the impassioned enthusiasm and subsequent failure of youthful promise, Mauriac invents a figural scheme in which both protagonist and movement share a resistance to smooth development. In this way, the backdrop of *Amour et Foi* serves as both figure and context for Jean-Paul's crisis:

Ne vaut-il pas mieux devenir l'esclave d'un Dieu, d'un maître, d'une doctrine que demeurer L'Enfant libre, mais solitaire et las, et qui, à certaines heures, voudrait bien mourir...? Vincent me dit qu'à l'union *Amour et Foi* je trouverais des frères humbles et bons. Ils sauraient me faire partager les espoirs dont ils vivent. Ainsi, docilement, le jeune homme baisse la tête pour recevoir le joug. Mais l'idéal vers quoi il marche lui demeure inconnu; il va en quelque sorte à reculons, les yeux levés sur les vieux dégoûts, sur les écoeulements quotidiens. Il court à ce qui est peut-être la vérité, non parce que c'est la Vérité mais pour se libérer des mornes tristesses qui le tuent...⁴³

In this passage Mauriac underscores the crisis of late-nineteenth century decadence in contrast with the hope and promise of a piety that would release him from a destructive life. But even at this early stage of the novel, Jean-Paul can never fully orient himself in the right direction; he embraces the Church in desperation rather than sincerity, finding himself repeatedly drawn back to the pleasures of solitude and literature rather than the earnest enthusiasm of the movement. Throughout the text, the boundless infinity of faith, witnessed in the devotion to the cause by figures such as Georges Elie, is felt by Jean-Paul as incoherence, as an effect of endlessness that draws Jean-Paul back to his childhood rather than into his future:

⁴³ Francois Mauriac, *L'Enfant chargé de chaînes*, Paris: B. Grasset, 1913, p.74. Hereafter cited parenthetically within the text.

Jean-Paul, dans une chapelle latérale, s'abandonna enfin, et pleura, et ses mains mouillées de larmes avaient la même odeur que lorsqu'à six ans il pleurait dans la chambre silencieuse, où une mère ne l'avait jamais endormi sur ses genoux. (123-4)

Using the infinite horizons of faith as a motif to generate a sense of mediocrity and imprisonment, Mauriac makes Catholicism a destabilizing force within the novel, no better than the allure of literature or the “influence du nietzschéisme” (131) often referred to by Agathon. By finding in Catholicism the symbolic resources to undermine the generic concerns of the Bildungsroman, Mauriac reworks the conventions of the genre in ways that offer a very different picture of Catholicism than critics have often suggested.

What matters is that Mauriac’s lesson will be negative, as the energy that so enlivened the “jeunes gens d’aujourd’hui” is turned in upon itself as an illustration of the failure of collective movements and ideologies to mobilize youth. Just as one must refrain from identifying with Jean-Paul, so the reader must come to identify instead with the cynical perspective of a narrative apparatus that does its best to deride Catholicism rather than recommend it as a means of immersion into society. Illustrating the exact opposite of Lukacs’s “attempted synthesis”, *L’Enfant* instead produces a series of irreconcilable opposites that manufacture irony rather than resolution. Of these, the fundamental incompatibility of Roman Catholicism with liberalism and by extension modernism, paves the way for other oppositions such as those between father and son, the elder and younger generation, the provinces and Paris, literature and action, etc.

L'Enfant chargé de chaînes consistently pivots around the figure of the adolescent not, as one might expect, as the figure of harmonic growth but rather as a means of disrupting the pace of the Bildungsroman. As such, Jean-Paul does not so much develop as proliferate instances where he is caught in narrative stasis, unable to be thrust along by potential plots of development such as romance, education or inheritance. As a student in Paris, literature isolates him:

Il sentit douloureusement l'inutilité de sa vie. Il avait quelquefois ébauché le geste de Rastignac, et jeté vers la grande ville son 'à nous deux'. Mais les petits échecs, les lassitudes, les dégoûts l'avaient rejeté dans la chambre, où dès lors il se tapit loin de la rue, avec des livres. (11)

To compound this sense of estrangement, Jean-Paul feels divorced from his father, and from the landscape of the Aquitaine with which his family strongly identifies: "Il ne connaît pas son fils et Jean-Paul ne connaît pas cet homme hâlé, hirsute, mal tenu, qui est son père et il se demande parfois : 'Comment suis-je sorti de lui?'" (3). Equally, his childhood companion Marthe provides no relief from his loneliness. Even when Jean-Paul has joined *Amour et Foi* full of the resolutions of a new life within the collective of Catholic youth, he quickly becomes alienated from the group, isolated by class and snobbery:

Pourtant au long de ces quinze jours, il avait souvent éprouvé un vertige devant l'abîme qu'il sentait se creuser entre lui et ses camarades, même ceux de sa classe qui aimaient le peuple autrement que par littérature, et le soir, après s'être exaspéré dans un cercle d'études, que de fois il s'était réfugié dans sa chambre, ayant en lui le désir violent de se désencaniller! Il revêtait alors un pyjama aux teintes fondues, et aiguisait son dégoût, en lisant les vers crispés de Jules Laforgue... (93).

Nonetheless, having escaped from the company of the movement in Bordeaux he finds no further relief in Paris:

Et cependant, lorsque je me suis résigné à vivre comme les autres hommes, à rechercher les mêmes joies, n'était-ce pas à l'amour que je songeais? Puis-je me contenter de menus plaisirs physiques? (197).

Bringing to life the concerns of adolescent turmoil, in which dichotomies are sharply felt and passions run high, Jean-Paul's situation highlights the intersection of personal faith and social action and the frequent incompatibility of the two.

For Jean-Paul and Marthe, Catholicism is experienced as nostalgia. Powerful in its associations, Catholicism exists in a distant past, removed from the present. As such, Jean-Paul longs for the comforting objects of his Catholic childhood:

Sur la table, entre les piles de livres, un petit Christ de métal luisait — un affreux objet, cadeau de première communion — mais que Jean-Paul vénérât parce qu'il avait connu, dans les soirs fiévreux, les larmes et les baisers de son adolescence. (212).

Catholic nostalgia encapsulates the generational crisis inherent in the movement of *Amour et Foi* and the conflicting views of the Church from the apostolate and the Vatican. In Chapter Six, Jérôme Servet responds to the condemnation of the movement by the Vatican, a scene in which Mauriac highlights the schism between the Church of old and its modern version:

Il s'assit devant son bureau, les bras pendants...

— Mauvaises nouvelles de Rome?

— Plutôt... une lettre ambiguë, comme ils savent en écrire là-bas, des louanges mesurées, des réticences, des menaces déguisées sous une bénédiction. Mais je sais que Mgr Bonaud, qui interdit à ses séminaristes et à ses prêtres de suivre nos congrès et de lire nos journaux, a été approuvé. Son exemple sera suivi. Plusieurs élèves du grand séminaire m'ont écrit des lettres désespérées...

— C'est là ta revanche, Jérôme.

L'évêque leur impose une discipline extérieure, mais qu'importe, si leurs âmes lui échappent, si elles te sont à jamais passionnément soumises?

Jérôme sourit. (55)

Recalling Pius X's actual letter to *Sillon* leader Marc Sangnier in which the Pope issued a barbed warning to the movement, making clear the attitudes it should adopt if it was to retain favour in Rome,⁴⁴ Mauriac's satirical treatment of Jérôme implies an ambivalence about the direction of the Church, stuck between its past and its future. Vincent responds to the split between the Vatican and *Amour et Foi* with a nostalgia for the past, at odds with the vigour of his commitment to the cause:

C'était si beau autrefois, quand le monde nous ignorait, cette vie d'enthousiasme et de ferveur. On allait, tu te souviens, dans des banlieues... On entraît chez des marchands de vin. Il y avait une conférence dans l'arrière-boutique. Tu parlais; on t'interrompait d'abord avec des farces ignobles, de gros rires. Peu à peu ces pauvres âmes s'éveillaient; une gravité inconnue apparaissait au fond des regards et tu pouvais alors parler du Christ. (57)

Longing for the movement as it once was, Vincent's preoccupation with its past ideals rather than its reality speaks to the youthful dissatisfaction that dogs the novel. Despite

⁴⁴ Considered to be an increasingly Republican movement that placed the spiritual needs of ordinary people before the intransigent hierarchy of Papal authority, *Le Sillon* was condemned by Pope Pius X on the 25th August 1910 with a letter entitled "Notre charge apostolique". See Gearoid Barry, *The disarmament of hatred: Marc Sangnier, French Catholicism and the legacy of the First World War, 1914-45*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, for a full discussion of Marc Sangnier's life.

his apparent acceptance of the ideology of social Catholicism, Jean-Paul is never truly at ease, accepting its membership whilst also being “conscient de son mensonge”.

The novel thus produces a deliberate inversion of the Bildungsroman ideal, documenting Jean-Paul’s almost total inability to cultivate his own selfhood through a religious posture. Instead, Mauriac betrays his hero’s lack of self-awareness in moments of interior commentary:

Jean-Paul prit conscience brusquement du pauvre coeur dévasté qu'il portait en lui, ce soir. Mais n'est-ce pas à ces heures-là que le passé chante indéfiniment comme les flots d'une mer calme? Le coeur vaincu et qui ne voit plus à son horizon aucune lumière revient vers les plages délaissées, où, un à un, comme des étoiles au crépuscule, les souvenirs se lèvent et luisent. (142)

Although Jean-Paul, by now expelled from *Amour et Foi*, is overcome by the scale of loss, it is to be assumed that this realization has come too late. In place of self-awareness, Mauriac portrays his hero as sliding back, indefinitely, into what modern readers recognize as Proustian reveries.⁴⁵ The regressivity of this turn is amply expressed in the language of the above passage; the horizon - for which we might read the future - is nowhere to be seen, causing the soul to turn back to abandoned beaches where memories, like stars, twinkle at twilight. However poetic this may be, the failure of Jean-Paul to cultivate himself through the Church is placed quite deliberately at the feet of French Catholicism. Solipsistic as he may be, Jean-Paul’s inability to integrate himself within the youth movement is in part due to the politics of the movement and the divisiveness of

⁴⁵ *Du côté de chez Swann* was published in the same year as *L'Enfant* (1913).

Jérôme Servet. Unsparing in his criticism of Jérôme, satirized as a vain demagogue, Mauriac criticizes the Church that allows such figures to rise from its ranks:

Un homme qui fait profession d'apôtre échappe à toutes les conventions. Jérôme s'arrogeait le droit de n'être pas poli. Nul ne lui en tenait rigueur. Inconsciemment, ces jeunes gens avaient subi l'influence du nietzschéisme grossier dont le monde aujourd'hui s'accommode. Le Maître leur était une manière de surhomme. (131)

By addressing quite explicitly the problems besetting the Catholic Church in France, torn between nostalgia for a maternal past and the politics of a new future, Mauriac makes clear the hostile environment in which French Catholic youth find themselves. Situating this critique within the Bildungsroman, Mauriac takes it one step further, suggesting that the genre of symbolic reconciliation is no longer able to function in French society. *L'Enfant* thus puts pressure on the enlightened logic of the Bildungsroman, implying that it is no longer possible for Catholicism and youth to come together in harmony.

In order to see how this kind of pessimism plays out in the novel's ending - the barometer of the successful Bildungsroman - we need only turn to the closing chapters. After an abortive suicide attempt, Jean-Paul experiences a reawakening of his religious senses during an early morning mass after a debauched night in Paris with his mistress:

Dans la nuit d'un confessionnal, il jeta toutes ses faiblesses. Il heurta le bois vernis de son front pénitent. Il se releva plus calme — à peine troublé de délicats scrupules, à cause de péchés mal précisés. De vieilles femmes à bonnet noir se groupaient autour d'un autel où la messe commençait; des servantes disaient goulûment leur chapelet, des dames au visage blanc uni, reposé, tiraient d'un geste lent leurs gants de filoselle. Sordide et grise, une loueuse de chaises se détacha d'un pilier et la monnaie de billon tinta... (217)

Although Mauriac eventually grants his hero an epiphany after several false turns, it is not freely given. Ironizing the Catholic Church through an assortment of its (female) humanity, spiritual enlightenment is besmirched by all levels of the social hierarchy: women with their silk gloves, servants mindlessly and greedily reciting their rosaries, all capped by the clinking of small change as the chairs are moved by a sordid woman. Although Mauriac seems to express hope that the Catholic Bildungsroman might chart the reconciliation between the young hero's soul and the Church, such a re-enchantment is quickly disavowed. When Jean-Paul goes to see the young carpenter Georges Élie in Bordeaux in an attempt to atone for having cruelly rejected him, the scene ends in bitterness and ill feeling:

Jean-Paul parlait avec cette tendresse un peu timide, ce savant abandon où il excellait. Son attitude penchée était celle qu'il utilisait autrefois dans ses essais de conquête
 — Non, tu n'es plus mon ami...
 Jean-Paul crut sentir moins de colère dans la voix de l'apprenti ; mais il eut la maladresse d'ajouter
 — Je ne me pardonne pas de t'avoir fait souffrir.
 Georges se redressa brusquement:
 — Crois-tu donc que je tienne à toi? Je ne demandais pas mieux que de ne plus te voir. Monsieur s' imagine qu'on ne peut se passer de lui...
 Il se tourna du côté du mur et ne parla plus. Jean-Paul voulut prendre sa main brûlante. Brusquement le malade la retira. (268)

For Jean-Paul, membership of *Amour et Foi* seems at first to promise the enlarged possibilities for a Catholic youth movement that could unite young men of all social backgrounds. However, at the crucial moment of potential harmony between Catholics of all social stripes, Mauriac reveals his hero regressing back to a decadence suspended in adolescence:

Alors Jean-Paul sentit le désir de fuir ce quartier infâme où le crépuscule même était sans beauté, de revêtir son smoking et d'aller dîner avec un ami de mise soignée, dans un restaurant coûteux où les musiques tziganes sont frénétiques et tristes; et, comme toute émotion chez lui suscitait un souvenir littéraire, il renia momentanément ses dieux: Charles Louis Philippe, Francis Jammes... (270)

Mauriac gives the final chapter to Marthe, alone in her country bedroom reading Jean-Paul's letters, addressing her directly in the authorial voice. Concentrating the reader's attention on the repetitive nature of stunted growth, Mauriac confirms in advance to Marthe that Jean-Paul's behavior will not change:

Vous savez que le bien-aimé demeure malgré tout un enfant chargé de chaînes et qu'il n'est pas encore délivré...
Marthe, vous souriez bravement à toutes les trahisons possibles; d'avance, vous les absolvez; votre minutieux amour prévoit, comme sa future vengeance, des redoublements de tendresse —et la sérénité des pardons silencieux. (275)

By predicting future moments of betrayal and forgiveness Mauriac breaks the teleology of the novel of development once and for all, suggesting a circuit of frozen youth and well-intentioned, but ineffectual, piety.

Conclusion

At the start of this chapter I proposed that a useful way to re-assess the “generation of 1914” myth was to locate it at the crossroads between the “Agathon” enquiry and the far more suspicious critique of pre-war French Catholic rhetoric from within the confines of the novel of development. The anti-developmental French Catholic Bildungsroman thus strikes a curious note by distorting the established narrative arc of

pre-war jingoistic enthusiasm that has become solidified in the post-war period. This position is now axiomatic, despite the efforts of revisionist scholars such as Andrew Frayn and Gary Sheffield. In the French literary tradition, Péguy has come to epitomize this trait with the oft-quoted lines of his poem *Ève* written in 1913:

Heureux ceux qui sont morts
 Pour la terre charnelle
 Mais pourvu que ce fut
 Dans une juste guerre

Heureux ceux qui sont morts
 Pour quatre coins de terre
 Heureux ceux qui sont morts
 D'une mort solennelle ⁴⁶

Péguy went to war in August 1914 and died shortly after in the Battle of the Marne in September of the same year. Famously entreating French Catholics to die in the name of a just cause, Péguy is touted as the definitive pre-war exemplar of heroic enthusiasm, emblematic of the union between France and Catholicism as war seemed inevitable, evinced in these lines written in 1911:

Miles Christi, tout chrétien est aujourd'hui un soldat; le soldat du Christ. Il n'y a plus de chrétien tranquille. Ces Croisades que nos pères allaient chercher jusque sur les terres des Infidèles, *non solum in terras Infidelium, sed, ut ita dicam, in terras ipsas infideles*, ce sont elles aujourd'hui qui nous ont rejoints au contraire, - et nous les avons au domicile. Nos fidélités sont des citadelles. – Le moindre de nous est un soldat. Le moins de nous est littéralement un croisé [...] La guerre sainte est partout. Elle est toujours. Nous sommes tous aujourd'hui places à la brèche. Nous sommes tous à la frontière. La frontière est partout. ⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Charles Péguy, *Ève*, Paris: Cahiers de la quinzaine, 1913, p.234.

⁴⁷ Charles Péguy, *Nouveau théologien*, t.XIII, 1911, p.147.

The construction of Péguy's reputation was cemented by his death so close to the declaration of war in 1914 and the hagiographical view of him created by a small group of French Catholic right-wingers, among them Maurice Barrès and Henri Massis. I believe that this perspective affords him undue prominence and occludes the range of Catholic responses to the coming war. The veneration of Péguy, the pathos of his biography and the mystical enthusiasm of his verse, demonstrates French Catholicism's need to raise its profile by aligning it with that of the nation's cause. Whilst my assessment of him is not on aesthetic grounds, it has been my intention in this chapter to consider how the myth of French Catholic pre-war enthusiasm came to achieve such prominence, and to look again at the relationship between resurgent and triumphant Catholicism, using the novel of a development as a barometer of pre-war French Catholic thought.

The anti-developmental plots that I have examined here give vivid narrative form to the predicament in which French Catholicism found herself before the First World War, namely the impossibility of living as fully realized French Catholic in a formally secular society. Taking the inherent logic of the Bildungsroman and inverting it by refusing their literary incarnations the promise of adulthood, both Psichari and Mauriac present the trope of youth as entirely destructive, stripping away the mystique of French Catholic destiny and leaving only the frustrations and confusions of early life. In doing so, these novels present important challenges to the "performativity" of French Catholic literature in the pre-war period, asking us to question our expectations of First World War literature, over a century after the pre-war period.

Chapter Two

All too compatible: Catholic rhetoric and the First World War

There is no limit to the measure of ruin and of slaughter; day-by-day the earth is drenched with newly shed blood, and is covered with the bodies of the wounded and of the slain. Who would imagine as we see them thus filled with hatred of one another, that they are all of one common stock, all of the same nature, all members of the same human society? Who would recognize brothers, whose Father is in Heaven?

Pope Benedict XV, *Ad Beatissimi
Apostolorum* (1914)

Introduction

On the 4th September 1914 Rheims Cathedral was bombed by German artillery fire. A gothic masterpiece where the Kings of France were once consecrated, the Cathedral stood as a symbol for a new type of war. Henceforth, warfare sought the wholesale destruction of the enemy culture, making cultural war and its symbolic transgressions peculiar to, and definitive of, the First World War.⁴⁸ As Alan Kramer points out, cultural mobilization was a crucial factor in determining national morale during the war itself and, in its aftermath, explaining the birth of European fascism in the interwar period. Despite this, scholars of the First World War have continued to view the destruction of the war purely as a consequence of mechanistic and industrialized warfare, obscuring the ways in which the devastation of the war was also cultural. In this chapter it is my contention that the French Catholic revivalists took up the cultural war in ways that

⁴⁸ See Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of destruction: culture and mass killing in the First World War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, Chapter One.

were peculiar to longstanding Catholic imagery and that this dogmatic interpretation of violence found a peculiar affinity with the war which confronted them.

The central premise of the previous chapter was that examples of French Catholic pre-war literature do not conform to our expectations of First World War writing. Using the formalities of the Bildungsroman as the overarching frame to my discussion, I put forward the argument that French Catholics did not greet war as enthusiastically as critics would like to make out.⁴⁹ Instead, I posited that the trajectories of their youthful protagonists, the frequently evoked “generation of 1914”, were paralysed in endless youth, rooted in the isolating spirituality of their Catholicism. Such a line of analysis allowed me to focus on the implicit logic of the Bildungsroman whereby the maturation of characters implies what Franco Moretti has called the “symbolic legitimacy” of individual and society.⁵⁰ Extending this out into the conditions of pre-war French Catholicism, I proposed that both Ernest Psichari and Francois Mauriac offer up a picture of the symbolic “illegitimacy” of nationhood and Catholicism, a turn that points to the inklings of disenchanting war literature, often considered to be an exclusively post-war phenomenon.

In this chapter I will explore the foundational principle of my first chapter more fully, examining the ways in which French Catholic writing produced in the early war

⁴⁹ See John Cruickshank, *Variations on Catastrophe: some French responses to the Great War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982 and Barrie Cadwallader, *Crisis of the European mind: a study of André Malraux and Drieu La Rochelle*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1981.

⁵⁰ Franco Moretti, *The way of the world: the Bildungsroman in European culture*, London: Verso, 1987, p.7.

period continues to disrupt standard narrative arcs associated with the First World War.⁵¹ Moving forward chronologically, in what follows I turn to a set of texts written by prominent French Catholic revivalists Léon Bloy and Paul Claudel in order to examine the ways in which French Catholicism became what David Carroll has called an “aesthetics-as-ideology”.⁵² Since literature was the way in which French Catholic revivalists explored their faith, here I explore how their ideology intertwined itself with their literature. In doing so, I acknowledge the frequently made association between French Catholic revivalists and the architects of Vichy France.⁵³ However, it is my contention that the French nationalism championed by Bloy and Claudel in their wartime writings was not the external application of politics to their literature but rather a totalizing impulse peculiar to their Catholicism and apparent long before 1914 in the very roots of the French Catholic revival.⁵⁴ French Catholic “literary nationalism” in the sense I want to give it here is therefore not the defensive application of jingoism to their literary posture upon declaration of war in August 1914, but rather the expression of a long-standing engagement with Manichaeic dichotomies informed by their faith. In a sense, the “literary nationalism” practiced by the revivalists exploits the totalizing tendencies implicit in Catholicism – good versus evil, light versus darkness, etc. – in such a way as

⁵¹ “In recent years, historians have argued persuasively against almost every popular cliché of the First World War [...] None of this has made the slightest difference to what most people actually believe about the First World War [...] In part this is a problem of imaginative inertia: the great human difficulty in jumping from one vision of the world to another. But it is also because of the functions that our shared beliefs about the war fulfil. They have achieved the status of modern mythology and as such are knitted into the social fabric.” Dan Todman, *The Great War: myth and memory*, London: Hambledon, 2005, p.xii.

⁵² David Carroll, *French literary fascism: nationalism, anti-Semitism, and the ideology of culture*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, p.6.

⁵³ French Catholic ideology is often assumed to be proto-fascist, see Carroll, p.6.

⁵⁴ For an in-depth discussion of the revival, see Richard Griffiths, *The reactionary revolution: the Catholic revival in French literature, 1870-1914*, London: Constable, 1966.

to provide a transformation of the early war period into the highly rhetorical attitudes readily associated with propaganda.

Bloy and Claudel wilfully dismissed Catholicism's transnational claims to peace in the early years of war. Sensitivities to art and literature did not prevent them from being indifferent in the face of the worst forms of injustice or even from actively promoting hatred and violence against others. On the contrary, it was precisely their Catholic convictions that led them to the extremist positions they formulated in their literary and critical texts as well as in their more directly political writings. Of interest to me here is how the imaginative potential of Catholicism was harnessed so successfully to the conditions of the First World War. Religion has a long history of being made to support both the highest ideals and the basest crimes of human endeavour; in the case of the French Catholic revivalists, their religion did not prevent them from giving in to political dogmatism, racial bias and explicit hatred. Catholicism was proof that the most extreme political positions could be defended in terms of spiritual and eschatological principles, at times seemingly the antithesis of the fundamental principles of Catholicism herself. As such, here I am interested in the negative potential of French Catholic literature. By analysing the representation of the German in the thought and fiction of Claudel and Bloy my intention is not to explain away their animosity as political and national exigency but rather to examine the ways in which they conceived of the damnation and extermination of the Germans as a means of restoring the values and ideals of the Catholic Church in France. Their tone – however mistaken it was – cannot

therefore be understood as a rejection of humanistic values and cultural ideals but rather as the protection of them.

To understand this position more fully we must turn to the matter of French literary nationalism itself and how it came to be defined at the end of the nineteenth century, coinciding with the beginnings of the French Catholic revival. No early twentieth century writer is more associated with this position than Maurice Barrès. Author of a series of explicitly nationalistic works, the cycles *Roman de l'énergie nationale* most specifically, Barrès became the standard-bearer for French literary nationalism like no other. Writing an almost daily column in the *Écho de Paris*, later published as the *Chronique de la Grande Guerre*, Barrès became known variously as the “rossignol du carnage” or the “grand chef de la tribu des bourreurs de crâne”.⁵⁵ Like the Catholic revivalists, Barrès’s vision of France was pre-determined, its roots fixed in relation to “la terre et les morts”. French identity, fixed within Churches, memorials, and the earth itself became aestheticized within a collective past, postulated as an organic unity during the war years. Drawing on longstanding imaginative positions to create a unified – and exclusive - sense of national identity, Barrès is often grouped with the revivalists as an example of the ways in which violence became aestheticized or moulded into imaginative patterns that tapped into ancient traditions. As I show in this chapter, in both cases, the utilization of the imagery of rebirth, resurrection and metamorphosis sets up a troubling relationship between nationalism and art, throwing into question art’s ancient commitment to what is beautiful rather than violent. Like Barrès, Bloy and Claudel come to no conclusion about the fundamental contradiction of Christian

⁵⁵ Maurice Barrès, *Journal des années de guerre*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1952, p.131.

imaginative positions and the destruction of the war. Instead, their work trades on the power of its authority to create transcendent visions of national identity that at times creates something especially forceful, and at other times succumbs to the desolation that sheer ruin leaves in its wake.

Bloy

[...] la haine infinie de tous les saints pour les démons est exactement ce qu'il faut offrir aux ennemis de la France.

*Méditation d'un solitaire en
1916 (1917)*

In my previous chapter, I discussed the ways in which Charles Péguy diagnosed the malaise of modern times as a consequence of secularisation, committing himself to intransigent Catholicism in the last years before his death in action on the Marne in 1914. Like Péguy, Léon Bloy (1846-1917) rallied vociferously against secularism in early twentieth century France making the conflict of the Church and the French Republic the key political context of his work. Rejecting the banality and mediocrity of the Republican society in which he found himself, Bloy sought refuge in religious idealism. In order to underpin this position and establish the depths of the human mind and experience, Bloy appealed to the Christological mysticism of Pascal and Ernest Hello, a fellow French Catholic writer whose work prefigured his own. Bloy's novels affirm the pain of the human condition and the denial of terrestrial life in order to gain access to the intimate knowledge of God, achieved through intense and solitary contemplation. His heroes such as Marchenoir in *Le Désespéré* embody the man of supreme religious conviction forced

to live in contradiction to the secular world, directing all of his energy towards the supernatural. The hero of religious principle thus becomes the ideal symbol of rupture - rupture with a world that is the domain of immanence and materialism, hostile to the contemplative and interior world of the spiritual. Outcast by society, this figure still retained his link with the terrestrial world as a prophet, a position taken up by Bloy in his autobiographical works.

Bloy's apologetic is based on the reinstatement of the dogmatic images by which Catholicism represents the supernatural. In this he followed a movement already present within the Church that recognized the emotive appeal of supernatural imagery to the popular imagination. As such, his work restores the dogmatic formulae of God's providential intervention in human history. This posture plays out in his work as a form of history that possesses the coherence and finality of God's will. Two eschatological moments are particularly emphasized: the moment between the Fall and the Second Coming, employed to press for moral revival in both individuals and their society through national and moral unity, and imminent apocalyptic catastrophe used as a vehicle for specific attacks on avaricious figures and profiteers. In the two works I consider here, I propose that the nationalistic violence of the early war period is under pressure to signify imaginatively lest it admit its radical futility. In my introduction I contended that the harnessing of Catholic exegesis to the conditions of the First World War was not the external application of nationalism to the First World War but rather the totalizing imaginative tendencies internal to the ideological position held by the French Catholic revivalists. In making this argument I foreground the polarizing tendencies of the French

Catholic imagination whilst also remaining sensitive to the urgency with which writers of all political and religious stripes were forced to filter the paradigm-shattering experience of war. With this in mind, I want to apply what critic Sarah Cole calls “enchanted violence”⁵⁶ to my reading of Bloy, arguing for the ways in which the war provided the locus for a potent spiritual imaginary which became intertwined with aggressively nationalist ideals and the language of elevated militarism. In establishing this basic imaginative structure around violence – one which I will return to in my discussion of Claudel later in the chapter – I will suggest that the combined imaginative potential of Catholicism and war produces a perfect storm of creative energies influencing the ways in which the literary output of the revivalists has since been read.

Polemicist by reputation, Bloy published several volumes of his journal in the newspaper *Mercure de France* denouncing the horrors of war through a stigmatization of the German *Barbare*.⁵⁷ *Au Seuil de l'Apocalypse, journal 1913-1915* meditates on the subject of war and universal evil, presenting an eschatological vision of the world during wartime. The themes of suffering, sainthood, and martyrdom that run through his fictional corpus⁵⁸ give way to nostalgia as Bloy meditates on the theme of Paradise, given new significance in light of his graphic description of the suffering of the first months of war. The Germans, presented as the modern irreligious, are responsible for the war by their refusal to accept the redemptive effort that underpins the traditionalist Catholic

⁵⁶ Sarah Cole, *At the Violet Hour*, p.40.

⁵⁷ These publications are as follows: *Nous ne sommes pas en état de guerre* 14-15, *Jeanne d'Arc et l'Allemagne* (1915), *Au Seuil de l'Apocalypse, journal 1913-1915* (1916), *Méditation d'un solitaire en 1916* (1917) and *Au seuil des ténèbres*, posthumously published in 1918.

⁵⁸ Bloy's only two novels were *Le Désespéré* (1887) and *La Femme pauvre* (1897).

position. As per the work's prefatory remarks, the Germans are not engaging in an act of war but rather in the total destruction of souls:

Il s'est trouvé, aux XIX^{ème} et XX^{ème} siècles, une nation pour entreprendre ce qui ne s'était jamais vu depuis le commencement de l'Histoire: L'EXTINCTION DES ÂMES. Cela s'appelle la culture allemande.⁵⁹

War cannot be just, since it is no longer a war but rather the wholesale destruction of a race that has turned itself away from God:

Il ne s'agit pas d'ici d'une guerre ordinaire, mais d'une guerre d'extermination. [...] Je vis comme dans un songe douloureux. [...] Et je pleurais dans les ténèbres de la crainte et dans les ténèbres de l'espérance. (179)

A total mistrust of rationalism lies at the heart of Bloy's account of his life as an ageing wartime civilian. He rallies against the Godless climate of a Godless France where he and his wife are conspicuous for their faith:

Pour les gens de ce pays, nous sommes ceux qui vont à la messe. C'est comme si on disait : ceux qui ont fait faillite ou qui ont été au bagne. (159)

From this perspective, Bloy considers the war an expiatory punishment for the blindness of secularism that makes the war like no other:

Alors ce sera l'Expiation véritable, dans l'épouvante indicible, l'expiation pour la France d'abord, à cause de sa primauté, ensuite pour le reste du monde coupable de la même prévarication, et aucune voix humaine ou angélique ne pourrait dire jusqu'où ira la désolation de la terre. (165)

⁵⁹ *Au seuil de l'Apocalypse : pour faire suite au Mendiant ingrat, à Mon journal, à Quatre ans de captivité à Cochons-sur-Marne, à L'invendable, aux Vieux de la montagne, et au Pèlerin de l'absolu : 1913-1915*, Paris: Mercure de France, 1921, p.1. Hereafter cited parenthetically within the text.

Like other major writers of the Revival⁶⁰ such as Barbey d'Aurevilly, Bloy takes the Fall to have been an actual historical event which offers the only satisfactory explanation for the present moral condition, in line with Antoine Blanc de Saint-Bonnet's interpretation in *L'Amour et la Chute*, in which the sin of the Fall is not of the flesh but rather of pride. Rejecting the traditional ascription of the Fall as the temptation of Eve, it is rather Adam who sins by his refusal to recognise the need for redemptive Christian effort.

For Bloy at the end of his life, the war was emblematic of several conflicting positions. The war against Germany had its precedent in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871 in which Bloy fought and is perceived of as an enlargement and continuation of this existing enmity. In this light, the First World War cannot be said to have brought the civil war between the Third Republic and the Catholic Church to a close since the struggle between secularization and French Catholicism takes on the imaginative potential of apocalypse in his war diaries. Bloy discounts the hollow truce of the *Union Sacrée*, preferring to see the war as the cosmic battle between rationalism and religion. Beyond the basic schism in French society between secularism and religion, there lies an internal conflict at the heart of the Catholic Church itself, between ultramontanist Catholics - who consider Rome as the central authority of the Church - and those who consider the church as decentralized according to nation. Bloy condemns the neutrality of Pope Benoit XV who refused to draw the Catholic Church into bellicose nationalism, instead proclaiming the Church unbiased and attempting to broker peace through neutrality:

⁶⁰ In line with critics of the revival such as Richard Griffiths, I date the French Catholic Revival from 1870 to 1914.

Avant-hier, le cardinal secrétaire d'État informait tout l'univers que le Vatican observe la neutralité absolue! Le Vicaire du Fils de Dieu se déclarant neutre! Je me demande quel Pape nous a été envoyé... (236)

In this way, the language of nationalism comes to represent an alternative soteriology that ironically transfers the hope of salvation from a Christian ethic of peace and brotherhood onto a bellicose nationalism that demands justice:

Les catholiques belges se plaignent de ce que Benoit XV, qui abuse de son inconcevable neutralité, n'a pas élevé la voix pour condamner les horreurs allemandes en leur pays [...] Quelle figure magnifique il aurait pu prendre au début de son pontificat, en jetant sur toute l'Autriche catholique, et soi-disant apostolique, le grand Interdit [...] Quelle occasion unique de rendre à la Papauté son ancien Prestige! (252)

In France, Bloy finds the closest parallel to the Kingdom of the Spirit. France is the soul of Europe, to whom other nations look for guidance and the physical image of God's kingdom. Her repeated aberrations from grace (as incarnated by the Republic) and her ensuing restoration to glory (the Battle of the Marne) are proof of God's mercy towards his eldest daughter. In the early years of the First World War, this theory – of eventual salvation through suffering – is called upon as evidence, and assurance, of her eventual victory. The abjection of France and her soldiers in the trenches marks the beginning of the imminent apocalyptic catastrophe that will eventually ensure the hope and renewal in the second coming of Christ. During the war years, the idea of the Kingdom of France established through penitential suffering was the idea that gave Bloy the most credibility within French society by answering a popular need: the reconciliation of nationalism (and by extension Republicanism) with a traditionalist Catholic legacy of

penitence, suffering, and renewal. The model of Marian devotion embodied by La Salette⁶¹ becomes the overarching narrative for the catastrophe of the First World War. In this way, the First World War is not the end of civilization, but a preliminary phase before the accession to the Eternal Kingdom. But this accession will not be without trial; although Bloy sees the victory over German materialism as inevitable, he turns his attention away from the Manichean polarities of enmity at the close of the work and returns to prophesying the deterioration of France under the Republic in the aftermath of war. He sees the state of France worsened by the pernicious influence of France's English and Russian allies and predicts a sectarian civil war after Viviani has done his best to bury the Catholic youth in the trenches. His condemnation of the inexplicable neutrality of Benedict XV is seen as a clear sign of the diminishing power of the Church. His final entry in the diary ends on a note of desolation:

[...] oui, dans le cas de la victoire définitive des alliés, qu'arrivera-t-il ? C'est bien simple. Dieu n'existera plus du tout, puisqu'il aura été démontré qu'on peut si facilement se passer de Lui.⁶²

Published by *Mercure de France* a year later in 1917, *Méditation d'un solitaire en 1916*, represents a similar perspective on Franco-German hostility. Structured thematically around Bloy's musings upon "La Communion des saints", his personal status as a solitary dissident "Encore une fois, je suis seul", and his direct addresses to the Kaiser himself "Maintenant, Guillaume, c'est à toi que je veux parler" it strikes a curious note. In line with *Au Seuil*, in which Bloy's voice is used in the prophetic mode, his first-

⁶¹ La Salette was a Marian apparition reported to have been seen by two children in 1846, later granted a Canonical Coronation by Pope Leo XIII in 1879. Bloy believed that the Virgin had warned the children that the end of time was imminent if the world did not reform.

⁶² *Op.cit*, p.245.

person voice is extended to a personal address with the principal actors of war directly. In doing so, Bloy is able to give a representation of the war from behind the lines that is authoritative in its conviction in France's Catholicity "Or, la France est la fille aînée de l'Église, l'Épouse préférée" (106), but also satirical in its treatment of the French bourgeoisie and the press who have misunderstood the meaning of martyrdom by mistaking it for patriotism:

L'éloquence patriotique des embusqués ne voudra voir en eux que des héros ou des martyrs; et cela leur tiendra lieu de l'absolution sacerdotale et des prières saintes qui auront manqué à leur dernière heure. (145)

A pariah, Bloy decries the popular vision of martyrdom and its hollow rhetoric of heroism. In the section entitled "Les Prêtres-Soldats!" Bloy denounces the "lâcheté irrémédiable de l'épiscopat Français" (73) that has sent Priests to war under the aegis of Republican equality "arrachés à l'autel et jetés parmi les combattants" (73). And yet, despite the bombastic pronouncements and satire, there exists a distinct note of anguish. In a letter to Henri de Groux published at the end of *Méditation*, Bloy sympathizes with the painter's fantastic vision of ruin and desolation that was evident in his exhibition of 1916.⁶³ Acknowledging that de Groux and Bloy were criticized for their portentous vision of war, Bloy maintains in his letter that theirs is the only expression available to the artist conscious of how far the reality of war falls short of the morale projected by propaganda:

Puis comment exprimer autrement les réalités inexpiables de cette guerre sans se condamner au ridicule et sans être un imposteur?⁶⁴

⁶³ For an elaboration of the relationship between de Groux and Bloy see their published correspondence, *Correspondance, Léon Bloy et Henry de Groux*, Paris: B.Grasset, 1947.

⁶⁴ *Op.cit.*, p.275.

Throughout *Au Seuil* and *Méditation*, Bloy is caught between the desolation of war and the imagery of intransigent Catholicism that necessarily represents the Germans as diabolical:

Une imagination religieuse peut se représenter l'Europe actuelle, c'est-à-dire le monde, comme une pyramide au sommet de laquelle est accroupie la Prusse, ennemie de Dieu et des hommes [...] c'est le paradis de Satan qui s'y fait adorer sous les dégoûtantes espèces d'un empereur en putréfaction.⁶⁵

In order to defeat Germany systematically, Bloy establishes the need for a descent of the Spirit in the figure of the “homme-drapeau” to rally France against its aggressors. Nationalism and Catholicism become conflated using the image of the Spirit to assert the need for moral and religious – rather than purely political – renewal in France. This idea is most fully elaborated in the fourth chapter of the *Méditation* where Bloy dismisses Napoleon as being too political a figure in the historical order in contrast to the “homme-drapeau” who is sent to earth in poverty to upend the contemporary societal values. Such an incarnation saves France but in ways that are unrecognizable to Bloy's contemporaries; the salvation he brings answers the appeals to justice that France has made, but his answer is not expressed in terms of enmity and retribution, but rather in moral terms that call for a return to a divine order to atone for the wounds inflicted by humanity upon itself. The stranger recalls traditional images of Parousia or the Second Coming:

⁶⁵ *Op.cit*, p.280.

[...] la misère la plus parfaite le reniera, parce que l'Infini d'elle-même lui sera montré par ce Visiteur dans les plaies du Christ.⁶⁶

Although the imagery of the stranger's coming seems to confirm the advent of Christ, Bloy does not ultimately confirm this, insisting instead upon a return to Gospel morality. Chapters 11 through to 14 of *Méditations* expand Bloy's thinking on this theme under the title "Dans les Ténèbres". Whilst the stranger who will come in salvation to save France has the power to exterminate all the Germans, France must recognize her own shortcomings if she is to triumph. The final message in the chapter entitled "L'Avènement inimaginable" is clear: there can be no political triumph without a return to Catholic doctrine.

French Catholics such as Bloy saw France as the eldest daughter of the Church and the war as the means by which the nation could be redeemed. Despite being roundly condemned as a pariah by his contemporaries, Bloy was far from the only writer to publish polemic casting the Germans as the antithesis of civilization. Joséphin Peladan, a right-wing neo-Catholic published his *L'Allemagne devant l'humanité et le Devoir des Civilisés* in 1916 detailing how Germany incarnated evil like no other nation in history. Yet the techniques used by Bloy in his wartime writing emphasize how the imaginative potential of Catholicism could be so successfully harnessed to periods of heightened nationalism. The adaptation of biblical themes to literature, previously characteristic of Romanticism, was one of the most distinctive features of the Catholic revival. But Bloy's systematic attempt to incorporate scriptural exegesis into his writing points to the peculiar confluence of historical exigency and imaginative vehicle, able to elide the language of

⁶⁶ *Op.cit*, p.265.

high nationalism into the immovable truths of biblical lore. In *Le Symbolisme de L'Apparition: 1879-1890* published posthumously in 1925, Bloy maintained that Old Testament symbolism should be exploited for its persuasive qualities as well as its doctrinal content. Viewing the imaginative potential of the Old Testament as a corrective to the sterile Christianity that he encountered around him, Bloy argued for the reinstatement of Old Testament figures as much for their emotive appeal to the imagination as to spiritual conviction.

Claudé

En face de tels attentats, on ne peut pas se demander quel sens l'armée allemande et son chef attache à la formule 'Dieu est avec nous', et si le 'Vieux Dieu Allemand' qu'ils invoquent n'est point cette même divinité païenne qui, dans les forêts de la Germanie, inspirait à leurs ancêtres barbares la haine du Christ et ses missionnaires.

*La Guerre Allemande et le
Catholicisme (1915)*

Contre leur Goethe et leur Kant et leur
Nietzsche et tous ces souffleurs de ténèbres
Et de pestilence dont le nom fait horreur,
Et contre leur père à tous, l'apostat Martin Luther,
Qui est avec le diable !
C'est Dieu même que nous défendons,
Ceux-là même qui ne savent pas même son nom.

*La nuit de Noël de 1914
(1915)*

Like Bloy, Claudel (1868-1955) did not fight in the First World War. Although he continued to publish in the war period, the proportion of his work explicitly related to the war itself is relatively slim. *Poèmes de Guerre* (1922), a collection of no more than twelve poems published separately between 1915 and 1922, along with two longer poems

in *Feuilles des Saints* entitled ‘Sainte Geneviève’ and ‘Saint Martin’ written in 1918 and 1919 respectively, are the few poems that make direct reference to the war. Constructing a profile of Claudel as a ‘war poet’ is not straightforward.⁶⁷ His best known war publications are his ‘pièce de circonstance’ *La Nuit de Noël 1914* (1915), and his Catholic propaganda publication *La guerre allemande et le Catholicisme* (1915). His more ludic theatrical trilogy *Le Pain dur*, *Le Père humilié* and *L’Ours et La Lune* (1915-1916) add to the difficulty in bracketing him solely as a war propagandist.⁶⁸

As with my discussion of Bloy, my reading of Claudel’s war corpus is placed within the combined imaginative structure of Catholicism and war and its significant consequences for French Catholicism’s literary legacy in the interwar period. A diplomat during the war, Claudel was employed by the French government in November 1914 to write explicitly Catholic propaganda. Of this output, *La Guerre et la foi* (1915) detailed the atrocities committed by the German army during the invasion of Poland, Belgium and the East of France, including the symbolic destruction of Reims Cathedral. Combining the violence of war with the imaginative exhortations of Christianity proved to be surprisingly powerful. In the case of Claudel, this combination animated the brutality of war to such an extent as to endow it with a transformative, and ultimately redemptive

⁶⁷ Unfortunately this chapter does not permit a comparison between Claudel’s contribution to World War Two poetry in *Poèmes et paroles dans la guerre de trente ans* (1945), in which he alternates between a religious and a politically engaged tone.

⁶⁸ Claudel’s personal circumstances during the war itself may explain the conflict’s intermittent appearance in his corpus. Driven from Hamburg at the beginning of August 1914, Claudel travelled between Switzerland and Italy in 1915 and 1916, before taking up his post as French ambassador to Brazil in January 1917 where he remained until November 1918. This distance from the theatre of war itself is a factor which I wish to consider as contributing to the kind of poetic heroism – a trope that is only possible for those who did not see active service – that his war corpus extols.

power. As Cole points out, endowing violence with power produces an astonishingly powerful aesthetic enchantment:

[...] when the desire for plenitude meets the facts of historical violence, there is an equal and opposite tendency to enchant violence, to see it as the germinating core of rich, symbolic structures. To enchant, in this sense, is to imbue the violent experience with symbolic and cultural potency; to disenchant is to refuse that structure, to insist on the bare, forked existence of the violated being, bereft of symbol and expressing only a regretful beauty.⁶⁹

Accused of being a belligerent champion of war in the long years of recovery following 1918, Claudel galvanized national consciousness by drawing poignantly on the transformative and redemptive ideal – France’s forthcoming victory as Christic resurrection – at a time when the country was looking not just for icons but for a language that could frame the war’s accelerating violence in terms of fruitfulness. Taken together with Bloy’s wartime texts, I propose that both writers knowingly mobilize the imaginative potential of Catholicism to bolster nationalist ends.

Clearly, the war captured Claudel’s poetic imagination. Rich in symbols and images that provided the occasion not simply for metaphor but for parable,⁷⁰ the imminent conflict appears as both deliverance and adventure, bringing man closer to God and to the intellectual history of Europe, ranging from the Bible to Homer. Within his diary entries, war crystallized a repository of literary and cultural images:

Ode de la guerre : On étouffait, on était enfermé, on crevait dans ce bain grouillant les uns contre les autres, (les ouvriers, les lingots présentés à la cisaille, la rangée d’ouvriers à Offenbach dans de demi-ténèbres assis devant un cylindre qui tourne). Tout-à-coup un coup de vent, les chapeaux (canotiers, juillet) qui

⁶⁹ *Op.cit*, p.43.

⁷⁰ See Gérald Antoine, *Paul Claudel, ou, L'enfer du génie*, Paris: R. Laffont, 2004, p.56.

s'envolent, les journaux, la risée comme le vent mêlé d'une grande pluie sur l'eau d'un lac, la foule qui se met à chanter. Delivré du metier, de la femme, des enfants, du lieu stipulé, l'aventure [...] Le canon trempé dans son bain d'huile et la grande flamme. Une fois de plus tous les peuples vont s'étreindre et se retrouver, se sentir dans les bras l'un de l'autre, se reconnaître. Inlassablement, une fois de plus à sa tâche, vieille Europe!⁷¹

Combining political enmity and the Christian philosophy of hope, the war poems are stylistically diverse experimenting with free verse, rhyming verse, assonance, lacunae, and inversed iambic.⁷² The content is no less mixed : several poems stand out as versified speech addressed to, and for, the people in the romantic tradition. Some, such as 'Le jour des Rameaux' come across as theological argumentation while others make scant reference to the war at all (Rome, Le Crucifix, Saint Antoine de Padoue).

In the opening poem, 'Tant que vous voudrez, mon général!', war seems distant as soldiers carry out mundane work more frequently associated with solidarity than moral duty. The title, drawn from an anecdote from the Franco-Prussian war,⁷³ expresses continuity with soldiers from previous generations in a show of togetherness. Informal in tone, the poem's couplets give the impression of interrogative oral speech :

A la tienne, vieux frère ! Qu'est-ce que
tu étais dans le civil, en ce temps drôle
où ç'qu'on était vivants ?
Coiffeur ? Moi, mon père est banquier
Et je crois bien qu'il s'appelait Legrand.
Boucher, marchand de fromages, curé,

⁷¹ Paul Claudel, *Journal*, Cahier III, p.293.

⁷² 'Le Précieux Sang' alternates between short and long verse with an alternate rhyming schema while 'Le jour des Rameaux' is composed of sestets with emphasis upon the *mise en page* itself.

⁷³ This phrase is attributed to the Marquis de Galliffet, Minister of War in Waldeck-Rousseau's cabinet. See *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870-1871*, Geoffrey Wawro, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

cultivateur, avocat, colporteur, coupeur
de cuir.⁷⁴

Opening with the distinction between peacetime and mobilization before moving on to praise the egalitarian spirit of war as a nod to the Republican motto of equality, the poem echoes the spirit of the brotherhood of Christ, one which demands total surrender of the soul to God : ‘Livraison de mon corps et mon sang, livraison de mon âme à Dieu.’ The juxtaposition of religious and national rhetoric is intensified by the personification of France as a semi-deity demanding justice from her soldiers. The exhortation at the poem’s close - ‘O France, tant que tu voudras !’ – replaces the liturgical apostrophe with a national one.

Despite the Republican overtones, Claudel uses the war to mobilize a restoration of Christian values. In the longest poem of the collection, ‘La Grande Attente’, a direct attack is made upon René Viviani’s 1906 speech condemning religion and heralding the age of modernism :⁷⁵

Fini, les coupoles et les cylindres
Des halles à expositions d’où un feu
Pourpre ou vert s’irradie et la boue même
Sous nos pieds qui luit comme de l’or et
De l’acajou !
Seules brillent éternellement au-dessus
De nos petites lampes laïques au ras du
Sol surmontées de chastes abat-jour
Ces étoiles qu’on voulait éteindre.

⁷⁴ Paul Claudel, *Poèmes de guerre, 1914-1916*, Paris : Editions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1921, p.4. Hereafter cited parenthetically within the text.

⁷⁵ “Ensemble, d’un geste magnifique, nous avons éteint dans le ciel des étoiles qu’on ne rallumera plus”. René Viviani speaking in 1905 on the triumph of secularism, as quoted in *L’État contre L’Esprit*, Pierre-Henri Caron, Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1955, p.54

The German invasion of France is conflated with the punishment that France merits for having cast aside the transcendent God:

Du moins il n'a plus la lumière de
l'homme sur nous pour nous éblouir !
du moins il n'y a plus les œuvres de
l'homme sur nous pour nous empêcher de respirer !
Vous étiez tout de même trop peu,
O Père des moissons, Modulateur, vaste
Souffle suave et fort qui conduisez toute
Chose ensemble à sa maturité !
L'homme vous a cédé du terrain et
Voici qu'il ne peut plus défendre
sa maison et sa cité
Contre l'invasion de Dieu!

'Le Précieux Sang' is evidence of a sacrificial logic inspired by De Maistrian themes of penitence. The blood of Christ, sacrificed for the sins of the world, is also the blood of the soldiers who die in battle:

Heureux qui dans le désert de la Croix
Et le sommeil du Paradis
Partage la mort du Seigneur
Et qui goûte et possède enfin par le fait
De Dieu qui s'y est adjoint
L'absolu de la douleur !

The blood of French soldiers is shed to redeem the sins of France and is also the price of celestial justice which will be bestowed only when God is satisfied by the scale of slaughter:

Mais si vous avez besoin de notre
Amour autant que nous avons besoin de votre Justice,

Alors c'est que votre soif est grande !

Not entirely bellicose, the poems also reveal a sombre tone contemplating the scale of the war and addressing God directly for mercy in the face of grief:

Ayez pitié de ces yeux presque éteints
 Qui Vous cherchent et ne vous voient
 pas !
 Ces fils que Vous Vous êtes faits,
 Seigneur, est-ce qu'ils ne vous regardent
 Pas ?
 Et s'il est vrai que quand ils souffrent
 On n'est pas différent de ceux qu'on aime,
 Ayez pitié de nous, Seigneur, à cause
 De Vous-même !

Explicit mention of the war becomes increasingly scant in the poem 'Le Crucifix', split into two sections 'La tête vue de la droite' and 'La tête vue de la gauche'. Here, the crucified body of Christ becomes a metaphor for France herself, annihilated by the Germans. References to the physical wounds sustained by Christ - 'la transfixion de ses pieds'/'les quatre clous' - augment each other in the first part of the diptych to compound the sentiment of vulnerability : 'Il est trop facile de voir qu'il n'est pas en état de se défendre'. However, not two verses later, vulnerability is transformed into redemptive hope. The combination of Christ's innocence and mortal sin – 'Son innocence et le péché en moi, il y a cela entre nous de vital et commun' – becomes the redemptive fruit of hope for humankind : 'Tout ce qu'il y a de poids en lui tacitement est à moi comme un fruit qu'il n'y a plus qu'à recueillir.' In the second part of the diptych, the body of Christ as metaphor answers the plea of theodicy that rings out in the first section : 'S'il est mon Rédempteur, ou cela se passerait-il si je n'avais pêché pas ?', since the unseen triumphs

over the materiality of the body (and its position to the left or the right) ‘Ce que l’éternité nous réserve, il n’y a pas besoin de le voir en cette vie’. In this way, the wounds inflicted on the body of France by Germany are precursors to the unseen glory of redemption and hope, the preserve of those who believe in the Christian logic of resurrection.

Yet despite the explicit triumph of the unseen that validates and redeems the grotesque and visible wounds in the next world, the second half of the diptych is accented by the question of sight and witness, so much a crucial aspect of the business of war itself – ‘Tout ce qu’ils font, il feint de ne pas avoir regardé’ / ‘son front demeure détourné’ / ‘Il n’a voulu ni des hommes ni des anges pour en être les témoins’. The question of witness to German atrocities - central to the other poems in the collection - is overridden here by the insistence upon Christ, he who needs no visual witness to his suffering.

‘Derrière Eux’, published in 1915, testifies to a profound sense of sadness at the ‘vendange affreuse’ of the war:

Cette vendange affreuse dont on la barbouille et qu’on lui fait boire de force,
Sont des choses dont la terre a horreur,
et une œuvre au rebours d’elle même.

Nonetheless, the poem makes equal reference to a metaphorical fertilization of the soil by the blood of the dead : ‘L’âme rouge dans elle de ses fils et la libation comme du lait et comme du vin.’ This philosophy of renewal is also articulated in the poem ‘Aux morts des armées de la République’ where Claudel does not imagine the war dead as ‘morts

entiers' but rather as having been assimilated into the soil 'versés en masse dans la terre comme du blé'.

Claudé sought to fix the transcendent qualities of war into verse using the conditions of war as an incubator for the symbolic language of Christianity. Similar to Bloy, war for Claudé was atemporal, operating outside the constrictions of History in the linear sense, to produce a system of signification that could overwhelm simple contingencies. Claudé's war poetry steeped the desolation and violence of the war in a language of apotheosis, resurrection and transformation, generating it into a story of national identity. In a period of self-sacrificial fever and in a culture where the Christian comparison provided easy resonance, Claudé indubitably used these motifs to represent violence, but in a way that conjoined national belonging with sacralization.

Ghosts of past and present and the spectre of the future inhabit Claudé's 'œuvre dramatique de circonstance' *La Nuit de Noël 1914* (1915) in which the bombardment of Reims cathedral by the Germans coincides with the birth of Jesus. The play does not dwell on the dehumanization of war but rather the scandal of a conflict in which the Germans willingly deface the dual symbols of modern France : the Catholic faith (symbolized by the Cathedral) and the Law (symbol of the French revolution). This symbolization of ideals is drawn together in the play through the emblematic figures of Jean *le séminariste* and Jacques *l'instituteur laïque* who overcome their ideological differences in death after the humanity and compassion of Jean leads Jacques to convert to Catholicism in the next world. In an appeal to his contemporary audience, Claudé

makes several allusions to the events of the First World War as they had played out in its opening years : the atrocities committed by the Germans to Belgian civilians (notably children whose hands had been cut off), the English and Serbian children who had also been the victims of German bombardments, and the deaths of the French Catholic intellectuals Ernest Psichari and Charles Péguy. By enlarging the political space of the play to include not just the French but also her allies in the *Triple Entente* and those Jewish, Protestant and Catholic victims of the war, Claudel paints a picture of humanity united in suffering.

At the centre of the play is the Catholic and French symbol of Notre-Dame de Reims whose destruction by the Germans lends itself to propagandist hyperbole:

N'est-il point l'image de celui ou nous avons passé tant de nuits, ayant devant nous les deux tours de la cathédrale martyre, Notre-Dame de Rheims, Notre-Dame de France, assassinée par les Allemands en haine de la foi ?
 Ce n'est pas une sainte ou un évêque, c'est Notre-Dame elle-même, c'est la mère de Dieu fait homme pour nous, qui endure la violence et le feu !
 C'est elle tout à coup que nous avons vu flamboyer au centre de nos lignes, comme jadis la vierge de Rouen, c'est elle qu'ils essayent de massacrer, la vieille mère, pendant qu'elle nous faisait un rempart de son corps !
 Au centre de nos lignes c'était elle contre les hordes du noir Luther qui était notre rempart et notre drapeau !⁷⁶

The Cathedral becomes a symbol for faith which appears intercessionally to the soldiers within the space of the Front itself, just as the mother that is the Church transforms herself into a masculine figure able to act as a rampart for endangered soldiers. Aside from her qualities as physical rampart, the Cathedral also reunites two powerful and

⁷⁶ Paul Claudel, *La nuit de Noël de 1914*, Paris: L'Art catholique, 1915, p.115. Hereafter cited parenthetically within the text.

patriotic images for the French audience: Joan of Arc, ‘la vierge de Rouen’, and the French flag.

The play not only uses familiar political and patriotic landmarks to appeal to its audience, but also maximizes pathos by placing children centre stage. The ghosts of small children appear prompting Jean to ask them their fate : ‘Les tout petits qui sont morts parce que les Bavaois avaient réquisitionné tout le lait’ / ‘Les Allemands m’ont fusillé parce que je les mettais en joue avec mon fusil de bois’ / ‘Ce sont les petits Belges qu’on a brûlés dans une grange’, etc. Sentimentality enlarges the rhetoric of blame to reinforce the Manichaeic vision of the enemy as a faceless aggressor, whose actions brutalize the innocent and destroy the symbols of hope. Although the childish innocence is designed to provoke pity, the energy of the play lends itself to indignation which culminates in the need for a communal expression of faith in the celebration of the birth of Jesus at midnight and the long monologue from the Priest to this effect (122-128). The metaphorical space of the play – between heaven and earth – directs the attention of the audience to the transcendental values of faith and divine justice that overarch more earthly systems.

In *Feuilles des Saints*, a set of liturgical apostrophes published after 1918, Claudel sets out a clear stigmatization of the German. Reflecting on the humanitarian devastation of the war, the initial tone is sombre. Anguished by the sight of France that is ‘morne’ and covered in the autumnal leaves of trees that have suddenly shed in pathetic fallacy with the war’s loss, Claudel describes the coming of Sainte Geneviève in a divine

conflation of the France of the middle-ages and the present in which the landmarks of modern war are pointedly juxtaposed:

Routes qui roulez aujourd’hui vers Paris sous le dur
ciel de Mars et l’innocente joie d’Avril
Au rebours des régiments par colonnes et des camions
Qui remontent intarissablement vers le front par
doubles files [...]
Souvenez-vous, c’était la même chose jadis quand,
Entre l’Aisne et la Meuse, Rheims et Laon,
Capitaines de ces grands diocèses plats,
Virent sur l’Orient paraître le cheval noir d’Attila !⁷⁷

Geneviève, ‘épouse de Jésus-Christ’ (96), appears as a Marian figure exhorting the wounded and doubting French to a spiritual renewal in the name of the Passion of Christ : ‘Arrache-toi à cette boue affreuse, vois ton Dieu ! lève-toi, peuple de France, et saute dedans !’ (105). The Germans are characterized by a series of insults in direct contrast to the images of Sainthood, femininity, and innocence that distinguish Genèvieve. Germany is monstrous and grotesque and notable by her facelessness, preceded by the smell of gas and a premonition of asphyxiation (99).

Claudél’s aggressive anti-German rhetoric gains further energy in his poem ‘Saint Martin’, also part of *Feuilles des Saints*. In a rousing tone, Claudél uses anaphoric rhyming couplets to build upon the vulnerability of France in the face of an impending attack by a gigantic aggressor :

Quand le Fort Ennemi nous attaque,
pas autant que nous avons de ressources pour lui répondre,

⁷⁷ Paul Claudel, *Feuilles de saints*, Paris: Gallimard, 1925, p.93. Hereafter cited parenthetically within the text.

Quand le capitaine salue pour la dernière fois la mer en biais du haut de son navire qui s'effondre. (146)

Images of gigantism punctuate the poem, justifying its derogatory excesses : 'dragons', 'le torse monstrueux', 'Allemagne, grand tas confus de tripes et d'entrailles de l'Europe !'. In a stream of superlatives and hyperbole, Claudel continues to use images of domination to describe a militant faith: 'Mais aussitôt, ce qui est plus fort que les ténèbres c'est la foi !' (147). Strength, both physical and spiritual, is continually reasserted against the Germans in the military heroism of Saint Martin himself who will fight aggression with violence: 'Car Jésus même a dit qu'il n'était point venu porter la paix, mais la guerre, et le glaive, et le feu [...]' (148). After a long and vituperative address to the Germans in which Claudel variously accuses them of irreligion, Protestantism, materialism and geopolitical fault for being positioned in the centre of Europe, the figurative monster is slain 'hagard et las' (162) and the leaves fall as a sign of Saintly intercession. Just like Saint Martin himself, who renounced the military life for a life of solitary contemplation with God, the poem's final section urges the nameless soldier to rejoice in his reunion with the peaceful pleasures of homecoming rather than dwell on the violence of the blood of France that has flowed like a river redemptively from his soul : 's'en va de toutes parts porter la vie à ces millions d'êtres inconnus'.⁷⁸

Conclusion

In his study of the sixteenth century wars of religion, Denis Crouzet identifies the distinguishing feature of Catholic violence as the tendency to interpret war as apocalypse.⁷⁹ Extending his argument, Crouzet contests that Catholic violence was structured on an unconscious level by prophetic visions, transforming imaginative positions into active deeds. I want to use Crouzet's observations about the nature of Catholic violence as the end point to this chapter, suggesting as I do so that Catholic violence had changed remarkably little from the sixteenth century to the twentieth. My reading of Bloy and Claudel has taken the "long view" of their imaginative positions by arguing for their existence as integral to the French Catholic imagination rather than a contingent, nationalistic application of the dichotomizing power of religious symbolism upon declaration of war in 1914. Whilst the work of Bloy and Claudel may have mobilized the French to violent ends in the war period, it is my contention that their work is proof of the eschatological anguish they experienced as French Catholics first and foremost.

At the same time, my argument has also been sensitive to the self-conscious maneuvering of their explicitly French Catholic stance within the conditions of a newly secularized France. As scholars of religion and violence such as Caroline Ford have pointed out, the boundary between the religious and the political became particularly porous during the early Third Republic as France became secularized.⁸⁰ Secularized as France may have been however, religion did anything but disappear completely from the

⁷⁹ Denis Crouzet, *Les guerriers de Dieu: la violence au temps des troubles de religion, vers 1525-vers 1610*, Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1990.

⁸⁰ See Caroline Ford, *Divided houses: religion and gender in modern France*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005.

public sphere as Bloy and Claudel illustrate. Political conflict became sacralized, barely concealing its roots in messianism and eschatological anguish. Intertwining itself with the language of intransigent Catholicism and the polarizing dichotomies of Manichaeism, nationalism grew up into a civil religion. Such a position proved, in scholar Ivan Stenski's words "disastrously compatible" with the conditions of the First World War.

By 1916, there was no escaping the fact of overwhelming violence as the battles of the Somme and Verdun all too painfully illustrate. As Bloy and Claudel show us, to write poetry, journals or essays became imperative. As French Catholic revivalists however, their engagement with the war was so much more than simply the brute facts of nationalism or political subjugation. Rather, as I have argued here, the lens with which they saw the war was part of a longstanding tradition of French Catholic imaginative positions that stretched as far back as the Old Testament and as far forwards as the Second Coming of Christ himself. French Catholicism's tryst with the violence of the First World War was thus gripped in a representational dialectic that challenged Catholicism to perform, demanding a creative reckoning visible throughout the revivalists' wartime corpuses.

Chapter Three

Imitatio Christi: Interpreting the Great War as the Passion of Christ

Introduction

From Dorgelès's sparse wooden crosses to Duhamel's hopelessly wounded martyred soldiers, World War One literature in the French tradition is haunted by Christian motifs that signify loss and fragmentation rather than salvation. Often quoted is the British war poets' bitter ironization of the Passion of Christ in poems such as Wilfred Owen's 'At a Calvary near the Ancre':

One ever hangs where shelled roads part.
 In this war He too lost a limb,
 But His disciples hide apart;
 And now the Soldiers bear with Him.⁸¹

Rejecting the tropes of glorified decorum and the official propaganda of Church and State, war is represented as an experience of negative revelation⁸² wherein hope can only be experienced in the fellowship of suffering.

But this is not the only use of biblical topoi in in First World War literature.

French Catholic revivalists writing about the Great War reprised the narrative of the

⁸¹ Wilfred Owen, 'At a Calvary near the Ancre', in *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, London: Penguin Classics, 2015, p.34

⁸² For a full elaboration of the term "negative revelation" see Yuval Noah Harari's *The Ultimate Experience: Battlefield Revelations and the Making of Modern War Culture, 1450-2000*: "An alternative war story equates revelation with disillusionment. In this version of the story, the ignorant youth enters war with expectations of glory, but combat teaches him not to believe the false promises of heroism and patriotism, and never again to trust powerful establishments." (4)

Passion of Christ to emphasize themes of hope, regeneration, atonement and perseverance in the face of immense physical suffering. Their metaphorical treatment of Christ's passion reveals an insistence upon humility, obedience, and God's righteousness as opposed to the emphasis upon the lonely Christ facing suffering in the absence of a patriarchal God. Their work represents a forgotten turn in First World War letters not least because their treatment of the conflict presents a radically different vision to the now-established view of the Great War as one of extreme disillusionment. Although their experience of the war admits doubt and sorrow, this is cast within a metaphorical universe that endows suffering with meaning.

The first two chapters of this dissertation have taken up the question of how French Catholic revivalists engaged with the First World War across the pre-war period of "heroic enthusiasm" and the early war years of 1914-1916. In both cases I have argued that French Catholic literature "performs" in unexpected and complex ways, asking questions of our expectations as readers of First World War literature one hundred years after the war took place. This chapter continues to probe the accepted myths of the conflict by turning to the fundamental issue of pain and suffering, central to our conception of a muddy and bloody war.

In order to delineate the boundaries of my treatment of a huge area of scholarly research, my focus will be on the metaphorical links between the Passion of Christ and the literal and moral wounds of the writers under consideration in this chapter. Christ's suffering offers a rich metaphorical landscape from which to consider the parallels

between war and religion, in particular the role religion plays in justifying the suffering of war within what critic Sarah Covington terms, “a spiritual framework of consolation”⁸³. Roman Catholicism, with its body-centred sacramentalism offers a perspective in which the suffering of body of Christ assumes a key position in the redemptive universe. Jesus’s assumption of the sinfulness of mankind is affirmed most of all by his wounded body and these physical wounds mark the victory of the sacrificial act and the promise of resurrection. Indeed, as the biblical tale of “doubting Thomas” shows, it is only through a direct exposition of his wounds that Jesus is able to convince Thomas of the mystery of the resurrection. The persistence with which the French Catholic revivalists return to images of the wounded body and their use of gruesome images to represent salvific triumph rather than the nihilism of the Great War marks these writers out from their literary and intellectual counterparts. As I explore in this chapter however, images of woundedness and redemption are at once subjective and universal. Whilst this dual aspect is a large part of their indexical power, I argue that their subjective cry of pain fundamentally destabilizes the theoretical impulse to interpret suffering as salvific.

Thus, my argument is influenced by two different perspectives; the first uncovers the ways in which French Catholic war memoirs and literature interpret the wounds of war as redemptive, in imitation of Christ’s Passion, the second acts as a riposte by asking whether suffering can be transcendent within the context of the Great War, or whether theodicy fails to have any meaning. The answer, in most cases, is that the impulse to justify Great War suffering as an eschatological staging-post on the way to Christ’s

⁸³ “Teaching the Wounded Body: Mutilation and Meaning in Western War and Religion”, Sarah Covington, *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Teaching the Body (Fall 2008 / Winter 2009), pp. 14-31.

second coming is the crucial explanatory tool with which the revivalists made sense of the war. But this answer alone is unsatisfactory. Even a cursory reading of the revivalists' war memoirs and fictional output during the war years reveals a nagging tension between the doctrinal party-line – whereby suffering is redemptive and generative – and the personal experience of war which destabilizes orthodox views of suffering by speaking from a place of subjectivity, be it the wounded body or the tortured soul.

This chapter will consider the war memoirs of prominent French Catholic intellectuals Henri Massis, Jacques Rivière and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. I consider them in this order as a way of establishing a spectrum of rhetorical confidence that slides from high-minded revival thinking to varying degrees of spiritual despair in the case of Rivière, and ends with a radically disruptive interpretation of the narrative of the Passion by Teilhard de Chardin. These memoirs constitute invaluable testimony from those who were physically present in the theatre of war. In addition to written testimony of the fighting, I also consider the modern-day “hagiography” of various fallen Catholic faithful by the French Catholics Henry Bordeaux and Massis. These elegies to the literary dead form a curious mixture of biography and hagiography that exhorts its readership to emulate the sacrifice of the fallen with similar suffering. By contrasting the two styles of writing, I show how both genres make continued appeals to the Passion of Christ as an impetus to suffer voluntarily and a panacea to grief. Although different in style, both genres function didactically, exhorting their readership to validate the suffering of others by acting reciprocally.

Wounds sustained at war are an intensely personal experience. The strength of this personal experience is undoubtedly authentic for the bearer of the wound, but for soldiers narrating their war experience, their challenge was to elevate personal experience to the level of collective imagination in such a way as to appropriate a national “Myth of the War” in Samuel Hynes’s terms. This was a difficult task not least because national war myths typically admit no exceptions, and, in the aftermath of the Great War, “myth” was also required to be “authentic”, a contradiction in terms. As Ann P. Linder states in her study of the German experience of the First World War, contradictory authentic experiences were unthinkable, there could be only one national type of authentic experience – only one version of the war and its significance inflated to the level of national myth.⁸⁴

In line with the British narrative of disillusionment, now canonized by critics such as Hynes and Paul Fussell, the French myth of war focuses on “meaningless suffering, loss and death, not only of men but of institutions and even of the cultural and historical past.”⁸⁵ This view is exemplified by literature such as Barbusse’s 1916 *Le Feu*, the high watermark of literary pacifism, and later, Céline’s 1932 *Voyage au Bout de la Nuit*, whose description of the Great War is one of classic delusion.

Most French Catholic war narratives are dedicated to former comrades, living and dead, or to the collective “fallen generation” of Catholic soldiers, using literary figures such as Péguy and Psichari as emblematic figures. Such dedications are consciously

⁸⁴ Ann Linder, *Princes of the trenches: narrating the German experience of the First World War*, Columbia, SC, USA: Camden House, 1996, p.2.

⁸⁵ *Op.cit*, p.2.

proffered by their authors and fulfil two functions; firstly, they confer a right to authority based upon the grounds of personal experience, secondly, they proclaim a community of experience that validates their vision. This gesture, where personal experience stands for the collective and vice versa, is at the heart of the power, and the weakness, of the Catholic war narrative. Since the personal narrative in the Catholic war testimony is being asked to assume not only the representative narrative of a living community but also the symbolic narrative of the Passion of Christ, my claim is that its authenticity unavoidably falters under this dual weight of expectation.

Authenticity and its relationship to the Great War narrative is famously disputed by historian and veteran Jean Norton Cru in his 1930 *Du témoignage*. Norton Cru noticed that the public regarded war novels as documents averring the absolute truth rather than as fiction. For Norton Cru, authenticity can only be conferred upon narratives written by those that were actually there. In this way, he continues, the “true” facts may be stripped away from the illusory accounts of war that are “aussi tenaces que dangereuses”.⁸⁶ Norton Cru sought to turn subjective experience into the objective. Of the three hundred war memoirs that he read, only twenty-nine could be considered as “true” history, each confirming the other’s statements. These accounts, according to Norton Cru, were morally defensible witness statements to war that stripped away any romantic or idealized notions of combat, revealing war in all its horror.

Unsurprisingly, of the twenty-nine witness accounts that Norton Cru deemed truthful, not one of these was written by the Catholic revivalists under consideration in

⁸⁶ Norton-Cru, Jean, *Du témoignage*, Paris: Gallimard, 1930, p.16.

this chapter. Where, then, to place these “authentic” war narratives that make claims to experiential truth at the same time as affirming a truth based upon the unknown? I propose that the Catholic revivalists’ war narratives perceived authenticity in a fundamentally different way to those creating strictly realist narratives. For them, authentic experience could only be conceived of in terms of the spiritual. Whatever their differences, the French Catholic intellectuals who fought in the Great War were in accord on one point: the authentic experience of the war was a spiritual one, characterized by the transformation of literal wounds into the metaphorical wounds of Christ, signalling the atonement of sins and the promise of a new future.

Are their narratives any less authentic because they call upon modes of understanding that console and give hope? In his article on “moral witnessing”, Winter defines twentieth-century moral witnesses as those who refuse to “sweeten the story” of atrocity, whose war narratives go against the grain of hope. But this essentialist view of experience ironically closes it off to others, rendering it uncommunicative as a warning sign to future generations: “The story is their story; they are wary of others who come to it, and who may hijack it for unspecified purposes.”⁸⁷ In contrast, Catholic revivalist narratives are constantly engaged in an act of opening out their experience into a communicative act that may call others to do the same in the name of Christ. Far from closed off or proprietary, their sense of authenticity is rooted in a call to arms that constitutes a very different kind of witnessing, in short, one that permits hope. The meaningfulness conferred by the story of Christ’s Passion transformed individual stories

⁸⁷ *Op.cit*, p.473.

of horror into a series of experiences that could be both productive and meaningful for the wider Catholic community.

For a generation of thinkers turning away from positivism towards new horizons, no tradition encapsulated *souffrance* more than French Catholicism. Catholicism's ardent appropriation of the suffering symbol was alluring to the intellectuals associated with the Catholic revival. The potency with which the Catholic tradition framed suffering acted as a powerful force to counter the positivist symbols of secular, bourgeois republicanism. This experience of contending with affliction was already underway in the energy of the French Catholic revival. From the revival's earliest roots in the fiction of Barbey d'Aurevilly and Léon Bloy, the doctrine of suffering assumes a critical place. Building on the post-revolutionary political philosophies of Joseph de Maistre and the later work of Antoine Blanc de Saint Bonnet, the revivalists sought to re-apply the concept of vicarious suffering in an age of anti-clericalism and widespread suspicion surrounding the Church. As such, the doctrine of vicarious suffering in the pre-1914 years was championed as a means of atonement for the newly-secular status of France, now divorced from the Catholic church. The vicissitudes of the doctrine held the principle of reparation at their core; in taking on the sufferings of the world, the good Catholic was able to imitate and even supplement the torments of Christ on the Cross. Although the appropriation of the doctrine of vicarious suffering varies according to author, across all the major figures of the revival the urge to highlight the uncompromising elements of Catholicism – in an age of ever-weakening religious adherence - was paramount.

A Generation Sacrificed

In 1916, Henri Massis published his explicitly patriotic work, *Le Sacrifice 1914-1916*. In it, he gave meaning to lives of the dead, members of what he called the “sacrificed generation”. Through a documentation of the lives of two of the most high-profile Catholic dead – Charles Péguy and Ernest Psichari – Massis enumerates stock aspects of Catholic revival thinking that distinguished the new, Catholic generation from the wave of secular republicans that stood in direct opposition. For the most part, these themes form a re-elaboration of the *Agathon* inquiry, a topic I give full attention to in my first chapter. For the purposes of my discussion here, I want to focus on two sections of *Le Sacrifice*, “Impressions de Guerre” and “L’Holocauste” – literally a biblical burnt-offering – to explore Massis’s rendering of the experience of battle. My analysis will focus on the parallel and, at times, competing discourses juxtaposed in *Le Sacrifice*. As a counterpoint, I will then explore Massis’s later *Le Jeudi Saint de 1918*, which represents a more uniform discourse of sacrificial honour. In doing so I want to suggest that there exists a tension in these works between eye-witness accounts of trench warfare, designed to convey authenticity or the “evidence of experience”, and the larger aura of imposed significance that suffering cannot help but take on, even at its most plainly represented. In a broader sense, this observation leads to what Sarah Covington terms the “mutual reciprocity”⁸⁸ between the real and the imaginary of war, although for Massis and his fellow French Catholics, I interpret this less as a reciprocal arrangement than as a conflicting one.

⁸⁸ Sarah Covington, *Wounds, flesh, and metaphor in seventeenth-century England*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p.86

As a new recruit in a battalion replacing the soldiers on the line, Massis describes the slow entry into the “jeu tragique de la guerre”⁸⁹ (160). The trenches echo with the sounds of the dying (163) as soldiers stagger after each other in the dark in shelters propped up solely by the bodies of the dead. Far from the hope of the resurrection, war is the eternal darkness that covers the earth, the very absence of God:

Devant nous, une butte couverte d’une touffe d’arbres et toute la nuit derrière, la nuit tragique, pleines de veilles farouches et d’agonies, grosse d’une pluie de mort amoncelée dans ses ténèbres et qu’un instant d’effroi va sourdre en une fusillade absurde. (169)

And yet, as the moment of the attack draws closer, an ellipsis in the text marks a shift in tone. Departing from the realism of trench life, Massis describes an elevation from the corporeality of the war experience, a state where the senses are no longer under attack:

Une sorte de grande tranquillité se fait en nous, une immense quiétude... Il semble que soudain toute la réalité douloureuse où nous sommes pris affecte moins nos sens, que les images en soient recouvertes et qu’il soit tombé dans le silence de nos âmes quelque chose d’apaisant et de fort. (173)

Through this “transfiguration unique” (174), former symbols taken to signify the desperation and terror of the war experience now come to symbolize grace; the night is no longer tragic, but rather an “accomplissement” (174), the earth is no longer the repository of material corpses but instead the almost maternal bearer of lives that have been offered in sacrifice: “Un silence suprême glisse de ces collines tragiques qui portent dans leurs flancs obscurs des milliers de vies déjà offertes.” (174) War is not fought in the

⁸⁹ Henri Massis, *Le Sacrifice 1914-1916*, Paris: Plon, 1916, p.160, hereafter cited parenthetically within the text.

ecstasy of battle, in moments of “l’aventure d’un moment héroïque” (177), but rather in the solemn asceticism of penitence: “[...] l’on ne comprend pas tout de suite la grandeur ni la beauté de l’ascétisme où elle nous contraint, de la pénitence où elle met le guerrier.”(178). Hours before the battalion is due to be sent to the rear the landscape of war and the metaphorical landscape of the resurrection become fused together:

Les heures passent et toujours ce pli de terrain, cette croupe, ce vallonnement, immobiles, indifférents, mais qui recèlent une vie si tragique et invisible. Nous ne pourrions plus contempler la campagne française sans la peupler de ces réalités pathétiques. Derrière ses aspects si charmants, si pareils, nous placerons les tombes fécondes de nos actions qui, de l’aube jusqu’à nuit, lui donneront une beauté plus profonde. Et la meule des gerbes périssables qui s’élèvera où nous avons saigné, produira l’impérissable pain du souvenir. (179-80)

Playing on the sacramental aspect of Catholicism that understands the sacrament, such as the host, to be the tangible sign of the invisible, the passage skilfully elides the reality “pathétique” of war with the invisible promise of the resurrection which will flower in the same earth that shelters the corpses of the dead. This promise of resurrection reaches the limits of the sublime in the moments before the attack, when “le grand mystère divin de la guerre” (186) induces a state of “délire des armes”.

The following section of the text, “L’Holocauste”, constitutes the fullest elaboration of Massis’ understanding of vicarious suffering. As with the first section of the text which uses the young Catholic intelligentsia as the emotive emblems of the sacrificed generation, “L’Holocauste” begins in August 1914 with the high-minded attitude of “[...] quelques jeunes écrivains, les plus hardis parmi les combattants de ces guerres spirituelles qui précédèrent la véritable guerre [...]” (197). Over and above the

material aspects of the war in hand, Catholic soldiers are fighting a different, spiritual, war. The spiritual war is an act of charity to France, the supreme act of faith that is an act of penitence. In suffering, and in the willingness to suffer, the trench becomes a monastery that demands total self-abnegation:

Telle est la méditation qui se déroule dans le cloître des tranchées. Nul solitaire n'en fit de plus ardente, de plus désintéressée, de plus vraie. Quelle trappe, quelle clôture offre semblable spectacle de dénûment, d'abandon, une vision plus profonde, plus réelle, de la mort, une solitude si sévère, une société d'âmes fraternelles, soutenue par une pareille ferveur? L'holocauste est complet. (206)

Yuval Noah Harari suggests that combat is a “quasi-mystical experience of revelation”.⁹⁰ This argument sees the experience of war in the modern turn as one of epiphany, where the positive truths of masculine heroism, patriotism and camaraderie are revealed to combatants in the midst of war.⁹¹ Massis’s assertion that the trench is a space of religious meditation that leads to an understanding of physical suffering as redemptive is in line with the war-as-revelation thesis. The use of the term “l’holocauste” is thus deliberately intended to flatten the critical distance between the experience of modern war and the cultural anachronism of Old Testament accounts of war which describe spiritual struggles in military terms.

Despite this, I want to interrogate *Le Sacrifice* as a work that, in spite of itself, betrays the war-as-revelation thesis, revealing an instance where suffering can signify no

⁹⁰ Yuval Noah Harari, *The Ultimate Experience: Battlefield Revelations and the Making of Modern War Culture*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p.1

⁹¹ Such an understanding of suffering as the site of unique truth and authority derives from early modern models of Catholicism which interpreted death, injury and suffering as privileged sites of truth and revelation.

more than physical pain. In doing so, my argument will probe the incompatibilities of the doctrine of vicarious suffering as it encountered the material contingencies of the Great War. Taken together, “Impressions de Guerre” and “L’Holocauste” form a curious mixture of first and third person testimony. Although “L’Holocauste” insists upon the redemptive qualities of suffering, “toute souffrance s’achève en gloire” (207), any reference to the physicality of war is missing from this section; suffering for others is purely theoretical despite the appeal to the testimony of soldiers (203). “Impressions de Guerre”, relying on the “flesh-witness”⁹² authority of Massis himself, presents things differently. In spite of the spiritual conversion that takes place as the attack nears, the inclusion of the preceding twenty or so pages strikes a dissonant note within the overall composition of the text. Plaintive in tone – “Qu’attend-on?” (163), “Où vais-je?” (166) – nothing more powerful than bodily pain pierces through the experience of battle. This lacuna, where physical suffering ceases to be revelatory in the Christian sense, points to the volatility of vicarious suffering when it becomes more than a theoretical concern.

In a later text entitled *Le Jeudi Saint de 1918* (1921), Massis turns his attention to a pilgrimage to Jerusalem made by a squadron of French officers on Maundy Thursday 1918. Using the eternal space of Jerusalem and the Thursday of Holy Week as unchanging signifiers in a group of men changed by war and displaced from the fighting, the text moves back and forth between the world of the Front and the Holy Land: “Tous les désirs, toutes les angoisses sont là-bas sur la Scarpe et sur l’Oise; et l’âme désarmée

⁹² Harari refers to “flesh-witnesses” thus: “Eschewing the rationalist authority of logical thinking, and the scientific authority of objective eye-witnessing, veterans lay claim to the visceral authority of ‘flesh-witnessing’. They are neither thinkers nor mere eyewitnesses. Rather, they are men (and occasionally women) who have learned their wisdom with their flesh.” (7)

malgré soi s'interroge sur son propre destin [...] Que faisons-nous ici?"⁹³ Despite the imaginative distance from the Front and the feeling of self-imposed exile insisted upon by Massis, their status as pilgrims called by God to Jerusalem in an act of repentance constitutes an act of vicarious suffering for the souls of others. Through an explicit identification of the Passion of Christ with their own pain, the soldiers' suffering unavoidably calls them back to the Passion: "Ils sentent sur eux comme une élection de misère, une grâce de détresse, une ressemblance des maux, et tout les introduit, tout nécessairement les ramène et les tire sur le plan de l'Agonie et de la Croix." (21)

As with *Le Sacrifice*, *Le Jeudi Saint* interprets war as a revelatory experience that calls to mind not only the suffering of Christ but also his willingness to suffer for the sins of mankind, 'une election de misère' (21). By recalling Maundy Thursday of Holy Week, the night of the last supper and the final day that Jesus is seen alive before the events of Good Friday, Massis underlines the importance of a community of souls in unison before the final hour, 'toute la troupe de nos douleurs, toute l'armée de nos espoirs' (10).

As a text that bears no third person testimony to destabilize the narratorial voice, *Le Jeudi Saint* appears to be a straightforward exposition of vicarious suffering, a revival piece of quasi-propaganda that justifies the pain of war through the Passion of Christ. In this way, the inclusion of the sung psalm near the close of the text subsumes any individual voice into a collective chant for the soul of France. This being so, the insistence upon war as a collective instrument channelled into the metaphorical pain of

⁹³ Henri Massis, *À Jérusalem : le Jeudi Saint de 1918*, Paris: 1921, p.3, hereafter cited parenthetically within the text.

Christ, speaks to a selective understanding of conflict that wilfully disavows the negative experience of revelation that is characteristic of first-person memoirs even in the revival tradition. This conflict between narratives of war as a collective instrument and combat narratives as a personal instrument is the fundamental problem for French Catholic revivalists hoping to superimpose the doctrine of vicarious suffering onto the Great War experience.

I have suggested that the ever-present tension between the spiritual, national and personal interests of war is a constant source of instability in Massis's Great War writing, and the work of other revivalists more generally. Whilst collective suffering is metaphorically malleable, swept along on a tide of rhetoric that is the consolidation of French national identity, it is the blunt experience of suffering that disrupts doctrinal interests revealing a breakdown of spiritual control around the war itself, a moment where suffering reveals nothing but pain.

Hagiography or Martyrdom with Meaning?

Henry Bordeaux's *Trois Tombes* (1916) is a study of the lives of three fallen Catholic intellectuals across three generations: Max Doumic, Paul Acker and Maurice Deroure. Giving the details of their lives and deaths as examples for emulation, Bordeaux appropriates the hagiographic tradition of Christian writing and uses it within a modern context. Defined as writing that represents the lives of exceptional figures in order to inspire reciprocal models of martyrdom, the hagiographical trend represents an important

element in revivalist notions of redemptive suffering. By creating textually mediated manifestations of personality, Bordeaux constructs modern-day ‘Saints’ whose voluntary suffering might inspire others to the same aims. In this way, figures such as Péguy , Doumic et al are portrayed as moral agents who actively author the ethical message of their lives through their life-choices rather than being simply the hapless victims of circumstance. Consequently, the sudden death of these figures on the battlefield – death being hagiography’s fundamental condition – serves to augment rather than exhaust the textual after-life of these modern-day Saints.

Martyrdom as a medieval concept is redeemed in a modern-day incarnation that uses the classic features of the martyrological drama – persecution, saintly endurance, victimhood, etc – to emphasize the human and affective dimension of Sainthood. Although suffering is presumed to be an inescapable aspect of war, the revivalists’ approach to human anguish distinguishes itself as an ethical engagement with the war rather than simply an illustration of victimhood. In this way, as critic Paul Yeoh points out, martyrdom becomes an “ethical response to the tensions of modernity”⁹⁴, conversely finding its niche within the context of total war as opposed to functioning as an anachronism highlighting the diminished possibility for heroic action in modern times. Modern or not, hagiography’s key distinguishing feature across time is its capacity to act communicatively. In line with the precepts of *imitatio Christi*, hagiography functions by eliciting a response to suffering that calls for reciprocal acts of martyrdom from its implied audience.

⁹⁴ Paul Yeoh, "Saints’ Everlasting Rest: The martyrdom of Maggie Tulliver” *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Spring 2009), p.13.

Bordeaux's modern-day hagiography opens with an *Avant-Propos* that uses stock features of revival doctrine surrounding suffering, foregrounding the generative vision of individual human death that follows in the lives of the Catholic dead. While the snow falls in Argonne and in Lorraine in the winter of 1915, small blades of grass serve as reminders of the "moisson prochaine" (i) that will inevitably follow the devastation of winter. Not only in the descriptions of the natural environment, but also incarnated in the actions of the women of the war-torn regions of Champagne and Lorraine is the spirit of praxis and regeneration:

Dès qu'elles aperçurent l'eau fraîche qui coulait, ces malheureuses, ployées de fatigue et qui avaient encore les yeux pleins de spectacles d'horreur, qu'on eût imaginés se couchant sur le pavé, prostrées ou révoltées, se mirent sans perdre une minute à laver le linge des enfants.⁹⁵

Paramount is the "don de soi" (12) that freely given will transform the sacrifice of Catholic youth into "un calvaire qui le fait ressembler à la Passion." (11)

The lives of Doumic, Acker and Deroure are all framed retrospectively. Beginning with the circumstances of their deaths, details of which are often gained through second-hand accounts from other soldiers, Bordeaux crowns their individual deaths as providential: 'Mais la Providence a choisi pour lui' (26), 'Les destinées les plus courtes s'achèvent encore dans leur plan' (83), etc. Death is not anti-heroic or subject to chance but part of larger, divine scheme that endows their lives with eschatological meaning.

⁹⁵ Henry Bordeaux, *Trois Tombes*, Paris: Plon-Nourrit et cie, 1916, p.2, hereafter cited parenthetically within the text.

In line with the exalted discourse of sacred hagiography, all three figures are feted for their idiosyncrasies as intellectuals but upheld as figures of a widely imitable Catholic culture. Thus although the text enumerates the particularities of all three men, their untimely deaths, which chiastically frame each narrative, are their distinguishing epitaphs.

As suggested above, the capacity for hagiography to act communicatively is made explicit in each narrative section, perhaps no more so than in the case of Doumic:

Est-elle encore la mort quand elle parle et agit, quand elle dit la vertu du sacrifice et entraîne par son exemple? N'est-elle pas alors le sommet de la vie? Heureux ceux qui se sont résumés dans le suprême instant et qui ont exhalé leur âme dans un cri de foi, dans une offrande volontaire! (25)

Being the “grand secret” (26) which unlocks the meaning of their lives to a wider audience, death is capable of creating a posterity that Bordeaux suggests even art is often unable to communicate: “Elle est alors l’acte définitif qui livre le grand secret, qui traduit le désir intérieur dont le Coeur était consumé et que l’art, si souvent, s’épuise à s’exprimer”. (26)

If art, and specifically literature, is unable to communicate their lives in the same way that their death can, the textual traces that all three figures leave behind them are exalted nonetheless. Taken together as an ecclesiastical architect and two novelists, all three fallen heroes are emphasized by Bordeaux as men of great talent whose sacrifice to their country is all the greater for their unfinished work. Constituting an overlap between

hagiography and biography, the textual traces that outlive all three figures are transformed by the premature martyrdom of their creators. Thus, Acker's work becomes entwined with his death in sacred and literary posterity: "Et c'est pourquoi les circonstances de sa mort viennent s'ajouter au mérite de ses ouvrages pour sauvegarder sa mémoire." (84). Similarly, Deroure, although not included in the pantheon of Catholic literati in which Péguy and Psichari are enshrined, was worthy of the accolade: "Mais cette ombre, dont je voudrais le tirer, s'éclairait déjà de la lumière dorée qui est le commencement d'un beau jour." (185). In the same way that the corpuses of Péguy and Psichari are canonized by the revivalists in part for the circumstances in which they died, *Trois Tombes* conflates the quasi-divine textual after-lives of its Catholic heroes with the temporal circumstances of their deaths, making the two mutually dependent. Just as the Saints' live on in the *vitae* of Christian hagiography, so the Catholic war dead, in a curious elision of generic understanding, live on through the combined force of their own textual output and that of their biographers. The written word constitutes not only an incarnation beyond the grave of their own making through literary posterity, but also a biographical 'monument' created by Bordeaux that celebrates their lives as expressions of redemptive suffering.

Not only their deaths but also the landscape within which they are buried takes on a heightened, and political, significance. Called as if a pilgrim to Doumic's grave, Bordeaux describes the earth as "un paysage de promesses agricoles" (23) bursting with the promise of an imminent harvest. War hardly intrudes into this pastoral vision, the space of the cemetery often being shielded by the contours of the countryside itself in

reverence for the dead: “Le talus me cache tout un côté, celui où les tranchées s’opposent et se rapprochent.” (23). Similarly, the spot where Acker dies in a car accident in Alsace is where flowers bloom in verdant pastures and his grave nestles, out of harm, in the flank of the mountain. Perhaps more than the appropriation of their literary work, the arrogation of the soil upon which they died constitutes a self-consciously political strategy that combines blood sacrifice with an assurance of eventual French victory, most notably in heavily contested physical spaces such as Alsace.

French Catholic writers like Henry Bordeaux inhabited a world of metaphor in which the narrative of Christ’s passion was able to console in its explanatory power. Although Bordeaux’s use of metaphor sometimes appears stretched or overindulged, flattening the details of the lives he memorializes to fit his ideological and political purposes, *Trois Tombes* constitutes an important trope of French Catholic war writing because of its ability to structure the past at the same time as providing a form of experiential testimony. As cultural historian Leonard V. Smith suggests, “[...] narratives and narrators create each other”⁹⁶; or, in other words, First World War experience is structured as much through narrative practices as through experience itself. Bordeaux’s text negotiates the shift between what happened on the battlefield (hence his appeal to various literary, epistolary and second-hand sources) and how that experience became encoded as martyrological.

⁹⁶ Leonard V. Smith, *The embattled self: French soldiers’ testimony of the Great War*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007, p.8

The Suffering Soul: Jacques Rivière's 'Carnets de Captivité'

Mon Dieu, maintenez cette blessure ouverte, élargissez-la davantage encore! Que je connaisse enfin la charité.⁹⁷

If Massis's work bears the tension between the reality of battle and the spiritual truth of Christ's Passion, then Rivière's war diaries can be said to reveal quite the opposite. Having fought for less than a month before being captured and imprisoned until 1917, Rivière's war experience was largely spiritual and his metaphorical universe ordered by imaginings of the combat that he longed to experience. Part conversion story, part treatise on spiritual despair, the fourteen notebooks that span his imprisonment provide ample evidence to illustrate both the centrality of suffering within the Catholic devotional universe and the symbolic attachment to the metaphor of Christ's wounded body and stricken heart as a conduit to grace. My analysis of his war diaries will be guided by Rivière's repeated use of the wound as metaphor for an opening of the soul and its locus as a metaphorical site of confession.

Newly imprisoned in September 1914, Rivière expresses an intimacy with God, a "subordination absolue" (48) to divine mercy and a physical immediacy to this submission. But the relief of this communion with God is soon lessened by exposure to the shamed self: "L'être vraiment cerné, désigné, réduit à faire face au doigt qui le désigne." (50). The act of confession sits on the border of what is forced and what is offered freely, an act of punishment that is confused by its own willing, described as "le moment de la grande angoisse" (50). Confession opens up the flesh of the self, what

⁹⁷ Jacques Rivière, *Carnets, 1914-1917*, Paris: Fayard, 2001, p.192, hereafter cited parenthetically within the text.

Rivière terms the “fissure” of self-knowledge that wounds like a “coup de ponce” (51). Having only returned to the Catholicism of his youth in 1913, it is not surprising that Rivière experienced this conversion as an infliction upon the body and the soul, with suffering serving as the precondition to God’s higher workings of grace. To be converted, in the age-old tradition of Paul’s violent conversion on the road to Damascus, meant being shocked into faith by the force of one’s sinfulness. In this way pain assumes the overtones of theodicy, originating in a place beyond the self.

Writing in 1915, Rivière establishes the metaphorical wound of confession, eliding the physical with the spiritual:

Pour ma faute, ce qu’il faut, c’est éviter que des excuses ne reviennent dessus, c’est tenir la blessure résolument ouverte. Non pas la tripoter, l’envenimer, mais empêcher le travail de cicatrisation que voudrait faire la vanité [...] Il est utile de maintenir la blessure ouverte pour empêcher l’ankylose de mes sentiments religieux. C’est par là que je communique avec Dieu. (170).

Made plain here is the double irony of the confessional impulse: confession does not merely expose the dividedness of the subject, it actively produces a fracturing, leaving an open wound that suppurates not only with the temptation to hide but also with the desire to tell all. Yet, as Rivière explores, healing the wound, letting it close up and scar is to defeat the very purpose of the act itself, since the desire to be absolved is bound up with ruinous pride. Confession thus involves suffering and actively desires it at the expense of any ethical efficacy. Although it may be framed as a communication with God, the recovery of a fantasized wholeness, it is fundamentally manifested in brokenness. Rather than exhibiting healing – ‘la cicatrisation’ – as its telos, it instead circles back on itself in

a never-ending vulnerability, a fluidity that is the antidote to the stiffening of the religious impulse.

What, then, does confession elicit? Not an eradication of shame but rather a continuous turning within a state of contrition and repentance; a responsiveness to shame that does not end with catharsis. Drawing on the endless metaphoricity of what is exposed to the world, Rivière acknowledges its infinite nature:

Comme un arbre ouvert qui saigne sa sève. Comme le grain qui pourrit et qui germe. J'ai été percé sur la veine vive, et voici cette liqueur qui en sort, mon bien, ma nourriture, l'aliment qui ne me manque plus jamais. (191)

Like the sap that oozes from the tree, the pain of confession is its own reward. The endpoint of expiation, of exoneration from guilt, is meaningless because confession operates within a cycle of vulnerability that is its own reward. The desire to make truth has its own peculiar natural logic that is a continuous affirmation of shame rather than its eradication:

Bonheur tout pareil à ma misère elle-même, tout confondu avec elle, que chaque ennui, chaque contretemps rouvrent comme une plaie [...] (192)

Simultaneously base and transcendent, shameful and triumphant, the wound is the most profound fusion of the material and the spiritual.

Although Rivière experienced considerable deprivation during his imprisonment, his imaginative attempts to experience a sense of fraternity with his fellow comrades are impoverished due to his lack of physical suffering: “Profond besoin de souffrir.

Certainement ce dont je souffre le plus ici, c'est de ne pas assez souffrir. J'ai de telles réserves pour endurer!" (132) And yet, the wound he lacks as a mark of honour has little to do with the reality of war as recounted to him by other inmates in the prison: "La mort par l'éclat d'obus et la mort par la balle. Ceux qui tournaient sur eux-mêmes, ceux qui se recroquevillaient sur place sans s'affaïsser [...]" (174) Far from being wounded in symbolic expectation, the flesh is sacrificed for a less than heroic war. Honour plays little role in this account; men die bent double, twisted amongst themselves. This being so, the wound remains the affective symbol which both links and divides Rivière from his compatriots.

If conversion has its own reward, the same cannot be said of war. Throughout the *Carnets*, war effects endless suffering that is absurd rather than redemptive. In the first few months of his incarceration, Rivière describes war as sterile, incapable of its own productivity: 'Sur la pente de toutes mes idées vers la littérature. Extraordinaire stérilité de la guerre.' (77). The death of his close friend Alain-Fournier, author of *Le Grand Meaulnes*, provokes a sentiment of suffering without meaning, an 'immense cauchemar' (238) that has no logic of its own. Rivière cannot see the war as anything but futile, the "bataille dans un bistrot" of *poilu* fable.

Nonetheless, the wounds of war have a reward that remains out of Rivière's reach: heroism. A central anxiety for Rivière is his perceived failure to have been a battlefield hero, a fact he attributes to "lâcheté" (22) and lack of courage "la sorte de courage qu'il fallait avoir là" (174). Courage is understood through a natural physicality

or disposition towards warrior heroism which Rivière, barely fit enough to pass the conscription checks (61), lacks. Having seen next to no Front Line combat, Rivière is no warrior, referring to his fate as that of someone who has narrowly escaped a railway accident (113). He regrets battlefield heroism as a missed opportunity and keenly feels his lack of experiential authority amongst his peers ‘cela me retire la liberté d’en parler comme je voudrais’ (160). Rivière expresses a longing to return to the Front as a ‘force fanatique’ (124) and imagines himself to be on trial before a tribunal of his friends and family, condemned for his lack of contribution to the war effort (167). The wound’s significance as a symbol of honour commanding respect persists in Rivière’s psychological universe despite reports that the reality of the battlefield was at odds with traditional codes of honour and stoicism.

In a world of inconsistent meaning, Rivière envisages God as omnipotent and omniscient, but not always beneficent. Consequently, a silent undercurrent of reproach runs through the *Carnets*. Deprived of the heroic status that would have affirmed his masculinity, Rivière addresses God in despair:

Il me semble que tout le profit que je pouvais tirer de la captivité est épuisé pour moi. Pourquoi donc, mon Dieu, vous qui avez mis tant de soin à remodeler ma vie, à en changer les motifs, dès que cela devenait utile pour son renforcement intérieur, pourquoi donc ne me délivreriez-vous pas de ce stérile séjour? (133)

As he struggles to suppress the earthly shame of not having fought valiantly in active combat, Rivière stumbles across the solipsism in his motives:

Et d'ailleurs j'ai honte de ne tirer des circonstances solennelles où nous sommes qu'un profit personnel, de voir que je n'y fais rien que de m'y enrichir, comme un vil accapareur de vivres. (134)

Freeing the flow of his frustration, and opening out his shame in the confessional act, submission to God's will results in a heroism of its own. The confessional act, borne on a flood of tears, somehow converts shame into self-compassion:

Pourquoi l'idée de cette confession m'est-elle dès maintenant si délicieuse, si réconfortante, si réhabilitante? Rien que de penser à leur pardon, je me sens envahi de bonheur, d'un bonheur plus grand peut-être que si j'avais à leur raconter quelque acte d'héroïsme. (102)

Nonetheless, self-compassion gained at the expense of spiritual despair cannot dismiss the sexual desire that lingers over Rivière's wartime confessions. Having become involved with Yvonne Gallimard in the summer of 1914, his desire for her persists as a source of temptation and ineffable guilt as he contemplates his wife Isabelle's devotion to him. Repeatedly framing his own words with excerpts from Racine's *Phèdre* - emblematic of a transgressive love - Rivière considers love to be a prison of its own: "Le poids, la longueur, la durée, l'inertie, la perpétuité..." (111). The Petrarchan notion of a love trailed by loss, or at least unattainability resounded for Rivière whose war experience was largely psychological. But tropes of war that infiltrated through into the confines of the prison, also brought a more confrontational approach on Rivière's part. The act of wounding thus signifies a counter-wounding in a larger war where the male hero would regain his dominant position.

As the notebooks progress chronologically through the war, Rivière adjusts his focus from the personal to the political. In hospital in 1917, Rivière shifts the lexical field of the metaphorical wound from his individual universe to France herself: “Après la guerre il faudra débarrasser l’esprit public de ses impuretés, comme on enlève les morts du champ de bataille, pour éviter l’infection.” (412) The image of woundedness embedded in the metaphorical field of the body continues to be a vital image of expression or fragmentation. For France’s open wound not to become infected, the body politic must be restored to harmony through the symbolic expiation of the war dead. Yet every wound dealt to the nation could also carry grace within its destructive power; just as brokenness could lead to wholeness and mutilation could lead to strength. In this sense, France could become redeemed by the very disability that had torn her apart.

The wound is religion’s indexical image supreme, a metaphor whose power resides in its adaptability to any number of meaningful directions. As a synecdoche, Christ’s fragmented wounds represent his broken body but are rich with the incarnational meaning behind such fragmentation. A symbol of brokenness, they also lead to wholeness, just as the blood of redemption carries the marks of victorious resurrection. For Rivière, the image of the wound was expansive enough to accommodate his spiritual, political and patriotic selves. Borrowing from a storehouse of biblical and literary tropes, Rivière was able to fit woundedness to his confessional needs, even transforming its qualities into a badge of honour that was substitutive of combat heroism. Wounded in heart and soul but not physically, the varied metaphorical expanse of the wound was to transform Rivière’s imprisonment into meaning, interpretation and narrative. Rivière’s

wartime suffering left him wounded but – by his own volition – never healed, a redemptive debilitation extending far beyond the flesh.

Christ in all Things: Teilhard de Chardin

French Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin is difficult to place amongst the broad swathe of early twentieth-century French Catholic neo-Thomists such as Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson. Predominantly a scientist by trade, his thought points towards a full integration of evolution and Christianity. Following this line of thought, Teilhard envisaged an end-point whereby the Kingdom of God, or the so-called “Omega Point” would be reached. Although his philosophical work leans heavily on biological metaphor, his belief in the necessity of man’s total unification with Christ through suffering links him to the revivalists under consideration in this chapter. Like Massis, Rivière and Bordeaux, Teilhard had seen Front Line combat, acting as a stretcher-bearer from 1914-1918. In his *Ecrits du Temps de la Guerre (1916-1919)*, Teilhard attests to an intensified sense of revelation in the theatre of war. Using this heightened sense of Christ’s presence on the battlefield as my starting point, I will consider the ways in which suffering and transcendence are played out in his 1917 essay “La Nostalgie du Front”. As with my analysis of other texts in this chapter, my claim is that wounds of Christ are used as indexical Christian symbols to justify the suffering on the battlefields of the Great War in the eventual promise of resurrection.

Written in 1917, “La Nostalgie du Front” constitutes what philosopher Nicolas de Warren terms a “war-heresy”⁹⁸. Heresy, because the front-line acts as the site of ultimate revelation, betraying the myth of the war as meaningless. As De Warren elegantly puts it, what we witness in Teilhard’s text is not the illusion of meaning-bestowal but rather “the illusion of total meaninglessness”. In this way, Teilhard can be grouped with the revivalists in so much as he effects a total reversal of meaning surrounding the violence of the trenches. This being so, Teilhard’s vision of war as ontological liberation strikes beyond the dogmatic in ways that cause the reader to fundamentally question the truth of human existence. Following his argument, the reader is swept along upon the following logic: life is simply unliveable without death which alone is able to effect the transformation from the quotidian dullness of life to the radical subjectivity of embracing death for its own sake. This subjectivity, which can only be experienced at the Front, opens the door to a complete transcendence of pre-given meaning that is, Teilhard suggests, an act of total liberation: “L’expérience inoubliable du Front, à mon avis, c’est celle d’une immense liberté.”⁹⁹ (177)

Crucially, the Front represents a freedom from the commonplace. But it is also a place to be deciphered, a mystery that calls to be unravelled. For Teilhard, the mystery of the Front is all the more baffling because he experiences fear like any other man: “En ligne, j’ai peur des obus comme les autres. Je compte les jours et je guette les symptômes

⁹⁸ “Homecoming: Jan Patocka’s Reflections on the First World War” by Nicolas de Warren in *Phenomenologies of violence*, ed. Michael Staudigl, Boston: Brill, 2013, p.231

⁹⁹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Écrits du temps de la guerre: 1916-1919*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1965, p.177, hereafter cited parenthetically within the text.

de relève, comme les autres.” (173). But unlike the mass of soldiers he compares himself to, Teilhard experiences a curious sense of nostalgia for the Front, what he terms his “rivage aimé”. The search for the secret of the Front’s appeal begins with a highly symbolic opening paragraph where he describes climbing a ridgeline near the Chemin des Dames at twilight, a moment of distortion between night and day, feeling and fact. Beholding the sight of the “crête dévastée” (174) before him, Teilhard begins by scaling his inner, metaphorical ridgeline to interrogate the incongruity of nostalgia before the sight of such abject devastation: “[...] je veux m’analyser plus que je ne l’ai fait encore. Je veux savoir.” (174) Settling in to a Proustian-like reverie, his imagination transports him to childhood memories of travels to distant lands. Seamlessly, the Front and memory become welded together:

Je revois l’heure où, dans les gares, les feux multicolores s’allument pour guider les grands trains pressés vers un matin prestigieux et enchanté. Peu à peu, les tranchées, illuminées de signaux, se confondent, en mon esprit, avec une vaste ligne transcontinentale, qui mènerait excessivement loin... quelque part, au-delà de tout. (174)

Pursuing further his journey into the past, Teilhard elides his fascination for the Front with his desire to go beyond the frontiers of the western world, deep into the Orient, a desire that had originally led him to scientific discovery. He thus offers a provisional conclusion, that the “moi énigmatique” who is fascinated by the Front is none other than the “moi de l’aventure et de la recherche” (175). No sooner has he offered this conclusion however, than it begins to ring false. Although the experience of Front-line combat could be construed as a form of exoticism, Teilhard is adamant that it is altogether more than that, something of which he has only scratched the surface: “Mais c’est autre chose de

plus subtil, et de plus substantiel, dont tout ce grand appareil n'est que l'écorce [...]" (176). In re-configuring his longing for the Front as one of total freedom, Teilhard understands this as a freedom from pre-given meaning or worn-out oppositions; day and night, light and darkness, all cease to have any meaning in this "réalité de l'ordre plus élevé" (177).

Unlike the other texts considered in this chapter, Teilhard envisages the experience of battle as a total emancipation from the natural world, and by extension, the soil of France. As I have illustrated in relation to the Catholic revivalists engaging with the Great War, the soil of France holds a critical place in their mystical fusion of suffering and resurrection, acting as both receptacle for the dead and site of regeneration. For Teilhard, however, a break with the everyday world encompasses a total rupture with the soil. To illustrate this divorce, Teilhard recounts how, whilst walking to another part of the line, he trampled over a farmer's land and was duly reprimanded. This encounter with the farmer produces an epiphany of sorts where he realizes his total separation from any previous notions of community, with either humans or the soil:

Le bonhomme avait raison de se plaindre. Mais en l'entendant, j'éprouvai un choc intérieur, un vertige, comme si je tombais de très haut... Nous avions l'air de deux êtres pareils, lui et moi. Nous parlions les mêmes mots. Mais lui, il était confiné dans ses préoccupations de "terreux" individualiste. Et moi, je vivais de la vie du Front. (181)

However, although Teilhard does not envisage a resurrection through violence – and, by extension, suffering - that is coterminous with the soil, this does not rule out resurrection altogether. Rather, Teilhard's conception of re-birth through war is perceived

as a total and collective transformation of man, a “*désindividuation spéciale*” (180) in which the spiritual energies of the Front coalesce to produce an “*Ame du Front*” which acts in the name of the “*Nation entière*”. Unlike traditional Catholic revivalist notions of suffering and pain which is underwritten and justified by the collective atonement and resurrection of the Nation, in “*La Nostalgie du Front*” Teilhard insists upon entry to the “*Surface Sublime*” that is consecrated by danger rather than by the promise of eventual resurrection. The brute encounter with death is sacred in and of itself, not necessarily as an eschatological staging post:

Est-ce uniquement la joie de “subsister”, qui gonfle ainsi l’âme des rescapés de la guerre et rajeunit leur monde? - Je pense, moi, que la saveur inédite de vivre, succédant à un “*narrow escape*” tient surtout à cette intuition profonde que l’existence qu’on retrouve, consacrée par le danger, est une existence nouvelle. Le bien être physique qui se répand dans l’âme, à cette minute-là, signifie la Vie supérieure en laquelle on vient d’être baptisé. (181)

Echoing lines from Péguy’s 1913 *Ève*, Teilhard appears to be inserting himself into the revivalist tradition at the essay’s close: “Heureux, peut-être, ceux que la mort aura pris dans l’acte et l’atmosphère même de la guerre [...] tout près de Dieu!” (183). However, whilst Péguy, Psichari et al looked beyond the war to the eventual coming of Christ, for Teilhard, the freedom gained at the Front will become eclipsed, not crowned, by peace: “une lumière s’éteindra brusquement sur la Terre” (182). The wisdom of the Front is not, in other words, an abiding revelation. Rather, it becomes extinguished with the return to peace and its meaning becomes obscured by the monotony of everyday life: “A la paix, toutes choses se recouvriront du voile de la monotonie et des mesquineries anciennes” (182).

Far from heralding the coming of Christ, Teilhard insists at the essay's close that the revelation of the Front can only be apprehended during war itself. This is a provocative suggestion and one that flies in the face of the French Catholic revivalists' framing of the Great War in fundamental ways, not least the assumption that peace - the endpoint to which revivalists gesture - does not affirm the promise of the resurrection but rather eclipses the hope contained in the act of transcendence itself. Instead of creating a community of hope and the promise of a new harvest, Teilhard suggests that war sets the fighting subject irrevocably apart from those who were not there. Implicit in this proposition is also the challenge to war's meaning, a challenge taken up by the revivalists but challenged further, and in different ways by Teilhard; war is no longer the deeply traumatic experience of suffering on the road to redemption, but is rather valid in and of itself as a revelation that is enclosed in its own secrecy. Such a suggestion inevitably leads to an experience of war that is radical not for its violence, but for its new mode of revelation:

And yet, the question concretely posed by the Great War is precisely whether the originality and historical meaningfulness of Socrates or Christ have come to an end, replaced in their wake by the *Frontsoldat*, who, as the *supreme heretic (or pariah)* of the twentieth century, incarnates an existence violently released – set apart and liberated – from the bondage of the natural world without thereby resolving and finding a home for the question “to what avail”¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

It is often argued that during the final years of the First World War, new narrative forms were emerging. This observation is frequently made by critics attempting to trace a

¹⁰⁰ “Homecoming: Jan Patočka’s Reflections on the First World War” by Nicolas de Warren in *Phenomenologies of violence*, ed. Michael Staudigl, Boston: Brill, 2013, p.231p.239.

direct link between art's representational breakdown and the rise of the avant-garde; war was simply too vast and shapeless to be squeezed into extant art forms and traditional modes of representation fell short. Quite suddenly, war could in no way be conceived of in terms of a story with an ending. This thesis is amply supported by war narratives such as Barbusse's *Le Feu*, oft-quoted for the way in which it protests against a realist representation of war at the same time as it inserts itself into that very tradition. In the same way, Georges Duhamel's 1917 *Vie des Martyrs 1914-1916* records the human wreckage of the war, without the politics that Barbusse is remembered for but with the same unswerving commitment to a realistic depiction of sacrifice, a term loaded with fatigued connotations by the time the book was published. In an opening preface addressed directly to the reader, Duhamel insists that the reader contemplate the physicality of the wounds sustained: "Sous leurs pansements, il y a des plaies que vous ne pouvez pas imaginer."¹⁰¹ As a doctor, Duhamel knew more than most about the reality of war wounds but beyond his medical authority the book relays the critical message that war, like physical deformation, is incoherent at worst, ambiguous at best.

Despite their inconsistencies, the blunt suffering that underwrites the tension in Catholic Great War narratives is not Hynes's "Myth of the War", a definition so critical that it deserves quoting in full:

We know them all by now: the idealism betrayed; the early high-mindedness that turned in mid-war to bitterness and cynicism; the growing feeling among soldiers of alienation from the people at home for whom they were fighting; the rising resentment of politicians and profiteers and ignorant, patriotic women; the growing sympathy for the men on the other side, betrayed in the same ways and suffering the same hardships; the emerging sense of the war as machine and of all

¹⁰¹ Georges Duhamel, *Vie des martyrs, 1914-1916*, Paris : Libertés Françaises, p.8.

the soldiers as its victims; the bitter conviction that the men in the trenches fought for no cause, in a war that could not be stopped.¹⁰²

Myth is an important word here, implying a story created by those who fought to relate their war experience, a story so accepted in cultural parlance that it begins to take on legendary status. French Catholic intellectuals were already in possession of an explanatory story – the Passion of Christ – to make sense of the war and this may account for their lack of irony when idealism fell short. Paul Fussell famously wrote that all wars are ironic because they are always worse than one expects: “Every war constitutes an irony of situation because its means are so melodramatically disproportionate to its ends.”¹⁰³ Irony, as Smith notes, creates a “vacuum”, a retrospective mode that comes after the initiation to combat. French Catholic Great War narratives are curiously devoid of irony precisely because their purpose was to create a means of structuring war experience as a matter of contemporaneous urgency. Their narratives represent constitutive attempts to make sense of the war experience as part of the mobilizing war culture. Although modern readers may dismiss these aims in light of the ironic “myth” of war, they cannot be dismissed out of hand.

This chapter has been preoccupied with what Joan W. Scott calls “experience as evidence”.¹⁰⁴ Experience, according to historians such as Norton Cru, undergirds history; only those who fought can be relied upon to give an accurate representation of the suffering that took place and even they are liable to gross exaggeration as per the dictates

¹⁰² Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: the First World War and English culture*, London: Bodley Head, 1990, p.439.

¹⁰³ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, p.8.

¹⁰⁴ Joan W. Scott, “The Evidence of Experience”, *Critical Inquiry* 17, (Summer 1991), pp. 773-797.

of historical empiricism. Combat experience creates the impulse to set down what happened. This impulse is complicated not only by the distortions of memory but even more catastrophically by the realization that experience could not be rendered through language. All the writers I have considered in this chapter attest to the weight of experience in rendering their war narratives. For some, like Rivière, the perceived lack of combat experience produced an equally powerful impulse. However, as Leonard V. Smith observes, the experience of battle in the Great War and indeed any war, however weighty, is not at all self-evident; stressing the dissonance between two soldiers' accounts of the same experience, he concludes that experience as the basis for evidence is a deeply problematic concept since "even Great War narratives do not all tell remotely the same story".¹⁰⁵ Given the notable disparity between accounts of the same war – Barbusse's account looks very different from Bordeaux's, for example - what is striking about French Catholic Great War narratives is the uniformity with which experience is shaped within the "metanarrative" of Christ's Passion. Although "metanarratives" were seen as a casualty of the war's "crisis of consciousness", for French Catholics, the persistence of the Passion as an overarching explanatory system points to the ways in which experience, although an authoritative tool, became secondary to didacticism.

War memoirs draw our attention to personal, and often intimate, experiences of war. They are excavations of the self within the theatre of conflict, narratives about individuals rather than battles or campaigns. High profile French Catholics such as Bordeaux, Massis and Rivière produced a body of work in the later years of the war that

¹⁰⁵ "Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory: Twenty-Five Years Later*", *History and Theory*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (May, 2001), pp. 241-260.

elides the imaginative with the testimonial, the mystical with the political. For this reason, their corpus is hard to classify since they move between lived and fictionalized experience and individual and collective viewpoints. Although this chapter has explored a variety of writing and genre, its guiding principle has been the manner in which the metaphor of Christ's Passion took on particular permutations in accordance with the demands of a specific rhetorical discourse. While respecting the generic idiosyncrasies of each of the texts under consideration, it has been my aim to connect them all by the common underlying image of the wounded Christ that resonated across the unstable period from 1916 to 1918. Through the exploration of such an evocative metaphor across different generic persuasions, I have highlighted the ways in which French Catholic intellectuals borrowed from the past at the same time as they expressed profound anxieties about the present. In so doing, they forged entirely new and creative representations of the First World War.

Chapter Four

Reconstructing the Catholic Face

Introduction

In 1919, the French celebrated Bastille Day with a military parade on a grand scale. On this occasion however, the parade did not celebrate victory so much as the conspicuous legacies of the war's losses. Parading in full view down the Champs Elysees, France's *mutilés de guerre* including the notorious *Gueules cassées*¹⁰⁶ symbolized the damage wrought upon France by the war. What was missing was more obvious than what remained. As cultural historian Stephen Schlosser has written, integration was desperately needed: "Clearly, the war had changed France: former antagonisms had lost their salience, the body politic needed integration, and the Church was yet another part of the *patrie* in need of repatriation."¹⁰⁷ Like the *Gueules cassées*, parts of France were missing, and those parts that had been returned were unrecognisable; Alsace-Lorraine, territorially amputated from France after the Franco-Prussian war in 1870, was returned in 1918 bearing little relation to collective memory. Just as the *mutilés de guerre* appeared as distorted symbols of a formerly vigorous nation embodied by the resilient *poilus*, so "victory" in its 1919 incarnation seemed ambiguous at best, monstrous at worst.

¹⁰⁶ For a comprehensive history of the *Gueules cassées*, see Sophie Delaporte's excellent study, *Gueules cassées: Les blessés de la face de la Grande Guerre*, Paris: Noesis, 2001.

¹⁰⁷ Stephen Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p.100.

Ceremonies commemorating various military and civil aspects of the war were not put on hold until the guns had stopped. Rather, they took place throughout the war, celebrating key victories such as the Marne in 1914.¹⁰⁸ But the inclusion of one thousand *Gueule cassées* in the parade on Bastille Day 1919 struck a previously unheard note. Was France celebrating a triumphant victory or commemorating a profound sense of loss? Was France deferring to the Republican values of 1870 or something quite different altogether, a paean to Christ-like sacrifice? Equally, the commemorations on that July day begged another question: would France really be able to remember the survivors of the war as neatly as those who were safely dead? “Dismembered not remembered”¹⁰⁹ to use one critic’s words, tributes to the war-wounded did not necessarily take place, statically, at war memorials and cemeteries, as critics such as Winter have famously suggested.

Be it commemorative ambiguity or conscious union, the Catholic Church rose to the occasion. Several factors contributed to a growing union between the Republican values of *la patrie* and Roman Catholic customs in the commemorative era: the proximity of the official commemorative date of the 11th November to All Saints’ Day as opposed to the Republican spirit of Bastille Day, the canonization of “national heroine” Joan of Arc in 1920, and the symbolic proximity of the unknown soldier to the body of Christ. Accustomed to making sacred unions in the name of war, the Republican government

¹⁰⁸ For a full discussion of commemorative practices in France both during the war and after see Rémi Dalisson, “LA CÉLÉBRATION DU 11 NOVEMBRE OU L’ENJEU DE LA MÉMOIRE COMBATTANTE DANS L’ENTRE-DEUX-GUERRES (1918-1939)”, *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, No. 192, December 1998, pp. 5-23.

¹⁰⁹ Paul Connerton, *The spirit of mourning: history, memory and the body*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p.48.

made several key concessions to the Catholic Church in the 1920s, a sign that the politico-religious coalition of the trenches was able to answer the needs of a society in mourning. Of utmost significance was the restoration of ties with the Vatican in 1921, re-establishing and “re-membering” France to the Catholic body.

Yet after the Armistice, could Catholicism still supply the same explanatory tools as it had done for intellectuals and soldiers alike during the war years themselves? Important scholarship has emerged on the subject of the “*sortie de guerre*” in recent years. Bruno Cabanes has explored the period from 1918 to 1920 through the lens of the “*retour à l’intime*” or return to normal life. More laterally, John Horne has taken up the issue of “cultural demobilisation”, arguing for a porous relationship between war and peace in the immediate aftermath of the conflict. In his work on “Remembering and Dismemberment”¹¹⁰, historian Seth Koven underlines the ambiguities of the war’s end, emphasizing that the war’s consequences did not end with the cessation of hostilities. Mining the appropriate etymology and associative proximity of remembering and dismembering, Koven’s work lies at the intersection of the literal and the metaphorical, reminding the reader that physical dismemberment necessarily implies social, political and economic disintegration.

Within this landscape of disillusion peopled with cripples roaming the streets of France, how could Catholicism differentiate itself? French Catholicism’s “*sortie de guerre*” is defined by reconciliation rather than disillusion. Restoring its ties with the

¹¹⁰ See Seth Koven’s article, “Remembering and Dismemberment: Crippled Children, Wounded Soldiers, and the Great War in Great Britain”, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 99, No. 4 (Oct., 1994), pp. 1167-1202.

Vatican in 1921 after a hiatus of over a decade, Catholicism championed a turn away from disillusion and towards the optimism of restoration. Moreover, French Catholicism stands at the intersection of competing perspectives of the after-war period providing both a political and spiritual platform from which to survey the radically altered landscape. Despite this, French Catholicism is often overlooked as a force for healing in the interwar period due to the Church hierarchy's authoritarian leanings as National Socialism tightened its grip over Europe and due to the Church's deep involvement in the affairs of the Vichy government.¹¹¹

This dissertation examines the changing fortunes of French Catholicism from 1910 to 1930. Pondering the impact of modern war on a centuries-old religious narrative, I have proposed that French Catholicism was far from static, offering an explanatory tool for the conflict that redirected visions of war away from catastrophe and towards an understanding of French soldiers' war experience as a Calvary. By offering an eschatological account that transformed pre-war bellicosity into the language of just war, the barbarity of conflict into the language of divine intent, and the suffering of men into the redemptive Passion of the Christ, Catholicism experienced a significant revival as war gripped Europe. At the same time however, this dissertation has examined the ambiguities of the eschatological narrative as it was confronted with the unprecedented experience of the Great War, tracing such incompatibilities as Christian compassion and the demonization of the German enemy as well as the optimism of vicarious suffering

¹¹¹ For a full discussion of the Catholic Church's political fortunes in France see *Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918-1965*, eds. Tom Buchanan and Martin Conway, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

with the bloodletting of the Western Front. In this final chapter I will turn to the after-war period, asking whether the rhetoric of Catholicism could help France to heal. In doing so I will continue to focus on the dissonance between the optimism of the French Catholic script and the reality of the war experience recounted by French Catholics themselves, often described in terms of abject despair.

The trauma of the First World War has consumed much scholarship. Eric Leed has argued that industrialized killing distanced those who had fought from non-combatants.¹¹² Equally, as critics such as Modris Eksteins have pointed out, the war and its technology gave birth to modernism,¹¹³ heralding a new age of signification that would sever its ties with tradition. If this was indeed the case, then French Catholicism's task to reunite and reconstruct the French nation after the war was even greater than ever. In keeping with the broader argumentation of this dissertation, and following Jay Winter's intervention that mourning drew on tradition to negotiate loss and grief,¹¹⁴ in this chapter I maintain the slippage between tradition and modernity, finding complexity and paradox in the French Catholic response to post-war reconstruction. Instead of a radical gulf between the Third Republic ideals of *la Patrie* and the Roman Catholic vision of France - a subject I address in my first chapter - this chapter locates the intersection between the French Catholic desire for tradition and the need to look towards the future. Emphasizing the coexistence of violence and healing, of adherence to the

¹¹² Eric Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War One*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

¹¹³ Modris Eksteins, *The Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, London: Bantam, 1989.

¹¹⁴ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Catholic script and involuntary disloyalty to it, my analyses of both Bernanos and Rivière look to the ways in which they reframed their Catholicism around their own wartime experiences. Although both writers sometimes give way to the oft-discussed mode of disenchantment¹¹⁵ and irony (which according to Paul Fussell defined the war's "modern memory") they also express a desire to rehabilitate the hero and preserve motifs of French-ness in ways that fundamentally contradict the dominant mode of disillusion witnessed in the "war books boom" of 1928 to 1930.¹¹⁶

Transcendental Healing: Mending France's Gueule cassée

Gueule cassée was the term given to French Great War veterans whose faces had been, quite literally, smashed. These faces were missing vital structural elements such as noses and jaws and were frequently beyond repair. In keeping with a long metaphorical tradition that connects the health of the individual body to the health of the figurative social corpus from the eighteenth century onwards, the figure of the *Gueule cassée* is often taken to symbolize what Elaine Scarry would call the "unmaking" of the civilized world.¹¹⁷ Here however, I argue that rather than exclusively symbolizing the despair of French society, the figure of the *Gueule cassée* could also stand for the power of healing and the restorative synthesis of opposing parts: heroes and victims, survivors and casualties, Catholic and Republican. Using Giorgio Agamben's fundamental insight that

¹¹⁵ See Andrew Frayn's introduction to *Writing disenchantment: British First World War prose, 1914-30*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014.

¹¹⁶ See Jay Winter, *Remembering war: the Great War between memory and history in the twentieth century*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, p.234.

¹¹⁷ See Elaine Scarry, *The body in pain: the making and unmaking of the world*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

the body is at the centre of the political world,¹¹⁸ I want to suggest that the frail social body of interwar France actually cemented the resurrection of the Catholic Church in France in a period where the dissolution of religious faith would have been more obvious than its revival.

Although social and cultural historians such as Joanna Bourke¹¹⁹ and Susan Kingsley Kent have said a great deal about the Great War's impact on gender and the social body, exploring the exacerbation of concerns about the degradation of masculinity, little critical attention has been paid to the meanings attributed to Catholicism and the French social body in the aftermath of the Great War. Whilst I acknowledge that no "master narrative" could fashion the social body in totality, I will argue for the novelty and audacity of the Catholic attempt to re-fashion France, and by extension herself during a decade of unprecedented fluidity of meaning.

French Catholics saw France's military victory over Germany as the symbolic triumph of Thomist thought over German Kantianism. Championing a return to the patristic philosophy of the Middle Ages, key French Catholic intellectuals such as Jacques Maritain and Emmanuel Mounier upheld Thomism as the regenerative tonic for a society ravaged by war. Overcoming a Kantian presumption about the self and the world, Aquinas's famous dictum "ipsum esse subsistens" held that there was no distinction between essence and existence. As a theology of hope, or in Chesterton's words the *only*

¹¹⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1998.

¹¹⁹ See Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the male: men's bodies, Britain and the Great War*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, and Susan Kingsley-Kent, *Making peace: the reconstruction of gender in interwar Britain*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

“optimist theology”, Thomism promised the unity of God in all things. No philosophical position was better suited to a society searching for its missing parts.

Characterized by the spirit of the integral, neo-Thomism captured the need for plenitude but also for synthesis: if France was to move on, she needed, in Schloesser terms, to “reconcile herself with a portion that had been lost, repressed, or destroyed” (106). To do this, France had to re-incorporate the optimism of Catholicism into the reality of post-war life in order to heal her severed limbs. For Jacques Maritain and his convert wife Raïssa, formulating a Catholicism that could cope with the challenges of a post-war society became their major preoccupation. These efforts were often in collaboration; in 1919 French Catholic intellectual Henri Massis and Maritain founded *La Revue universelle*, aimed at bringing Thomism to a wider audience in conjunction with Massis’s manifesto for post-war reconstruction which he defined as explicitly French and Catholic, positing Catholicism as the only way for a society to mend, touting a motto that had reconstruction at its core: “We are united in joining together everything that is against destruction so that we may strengthen and grow in a community devoted to the spirit”.

Already notorious for his work as a generational portraitist of the Catholic youth revival before the war,¹²⁰ Massis adapted his tone to the post-war period all the while insisting upon renewal. In his 1919 manifesto for a “Parti de l’Intelligence”, Massis

¹²⁰ See chapter one of this dissertation for a full discussion of his 1913 co-published study of French Catholic youth, *Les jeunes gens d’aujourd’hui*, authored under the name *Agathon* with Alfred de Tarde.

attempted to mobilize post-war energies with a call to an intellectual apostolate that could defend the spiritual interests of humanity:

C'est à un apostolat intellectuel que nous voulons nous consacrer, en tant que Français d'abord, mais aussi en tant qu'hommes, en tant que gardiens de la civilisation. Le salut public et la sauvegarde de la vérité sont les points de vue qui nous guident: ils sont assez largement humains pour intéresser tous les peuples. Si nous mettons au premier plan la préoccupation des besoins de la France et la reconstitution nationale, si nous voulons avant tout servir et accepter nos obligations citoyennes, si nous prétendons organiser la défense de l'intelligence française, c'est que nous avons en vue l'avenir spirituel de la civilisation tout entière. Nous croyons et le monde croit avec nous qu'il est dans la destination de notre race de défendre les intérêts spirituels de l'humanité. La France victorieuse veut reprendre sa place souveraine dans l'ordre de l'esprit, qui est le seul ordre par lequel s'exerce une domination légitime.¹²¹

Published in response to Romain Rolland's manifesto of the same year¹²² that had accused French intellectuals of having debased their literary status through the publication of patriotic propaganda in the war years, Massis responded to his socialist and humanitarian opponents in kind. Placing national interests at the heart of his argument, Massis claimed that national regeneration was a necessary preliminary to the broader health of "l'avenir spirituel de la civilisation toute entière".¹²³ Rather than vilifying nationalism as the cancer that had spread through Europe, and in an attempt to rescue members of the *renouveau catholique* such as Claudel who had famously written wartime propaganda, the members of Massis's *Parti de l'Intelligence* reframed the stakes of the war into spiritual ones, claiming that the only path to regeneration was metaphysical, an entire "restauration métaphysique".

¹²¹ Manifesto for "Un Parti de l'Intelligence" published in *Le Figaro Littéraire*, 19th July 1919, taken from Michel Toda, *Henri Massis : un témoin de la droite intellectuelle*, Paris: Table Ronde, 1987, pp.182-189.

¹²² Romain Rolland's manifesto, "Déclaration de l'indépendance de l'esprit" was published in *l'Humanité* on the 26th June 1919. Signed by high-profile intellectuals such as Georges Duhamel and Jean Guéhenno, this pacifist grouping pitted itself in direct opposition to Maritain and Massis's *Revue universelle* with the creation of its own review *Europe* in 1923.

¹²³ *Op.cit.*, p.185.

In a lecture to the philosophy faculty at the University of Louvain in 1920, Jacques Maritain outlined the Thomist renaissance. Delineating the harmful effects of Cartesian thinking and the neglect of Thomist thought after the Enlightenment, Maritain turned to the horror of the war as impetus enough for philosophical change characterized by action. Opening his lecture in frank terms, Maritain told his audience that he had originally intended to address them on the topic of Bergsonian philosophy in 1914 but countered that in between 1914 and 1920 “[...] il y a des torrents de sang”.¹²⁴ Placing trauma at the centre of his philosophical argument, Maritain insisted that Thomism was thoroughly modern and those who were overly influenced by its medieval origins were missing the point. In a further section of his essays published under the title *Antimoderne* in 1922, Maritain insisted that the Thomist renaissance could only have come during a period of intense fragmentation:

Considérez que l’élite pensante est orientée, plus nettement qu’à aucun autre moment depuis deux siècles, vers le Christianisme, et que la foi catholique apparaît plus manifestement que jamais, dans la faillite universelle des systèmes humains, comme la seule lumière stable, comme la seule force intellectuelle qui intègre, toujours neuve et vivante en sa pérennité. En vérité, malgré la boue et le sang dont elle regorge, l’époque actuelle est puissamment intéressante pour l’esprit, et elle annonce les plus beaux combats.¹²⁵

The post-war period was the perfect storm of hybrid opposites that had to be reconciled: soldiers that were victims and heroes, a nation simultaneously victorious and economically devastated, and, most symbolically, faces without mouths that were forced to “celebrate” a Pyrrhic victory. Amid this topsy-turvy chaos Maritain attempted another,

¹²⁴ Jacques Maritain, *Antimoderne*, Paris: Éditions de la Revue des jeunes, 1922, p.113.

¹²⁵ *Op.cit.*, p.218.

spiritual, synthesis that was the reconciliation of Aquinas with the modern condition and the implicit affirmation therein that the modern could also be shaped by unchanging and eternal forms, of which Catholicism was the bedrock. Equally, neo-Thomism's insistence upon the relational nature of human beings to one another affirmed in action was perfectly suited to a society that was forced to re-assess the nature of its relation not only to its own, dramatically different citizens, but also to its former German foes.

But to appreciate the audacity of the Catholic take on post-war trauma, French Catholicism's response to the post-war condition must be seen within the context of other creative reactions to the war, of which surrealism was one. As opposed to what critic Amy Lyford calls the "tradition-bound rhetoric of the return to order"¹²⁶ the surrealists formulated a literary and artistic response to the war that privileged fragmentation, dismemberment, and incoherence rather than trying to heal bodily and mental inconsistencies through philosophic integration.

For the surrealists, the *Gueules cassées* represented an extraordinarily vivid reality of what they were attempting to express in more abstract forms. Revelling in the so-called "aesthetics of dismemberment", surrealists such as Louis Aragon and André Breton (both of whom worked at the Paris hospital for *mutilés de guerre*, Val-de-Grâce) held up the *Gueules cassées* as examples of the horror of war rather than patients who could recover and heal. Mining the gap between trauma and its repair, inter-war surrealism exposed the idealism of post-war reconstruction in such a way as to preserve the war-wounded as

¹²⁶ Amy Lyford, *Surrealist masculinities: gender anxiety and the aesthetics of post-World War I reconstruction in France*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, p.6.

signs of a war that were fast disappearing. By lingering over what could not be reconstructed, the surrealists worked against the grain of a teleological process of healing, commemorating the war through its broken symbols rather than its official monuments.

French Catholicism did not reject surrealism out of hand, just as she had not rejected modernism. Instead, she embraced Catholicism and modernism in synthesis. This was particularly visible in the arts where converts to Catholicism such as Jean Cocteau and Louis Massignon created a realist vision linked to the mystic. Maritain's championing of the homosexual Cocteau proved that cultural instability could lead to the integration of previously polarized notions such as Catholicism and homosexuality, tradition and modernity, and the hybridization of the right-wing and the avant-garde. In literature, the French Catholic novel began to flourish as Maritain and Massis established their new publishing venture the *Roseau d'Or* whose authors were some of the most successful of the interwar period, among them Paul Claudel, Julien Green and Georges Bernanos. By integrating Thomist thought into the literary mainstream, Maritain hoped that the association between Catholicism and the novel would contribute to a spirit of synthesis in the long-term.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Away from the more abstract syntheses of literature and intellectual thought, Catholic reconstruction was made concrete in the form of Catholic activism. Such forms of activism were by no means new; the *Association Catholique de la jeunesse française* had been founded in 1886 with the express intention of evangelizing the young, and the laity more generally. However, the war saw an upsurge in Catholic initiatives with the creation of the Robert Garric's *Equipe Sociale* (destined to recreate the solidarity of the Front during peacetime) and the enormously successful *Scouts de France* in 1920. After the severing of relations with the *Action française* in 1926, Catholic activism adapted to the new, non-partisan party line that was required to heal France gently and without any abrupt movements. Apostolic associationism was what was required and the inception of the *Jeunesse agricole chrétienne* and the *Jeunesse étudiante chrétienne* in 1929 was indicative of this shift in tone. Above all, Catholic activism encouraged a sense of community that reconstructed France's face.

The *Gueules cassées* were evidence, writ large, that France would never be the same again. The “fête de la victoire” in Paris had made it abundantly clear that a new age of violence had dawned with different technologies and different casualties. Reconstructing France’s wounded face would therefore require a synthesis of the old and the new, and an acceptance that some features would never be restored. Amongst what Daniel Sherman calls the “competing narratives” of commemorative and historical discourses in the early 1920s,¹²⁸ the *Gueules cassées* held a privileged place located at the intersection of individual experience and collective memory at a time when memory had not yet crystallized into official history. As a metaphor for post-war France they were emblematic of the commemorative struggle between the horror of war and the promise of reconstruction that persisted throughout a decade of memorial. A religion that stood for the belief in the unseen and the power of miracles, Roman Catholicism was the polar opposite of the triad of positivism, historicism and naturalism that had made up the ideological matrix of the Third Republic. Switching the religion of modernity for the religion of the supernatural and the unseen, France sought to heal her wounded face with a religion that offered order from anarchy. Ironically, a decade once seen as absolute rupture seems to have desired continuities with the past more than any other.

¹²⁸ See Daniel Sherman, *The construction of memory in interwar France*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999, p.134.

Regretful Ruminations: Jacques Rivière's 'L'Allemand'

Mon pauvre livre [...] je le déteste, je l'exècre, et si j'avais seulement un tout petit peu de courage, j'en arrêteraï l'impression [...]¹²⁹

Un livre des plus précieux pour nous aider à résoudre "l'énigme allemande", qui absorbe en ce moment l'attention et fait par instants le désespoir de tous les bons esprits. C'est une analyse psychologique très poussée, mais fondée sur l'expérience, - sur l'expérience la plus authentique, puisque l'auteur a été pendant trois ans prisonnier en Allemagne et qu'il a appris à comprendre le caractère allemand en le subissant. Aucune amertume cependant. Au contraire un grand effort de modération et d'impartialité.¹³⁰

Held captive by the Germans from 1914 to 1917, Jacques Rivière wrote prolifically during his internment.¹³¹ Of this output, his study of the German race, *L'Allemand*, illustrates the unusual dynamics of a consistent encounter with the enemy in a war famed for the faceless enemy of the opposing trench. This encounter produced a text that is extraordinary for the ways in which it disavows the Catholic position of post-war reconstruction at the same time as lamenting the short-sightedness of its nationalism. As I argued in chapter three in relation to the collision between the suffering soldier and the suffering Christ, the autobiographical self disrupts the impulse to interpret war within the eschatological framework, even as its need is most keenly felt. As Leigh Gilmore writes, "the coincidence of trauma and self-representation"¹³² reveals a great deal through the expression of its limits or inconsistencies, the point at which trauma and self-

¹²⁹ *Le dialogue entre Jacques Rivière et Jacques Copeau*, ed. Helen Naughton, Viroflay: Association des Amis de Jacques Rivière et Alain-Fournier, 1982, p.69.

¹³⁰ *Correspondance 1911-1924*, Jacques Rivière, Gaston Gallimard; édition établie, présentée et annotée par Pierre-Edmond Robert avec la collaboration d'Alain Rivière, Paris: Gallimard, p.93.

¹³¹ See Chapter 3 for an analysis of Rivière's *Carnets de Guerre*.

¹³² Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001.

representation no longer coalesce together but rather become antagonistic impulses. This line of reasoning draws upon the now-established work in trauma studies by scholars such as Cathy Caruth.¹³³ Here, I suggest that Rivière's *L'Allemand* represents the complexity of French Catholic writing in the post-war period, encapsulating such problems as the representation of the fully realized Catholic self in the face of war.

In 1916, whilst still interned at Koenigsbrück prisoner-of-war camp in Germany, Rivière wrote an essay entitled "Le Catholicisme et la Société", later published in *A la Trace de Dieu* (1925). In it, he acknowledges the power of Catholicism to penetrate political boundaries "comme un fantôme qu'on ne peut arrêter".¹³⁴ An unstoppable presence, Catholicism finds its apogee in war due to the universality of the Gospel that exceeds nationhood:

Mais il a sur tous les autres cet avantage incomparable, qu'il subsiste même au milieu de la guerre, qu'il se glisse au centre de l'horreur et qu'il y répare encore ce qui peut être réparé. L'Évangile a été prêché à toutes les nations, et tant que l'on reste dans le plan de l'Évangile les nations n'existent plus. (107)

Separating out Péguy's high rhetoric of Catholicism and nationhood, "cette vieille devise que la France est la fille aînée de l'Église" (102), Rivière insists that nationalism is a base instinct rooted in physicality: "Le sentiment national, c'est l'instinct de conservation de nos rudiments psychologiques les plus nus, les plus véritablement initiaux." (103)

Moving towards the pacifist convictions laid out in his fourteenth *carnet de guerre*,

¹³³ See especially Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony*, and Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul*. Taken together, their work explores the myriad possibilities (and problems) of trauma's relationship to testimony.

¹³⁴ Jacques Rivière, "Le Catholicisme et la société" in *A la Trace de Dieu*, Paris: NRF, 1925, p.81. Hereafter cited parenthetically within the text.

Rivière discounts any association between “le sentiment national” and Christianity since a shared conviction of faith or ideology across enemy lines renders its exceptionalism redundant:

La preuve matérielle en est donnée par ce fait, auquel ni le socialiste, ni le catholique ne semblent penser. C’est que, dans la tranchée d’en face, se trouvent à coup sûr un socialiste et un catholique, et qui croient, eux aussi, combattre chacun pour leur cause. Ce seul fait suffirait à décider de l’indépendance absolue du sentiment national et de la foi chrétienne. (104)

Although the essay does not debase nationalism entirely it does condemn the uses of nationalism to incite violence, a fundamentally un-Christian act: “Il peut désirer d’un grand Coeur mourir pour sa patrie, mais il ne peut vouloir sincèrement tuer, vouloir risquer de paraître devant Dieu avec cette tâche effroyable sur la conscience.” (106) The violence of nationalism and God’s love are antagonistic impulses that detract from the fundamental choice between belief and unbelief which the essay concludes as necessary above all other concerns: “C’est bien la seule question” (121).

Given these sentiments, it is curious that at the same time as Rivière was elaborating a philosophy of Catholic pacifism and social action, he was also in the process of writing his inflammatory study of German nature entitled *L’Allemand*, eventually published in the 1919 *Nouvelle revue française* under his own editorship. Far from the high-minded tone of his collected essays, *L’Allemand* publicly airs his vendetta towards his German captors. Divided into two parts, the first “D’après nature” studies the German as he observed him during his three years of daily contact as a prisoner. The second, “A l’en croire” is a commentary on German philosopher Paul Natorp’s articles on

the nature of German genius published in the review *Deutsche Wille des Kunstwarts* in 1915. As the full title of the work – *L’Allemand, souvenirs et réflexions d’un prisonnier de guerre* – suggests, the analysis of German nature is formed, unapologetically, by personal experience. Yet, and as I want to suggest more fully, the second part of the text forms the basis of an appeal to a more objective form of analysis through philosophical reasoning. This tension between subjective and objective perspectives is most apparent in the preface where the will to Catholic social reconstruction and its antipode of nationalistic hatred in the *après-guerre* period are regretfully contemplated by Rivière. More laterally, the text exhibits the obstructive nature of personal experience during a decade of spiritual and cultural “demobilization”.¹³⁵

The 1918 *Avant-Propos* engages the non-imprisoned reader ethically, envisaging a type of reading rooted in empathy. Prisoner, Rivière frames his portrait of German nature as a product of frustration: “Tous les jours j’avais à subir leurs taquineries: il me semblait de bonne guerre de la brandir, en réponse, aux yeux du monde entier”.¹³⁶ Soon after, however, he admits that the wider consequences of publication call into question his authorial responsibility:

Plus généralement, avais-je le droit de contribuer pour si peu que ce fût, à l’augmentation de la haine et de la douleur dans le monde? M’était-il permis d’alimenter de mes remarques ce monstrueux capital, déjà si difficile à liquider?
(9)

¹³⁵ For a broad discussion of the term “cultural demobilization” see John Horne, “Demobilizing the Mind: France and the Legacy of the Great War, 1919-1939” in *A Companion to World War One*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pp. 101-120.

¹³⁶ Jacques Rivière, *L’Allemand, souvenirs et réflexions d’un prisonnier de guerre*, Paris: Gallimard, 1919, p.8. Hereafter cited parenthetically within the text.

By voicing misgiving in a series of rhetorical questions, Rivière opens up a relationship between his experiential self and the reading public that casts the enterprise into doubt. Doubt rendered all the more acute by self-awareness: “En d’autres termes, la vision allemande m’était apparue, non pas bien entendu aussi juste, mais aussi nécessaire que la mienne [...]” (11). By acknowledging the ways in which the text might figuratively dissolve national identities rather than reinforce them, Rivière foregrounds the ways in which the altered subjectivity of the prison-self forms the unstable centre of the text.

Sight, both literal and metaphorical, besets the 1918 *avant-propos*. Opening his remarks with the admission that the text could very easily not have been published – “Les pages qu’on va lire ont bien failli ne jamais voir le jour” (7) - Rivière plays on the precarious conditions of visibility that the circumstances of the work raise and the position of the work as both private repository of frustration and public document. This tension is further amplified by the admission that in making his ideas visible to the world “aux yeux du monde entier” (8) a very personal vision would act as a deserved (“il me semblait de bonne guerre”(8)) punishment for the collective sins of the German people. A punishing vision, Rivière concedes that its insight risks blinding a post-war audience turned towards reconciliation: “[...] qui risquerait ensuite de nous aveugler” (10). Developing further the metaphor of blindness, Rivière edges towards a formulation of nationalism as a form of inescapable bigotry in time of war:

Il ne faut pas dire tout à fait qu’on devient aveugle; la clairvoyance de bien des esprits s’exaspère; mais elle prend un cours circulaire et comme enchanté; elle ne sait plus sortir de l’enceinte magique où une invisible puissance l’a enfermée. (12)

Caught in the blindness of his own nationalism but able to see beyond it with the benefit of hindsight, the *avant-propos* justifies the publication of the text by pre-empting the objections it may raise: “Vais-je ajouter un chapitre à cette littérature féroce et précaire, que je ne puis lire moi-même sans dégoût?” (14). In being alert to the short-sightedness of his enterprise at the same time as presenting an extremely insightful set of reasons for his motives, Rivière makes the case for the text as the vehicle for his emotional survival:

Ceci n'est pas un jugement, une mise en accusation de l'Allemagne, du genre de celles que dressent quotidiennement nos journalistes et nos hommes d'État. On trouvera pas dans mon livre l'appareil solennel de la justice [...] Je ne me place pas à un point de vue transcendant; je fais de l'hygiène, comme on dit. (17)

Anxiety also overwhelms the 1924 preface, made plain in the repeated references to sight as both objective and misleading. Describing the imperfections of his manuscript after a period of reprieve, Rivière condemns its exaggerations and lacunae which appear very clearly to him having revisited it: “[...] ses lacunes, ses exagérations, les préoccupations subjectives qui en compromettent la thèse, m'ont sauté aux yeux avec plus d'évidence encore que je ne m'y attendais.” (i) He goes on to admit that time has altered his perspective on the German race since the end of the war, “Je ne vois clair qu'au contact de la vie” (ii), but concludes that a more protean analysis of the German people would be incompatible with the “portrait ethnique” that he has drawn in the text. Arguing the point further, he insists that a certain amount of distortion is its very condition:

Comme on l'a noté, mon portrait de l'Allemand, c'est aussi un portrait du Français, L'Allemand ici est peint tel que peut le voir (ou plutôt tel que ne peut pas le voir) le Français, - dont apparaissent tous les défauts, toute la nervosité, tous les dégoûts natifs irraisonnés. (iii)

Despite his credentials as literary critic, Rivière admits to a wilful myopia when it comes to German literature which he has neglected to include in his portrait: “Qu’eussé-je vu, si j’eusse été plus distrait de moi-même et plus vacant?” (iv).

Part one, “D’après nature”, is divided into four chapters. Sketching a moral portrait of the German soul based on anecdotal evidence, each chapter concentrates on certain (negative) character traits: “Le manque de crête”; “La morale du possible”; “La vérité c’est tout ce qu’on peut faire croire”; “La volonté et ses miracles”. Essentializing the character traits of the Germans by recalling their primitive nature and their original state of savagery, “Je ne nie pas qu’il soient des barbares” (23), Rivière reproaches the Germans less for their violence or German *Kultur* than for their indifference:

Plus que d’avoir ravagé, pillé, incendié, et massacré, je lui en veux de se résumer si facilement, de se réduire à si peu de chose. Ce que je ne puis lui pardonner, c’est son néant intérieur. (27)

Tormented by the underwhelming sense of German morality, described as second-rate – “Il reste irrémédiablement écolier en morale” (72) – Rivière enumerates instance after instance where the German falls short of any kind of magnanimity. Although their treatment of Russian prisoners inspires fear due to the “tortures incroyables” (80) they carry out, their failure to inspire any kind of moral fear in the hearts of the French inmates is perceived by Rivière as worse still. Morally defunct, but also lacking in intelligence, chapter three constitutes a damning assessment of the German intellect: “[...] il y a chez l’Allemand une sorte d’ignorance congénitale du vrai, qui mérite d’être

étudiée de près” (109) Unabashed by what is morally, or even empirically, right or wrong, the German advances rather by what is possible, or what can be made to appear that way: “Le vrai, c’est tout ce qui peut être rendu vraisemblable” (110). In this way, their invasion of Belgium in 1914 formed part of a strategy of “la morale du possible” just like the bombing of a French Cathedral on Good Friday is tiresome to the Germans but not monstrous:

Son canon à longue portée a eu la sottise d’aller aboutir, le Vendredi Saint, dans une église où il y avait du monde et de faire de la bouillie. C’est ennuyeux; et il est vraiment difficile de se débarbouiller de l’affaire. (123)

Insults aside, Rivière concedes in the fourth chapter of Part One that the Germans should not be totally condemned. Instead, he singles out their extraordinary will or “volonté” as evidence of their wartime efficiency:

La volonté a chez l’Allemand une force et une étendue qui passent de beaucoup l’ordinaire. Elle va partout, elle s’applique a tout, elle opère tout. Elle est infatigable et sans défaut, elle est pratiquement infinie. (129)

Drawing together the threads of earlier chapters, Rivière insists that the German indifference to humanity is what allows them to wage war with ruthless efficiency; German nature is “monstrueusement éduicable”, a moral tabula rasa that grants them the perfect disposition for the indignities of war.

In part two, Rivière switches from the anecdotal material of his time as a prisoner-of-war, his “souvenirs” to his “réflexions”, which he attempts to fashion as an objective study of German nature, concentrating on the German’s “propre génie”. Using German

philosopher Paul Natorp's philosophical treatise on the word *Deutschum* as a comparative yardstick to his own observations, Rivière suggests that his remarks in part one are in line with the observations he made as a prisoner. Leaving aside the dubious objectivity of his enterprise, the very attempt to achieve impartiality through Natorp proves that both the French and the Germans believe in the essentialism of race as a predetermined given apart from the contingencies of the war. Seen from this angle, part two is less an anecdotal tirade continually bolstered by unflattering portraits of the Germans but represents, notionally at least, an earnest attempt to embody the Christian ideals of compassion and peace laid out in the rest of his prison corpus.

Unsurprisingly, once he begins his analysis, objectivity is hard to sustain. Juxtaposing Natorp's theory of race with his own analysis, Rivière soon contests many of Natorp's claims. Taking issue with Natorp's claim that the Germans are a unified race not given to the excesses of individualism but rather bound by a "continuité supérieure" (136), Rivière retorts that this claim springs from "une impuissance analytique" (the title of the second chapter of part two). Building on his allegation of analytical inferiority in the second and third chapters, Rivière claims that the German disregard for the individual leads to a false sense of synthesis "l'esprit d'universelle synthèse" that culminates in a confused melange of rules and logic. Criticizing the way in which Natorp constantly tries to elevate the Germans "au premier rang de la hiérarchie intellectuelle" (145), Rivière does manage to concede that even French philosophers have failed to achieve impartiality due to their wartime propaganda although the spirit of fair play does not last long:

Sans doute, mais chez eux ce fut justement un effet de la guerre. Ce sont gens que la guerre a mis hors d'eux mêmes, a chassé de leur maison; eux aussi en un sens, ils sont des "refugiés". Au contraire, il faut admirer et détester combien le tour pratique donné par Natorp à sa réflexion est naturel. Il n'a même pas eu à le lui donner; elle l'avait déjà; cette serviabilité, c'était son allure spontanée [...] Ce qui chez nous est maladie, chez lui est constitutionnel. (181)

In the chapters that follow, the chasm between the objective and the subjective continues to widen. In keeping with the French wartime view of Kantian philosophy as the harbinger of German aggression, Rivière accuses Kant of having extended the "connaissance de l'Absolu à la loi morale" (191). In this way, the Germans lack the finesse of moral contemplation, or true sophistication; they are "volonté" without intelligence, "organisation" without "contemplation". This observation gathers speed in the penultimate chapter "Culture et barbarie", where a possible German victory is equated with a return to barbarism:

J'ai spécialement pris soin de retenir le plus longtemps possible le gros mot de barbarie. J'ai même condamné l'emploi qu'on en fait couramment pour stigmatiser certains défauts allemands que je crois avoir montrés d'une qualité toute différente. Mais enfin voici le moment arrivé où je ne puis plus m'empêcher de le lâcher [...] même si la révolution du monde par l'Allemagne devaient représenter un progrès matériel positif, je prétends que ce ne pourrait être qu'au prix d'un retour à la plus effrayante barbarie intellectuelle. (201)

On the following page, Rivière defines intellectual barbarism as the inability to recognize excellence. Citing Goethe in an attempt to restore neutrality to his claim (202), he maintains that German barbarianism stems from a total lack of sensitivity to the nuances of humanity. In the final chapter, Rivière returns to the brute force of the German nature in the chapter entitled "La jeunesse de l'Allemand". Condemning further the German will he concludes rhetorically: "Et qu'y a-t-il de moins intéressant que la jeunesse?" (216).

As Pierre Nora suggests in an article entitled “Between Memory and History, Les Lieux de Mémoire” the relationship between French history, memory, and the nation exhibits a curious symbiosis at all stages¹³⁷. The ability of the French to recognize themselves as French, or to know and transmit the essence of Frenchness, is made abundantly clear in *L’Allemand*. As the literary product of resistance, *L’Allemand* draws upon certain myths of Frenchness that see the French as the embattled defenders of their territory; myths that grew out of the commune in 1870 and were cemented by the French at Verdun¹³⁸. By conjuring a national self-consciousness, or an imagined community of the French beyond his prison walls, Rivière was able to retaliate against his German aggressors by inscribing his individual experience into a broader narrative of moral superiority, an issue that becomes nationalized in the process. We should not be surprised that, in wartime, nationalism became the dominant lens for interpreting the position of the self.¹³⁹

What is unusual, however, is the way in which *L’Allemand* ironically reproduces in its content a model of history that Rivière sought to supersede in his other prison writings. Where then, to place the text in the wider corpus of Rivière’s work? And how can we explain the anomaly that the work represents within the context of his avowed

¹³⁷ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History, Les Lieux de Mémoire”, *Representations*, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring, 1989), pp.7-26.

¹³⁸ For a well-informed discussion on the importance of history to the French and the ways in which the Great War interrupted the dominant historical narrative in French history books written for children, see Anne-Louise Shapiro, “Fixing History: Narratives of World War One in France”, *History and Theory*, Vol. 36, No. 4, Theme Issue 36: Producing the Past: Making Histories Inside and Outside the Academy (Dec., 1997), pp. 111-130.

¹³⁹ See Thomas Scheff, *Bloody Revenge: Emotions, Nationalism, and War*, Oxford: 1994. Equally, chapter two of this dissertation engages with the issue of French nationalism and Catholicism in the case of Léon Bloy and Paul Claudel, amongst others.

aims for peace and reconstruction as evinced in his writing on Catholicism and society? The mixed reaction to the text by high-profile literary and philosophical figures in France such as André Gide and the French Catholic Gabriel Marcel proves that the publication of the text in the post-war moment was as divisive as it was cohesive. Gide saw in it a portrait not of the Germans but of Rivière himself: “l’intérêt que l’on prend à vous lire, vient, sans doute, de ce que, souvent, en peignant l’Allemand et en vous opposant à lui, vous vous peignez du même-coup vous-même”,¹⁴⁰ while Marcel enthusiastically saluted its publication as confirmation of the “foncière plasticité” of the Teuton nature. Given the mixed critical response to the book from all corners of the literary establishment and, most confusingly, from Rivière himself, I propose that *L’Allemand* represents the ambiguity of the *après-guerre* period, what Anne-Louise Shapiro terms the “crisis of historical thinking”¹⁴¹. This is not a new idea; critics of the First World War from Paul Fussell to Jay Winter have, in their separate ways, posited the war as a “crisis of consciousness”. However, more nuanced than the ubiquitous “crisis of consciousness” that greeted the war is the manner in which the text asserts dominant – and perhaps dying – beliefs about national identity, both French and German, at the same time as asserting their demise. Such instability surrounding national identity speaks directly to the ambiguities of the interwar period, encapsulated by the plight of the *Gueules cassées* at Versailles in 1919. As Shapiro goes on to observe, the alignment between national identity and national mission became difficult to entangle in the post-war period as the commitment to patriotism was harder to defend: “The effects of unrestrained patriotism seemed readily and horrifically apparent; at the same time, it seemed evident that the

¹⁴⁰Yael Dagan, *La Nouvelle Revue française entre guerre et paix 1914-1925*, Paris: Tallandier, 2008, p.168.

¹⁴¹*Op.cit.*, p.117.

nation needed some renewed, acceptable sense of itself in order to begin the process of emotional and physical recovery.”¹⁴²

Rivière announces the failures of his project before the reader has had a chance to encounter them. Instead of interpreting the venture as an exercise in guilt as Yael Dagan has done¹⁴³, I want to argue for the text as an important meditation on history itself that proliferates contradictions rather than erasing them. Through the inclusion of his regrets surrounding the publication in both the 1918 and 1924 prefaces, Rivière foregrounds the difficulty in providing a war narrative that can “fix” history into categories of national identity. Equally, in contrasting his own subjective and anecdotal evidence of German nature from the perspective of the oppressed French prisoner with a portrait of the German nature written by a German, Rivière points to the impossibility of providing any kind of “objective” narrative, even if the intention is there. The juxtaposition of experience with analysis thus invokes the historian’s task of sifting through different accounts of the same phenomenon in order to achieve impartiality, however elusive that may prove to be. By allowing the account to be multi-vocal through the inclusion of Natorp’s perspective, Rivière seems to signal the ways in which the solidifying of historical narrative around essentialism or fixed characteristics such as those of national identity will always disappoint. Implicit, then, in Rivière’s decision to publish both his “souvenirs” and his “reflexions” is the recognition that the war experience must engage with the contradictions of the process of narrating an historical moment.

¹⁴² *Op.cit.*, p.118.

¹⁴³ Yaël Dagan provides a comprehensive analysis of *L’Allemand*, eventually concluding (with the help of psychoanalytic theory) that wartime guilt for not having fought on the Front Line was a deciding factor in the text’s genesis: “La culpabilité joue un rôle central dans le fonctionnement de Rivière” (175).

Satanic visions: Bernanos's 'Sous le Soleil de Satan'

In a 1926 interview following the publication of his novel *Sous le Soleil de Satan*, Bernanos classed the book as “[...] un des livres nés de la guerre”¹⁴⁴. Containing not one reference to the now familiar topoi of First World War letters – mud, trenches, barbed-wire – this classification might at first seem strange. Yet Bernanos was preoccupied with another, spiritual, form of combat that was the product of a post-war period that he condemned as “insupportable”:

Je m’y suis engagé à fond. Je m’y suis totalement donné. D’ailleurs, je l’ai commencé peu de mois après l’armistice. Le visage du monde avait été féroce. Il devenait hideux. La détente universelle était un spectacle insurmontable. Traqué pendant cinq ans, la meute horrible enfin dépitée, l’animal humain rentré au gîte au bout des forces, lâchait son ventre et évacuait l’eau fade de l’idéalisme puritain. Lequel de nous ne se sentit alors totalement dépossédé? (1039)

Both personal and political in its response, Bernanos sought to provide a spiritual framework for understanding the vast sacrifice of the war, now democratized into meaninglessness:

Les mots les plus sûrs étaient pipés. Les plus grands étaient vides, claquaient dans la main. On traitait communément, je ne dis même pas de héros, mais de saint, l’adjudant réengagé, tué par hasard au créneau. La douleur et la mort étaient devenues une espèce de monopole d’État. La patrie divinisée recevait de l’encens de tous les cultes, - comme si le règne dont l’oraison dominicale implore l’avènement était celui de la Démocratie Universelle. (1040)

¹⁴⁴Interview with Frédéric Lefèvre (1926), *Essais et écrits de combat*, Paris: Gallimard, 1971-1995, pp.1039-1055. Hereafter cited parenthetically within the text.

For Bernanos, the language of civic remembrance had parodied the divine connotations of sainthood, claiming for itself the sacred mysteries of death and pain as the apotheoses of universalized democracy. Furthermore, monuments erected to the memory of those who had died in the war were nothing more than a gross pun:

Ah! Qu'avons-nous donné, qu'avons-nous donné à tant de malheureux, irréparablement déçus, maintenant soulevés de haine. Une équivoque. Quelque chose comme un calembour sacrilège. Ce calembour, il est coulé en bronze ou sculpté dans une pierre au Carrefour de nos villages – le poilu pressé sur la poitrine d'une fille aux fortes mamelles qui a des ailes de zinc dans le dos. Des ailes de zinc! (1040)

As an antidote to the hollow rhetoric of nationalized postwar reconstruction, Bernanos offered the language of authenticity to prevent the solemn lessons of the war being lost in triviality, “dans une immense gaudriole” (1040). Reviving the Manichaeic dichotomies of good and evil in his fictional incarnations of Satan and Donissan, Bernanos sought to re-instill meaning through Donissan's stark sacrifice:

Je désirais simplement, mais passionnément, j'avais passionnément besoin – de fixer ma pensée, comme on lève une cime dans le ciel, sur un homme surnaturel dont le sacrifice exemplaire, total, nous restituerait un par un chacun de ces mots sacrés dont nous craignons d'avoir perdu le sens. Je ne demandais pas à mon saint des émotions esthétiques, mais des leçons. (1043)

Sous le Soleil de Satan is a triptych of despair. The adolescent Germaine Mallorthy (Mouchette), bored with provincial life, seeks adventure through an affair with a local aristocrat, Cadignan. Rejected by her lover after she becomes pregnant, Mouchette takes her revenge by killing him in an act designed to look like suicide despite the revelations from Mouchette herself, ignored by the community that now considers her to

be demented. The second part of the novel introduces a humble, young country priest Abbé Donissan, given to excesses of asceticism that worry his superiors. One night, while walking through the bleak countryside, he becomes lost and finds himself engaged in conversation with a horse-trader. With horror, Donissan soon realizes that he is speaking to the Devil himself. At the encounter's close, the Devil bestows on Donissan the power to read souls. Shortly afterwards, Donissan meets Mouchette. Through the power bestowed upon him he leads her to acknowledge the sin of her murderous secret. Finding no way out of despair once she has aired her sin, Mouchette kills herself, but not before asking to be taken to the church where Donissan lays her before the altar to the scandal of the other parishioners. In the third and final part of the novel, the reader meets Donissan again after an ellipsis of many years. Following a period of seclusion imposed upon him by his superiors for the scandal that Mouchette caused, he is now the venerated Curé de Lumbres whom pilgrims and penitents all over France seek out for counsel. Still anguished by what he sees as the triumph of the Devil over humanity, Donissan knows that his perspicacity into the souls of others will be at the expense of his own damnation. After an attempt to raise a child from the dead, in which he asks a miracle of God as a sign of his power over Satan, the Saint of Lumbres recognizes his earthly presumption in attempting to bargain with God. The child stirs but soon falls back on the bed and dies whereupon Donissan rushes to the confessional, only to be found some time later having died from a heart attack.

Sous le Soleil de Satan embodies a radically different response to the First World War than the polarized views of the war as either triumphal or meaningless.¹⁴⁵ Rather than rejecting these tropes out of hand, however, the novel instead responds to them with the clarity of a symbolic language rooted in a triune God that could answer what critic Omer Bartov calls the “confusion and unclarity” of the war. In creating his first “l’homme du surnaturel”¹⁴⁶, Bernanos brought the mystery of evil – writ large on the battlefields of the First World War – into stark relief. Since the spectacle of millions of dead was beyond rational belief, Bernanos was moved to come forward, as he put it, as a witness to evil’s intent: “Je n’aurai pas voulu mourir sans témoigner.”¹⁴⁷ Confronted with the absurdity of vast sacrifice in the trenches, Bernanos found solace in the redemptive power of sacrifice, in which human and divine suffering are welded together:

Entre Satan et Lui, Dieu nous jette, comme son dernier rempart. C’est à travers nous que depuis des siècles la même haine cherche à l’atteindre, c’est dans la pauvre chair humaine que l’ineffable meurtre est consommé.¹⁴⁸ (244-5)

¹⁴⁵ Omer Bartov’s summary of English, French and German war literature is as follows: “In most post-1918 Western countries, such as Britain, France, Germany, and Italy, one can easily recognize two views of war. The first focused on war as a great national and personal experience, and in its more fascist version wished to do away with the distinction between war and peace, the military and the civilian spheres, the professions of soldier and worker. It idealized the community of battle and hoped to recreate the same imagined solidarity of soldiers among all sectors of society. The second was ostensibly the opposite, based on the disillusionment experienced by those who had confronted the realities of modern war. It depicted war as a meaningless, hopeless, monstrous event, where primitive conditions and base instincts combined with modern industrial techniques and organization to create an endless cycle of guns and victims, production and destruction.” Omer Bartov, “Martyrs’ Vengeance: Memory, Trauma, and Fear of War in France 1918-40”, *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques*, Vol. 22, No. 1, The French Defeat of 1940: Reassessments (Winter 1996), pp. 47-76.

¹⁴⁶ For a full definition of this term in relation to Bernanos’s corpus, see Monique Gosselin-Noat’s excellent study, *Bernanos: romancier du surnaturel*, Paris: Pierre Guillaume de Roux, 2015.

¹⁴⁷ *Op.cit.*, p.1040.

¹⁴⁸ Georges Bernanos, *Sous le Soleil de Satan*, Paris: Plon, 1926, pp.244-5. Hereafter cited parenthetically within the text.

Published in the same year as the Vatican broke with Maurras's *Action française* and the Catholic Church in France continued to seek an uneasy rapprochement with the Republic, *Sous le Soleil* is unapologetic in its intransigent Catholicism. In no way diluted by the civic religion of remembrance¹⁴⁹ that had taken hold in the immediate aftermath of the war¹⁵⁰, even the novel's title signals the uncompromising nature of evil in its biblical incarnation of Satan.¹⁵¹ By situating the world under Satan's sun, Bernanos conceived of an earthly reality that had undergone a monstrous inversion; far from the "soleil divin" that l'abbé Menou-Sengrais evokes in his discussions with Donissan, the satanic sun can only be overcome through a form of cosmic redemption that recalls Christ's Passion.¹⁵² Bathed in the sinister light of Satan's "astre noir", many of the novel's key scenes are nocturnal: Mouchette kills her lover Cadignan at "l'heure crépusculaire" and arrives at doctor Gallet's house to give birth to the child during the dead of night. Most symbolically, the encounter with the Prince of Darkness himself takes place in total darkness: "Les ténèbres étaient si épaisses, que, si loin qu'il portait son regard, il ne découvrait non seulement aucune clarté, mais aucun reflet [...]" (120). At the novel's close, Donissan is found dead at nightfall after his final struggle with the devil.

As his 1927 essay entitled "Une vision Catholique du réel" illustrates, Bernanos sought to create a supernatural vision, "une aventure mystique", that could reinvest post-

¹⁴⁹ See Ivan Strenski, *Contesting sacrifice: religion, nationalism, and social thought in France*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

¹⁵⁰ In line with Bruno Cabanes's *La victoire endeillée: la sortie de guerre des soldats français, 1918-1920*, Paris: Seuil, 2014, I define this period as spanning from 1918 to 1920.

¹⁵¹ The title's apocalyptic overtones should be placed within the context of Donissan's meditation on Satan after their encounter in part two: "Connaître pour détruire, et renouveler dans la destruction sa connaissance et son désir – O soleil de Satan! – désir du néant recherché pour lui-même, abominable effusion du cœur." (197)

¹⁵² The divine sunlight of God's grace is a recurrent theme throughout the Bernanosian corpus. It reappears in his 1938 *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune*.

war language with authenticity after the casualties inflicted to meaning during the war. Throughout the novel, language is suspected of falsehood; Satan is “le suborneur subtil, avec sa langue dorée” (283) and the academic Saint-Marin who comes to observe Le Curé de Lumbres in part three is the very emblem of inauthenticity with his “bouche artificieuse” (253). In contrast, Donissan is characterized by “son sens aigu du réel” (117). What is abundantly real about the world is the presence of evil, of Satan himself, for Bernanos perhaps the least fictional of the novel’s characters:

Poser le problème de Satan, c’est poser le problème du Mal, c’est poser un de ces problèmes qu’on ne peut espérer résoudre sans offenser beaucoup de monde... Mais que dire des romanciers qui l’esquivent, alors qu’il font justement le métier de décrire et d’analyser minutieusement les passions?¹⁵³

The realist school¹⁵⁴ ignores the problem of *le Mal* at its own risk; representing a theological paradox since Satan is traditionally seen as the epitome of non-being, “ad non esse” in Augustinian thought. Thus, whilst Satan appears in concrete form, Donissan struggles to set down the miracle of his spiritual experience: “Il écrit, rature, déchire. Mais à mesure qu’il en fixe le détail sur le papier, sa miraculeuse aventure se dissipe dans son esprit, s’efface.” (244) Offering a pessimistic vision where Satan is more apparent than God, Bernanos seems to offer no guarantee of salvation since even Donissan, with his sense of what is real (or more accurately, what is divine) doubts that God will triumph: “Nous sommes vaincus” (129) whilst at the same time being certain of an

¹⁵³ Georges Bernanos, “Une vision Catholique du réel” in *Essais et écrits de combat*, Paris: Gallimard, 1971-1995, p.1085.

¹⁵⁴ Here I use the stock literary definition of realism as that which recalls both the realist and naturalist traditions in literature typified by the nineteenth-century French novels of Flaubert and, later, Zola who sought to depict reality through the minutiae of social and scientific plausibility.

ineffable divine presence: “Donissan connut que cette insaisissable joie était une présence [...]” (100).

As Stephen Schloesser explores in his work on post-war French Catholicism, the keyword for the generation who had fought in the trenches and survived was “realism”, or the attempt to grasp what was at the “heart of the matter”. But this was no easy task:

And yet it was a complicated realism, for perhaps the most distinctive self-expression of this post-war epoch was *sur-réalisme* – a hybrid of waking reality and a more authentic reality: the world of dreams, hopes and hallucinations [...] This cultural project of forging dialectical realisms marks what is essential in the history of France in the 1920s [...] Within this larger spectrum of new realisms, a self-identified ‘post-war generation’ of Catholics could find a niche for their own retrieval of ancient dialectics, variously called ‘Christian realism’, ‘integral realism’, or ‘mystic realism’.¹⁵⁵

Equally, as Helena Tomko has written in her study on “sacramental realism” and its bearings on the work of German Catholic writer Gertrude Le Fort, what differentiates this kind of realism from its modern and secular counterparts is a separate understanding of “reality, of nature and its relationship to supernature”¹⁵⁶:

For the Christian believer, the verisimilitude of the material realm is important but can tell only one part of a given tale, which instead resonates beyond the immediate and into the eternal [...] The consequence of this multidimensionality is that ‘sacramental realism’ in literature will be inherently paradoxical: How does the writer know how to depict the unknowable? How can she or he imagine the unimaginable? How are modern prose, and concomitantly modern verse, affected by these divine demands placed upon them?¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ *Op.cit.*, p.108.

¹⁵⁶ Helena M. Tomko, *Sacramental realism: Gertrud von le Fort and German Catholic literature in the Weimar Republic and Third Reich (1924-46)*, p.1.

¹⁵⁷ *Op.cit.*, p.1.

Tomko draws attention to the paradoxical nature of the realist project seen through the Catholic lens, prompting the question of whether Le Fort and her contemporaries such as Bernanos ever fully came to terms with the contours of their own realism. Christian realism posits two different but interdependent postulations, the first being that the drama of creation, sin and redemption are beyond experience, the second being the way in which these mysteries form the framework for everyday existence¹⁵⁸. For Bernanos, who made repeated reference in his non-fiction writings to the impoverished realism of the post-war period that ignored the mystery of the unseen as an explanatory tool for the chaos of demobilization, sacramental realism, or a narrative strategy that is paradoxical at its core, fits the complicated nature of the novel's project.

The novel negotiates the competing demands of sacramental realism in several ways. As Schloesser observes, this rendering of reality is far from simple. Making no apology for the silence of God, the text multiplies the instances of muteness and discontinuity; Donissan is crudely aware of Satan but is never able to fix this into language, "Il emporte en lui cette chose qu'il ne peut nommer, [...], Satan" (199). Equally, the narrative undergoes a series of narrative jolts created by the narrator's questioning tone: "Quel doute la retint un moment encore immobile? Et surtout pourquoi prononça-t-elle d'autres paroles?" (149). More mystical than realist, the novel delights in tantalizing silence, in the exposition of what is absent rather than present. In another form of substitution, *Sous le Soleil* emblemizes the unseen through its protagonists. As Eric

¹⁵⁸ For a detailed discussion on the ethics of Christian realism with reference to Ronald Niebuhr's seminal work on the topic, see Robin W. Lovin's article "Christian Realism: A Legacy and its Future", *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, Vol. 20 (2000), pp. 3-18, p.6.

Benoît notes in his comprehensive analysis of the novel¹⁵⁹, the central characters symbolize the supernatural in ways that language can only gesture to indirectly. Thus, Mouchette symbolizes humanity's depravity and the potential for salvation just as the dead child that Donissan fails to raise from the dead allegorizes the horror of death without the promise of the resurrection. In a world torn asunder, the novel's incipit by Baudelaire indicates the agony of man's dual attraction to both God and the Devil.

Famous for his mistrust of the modern world, of language, and of literary posturing in general, Bernanos cuts a fairly typical figure in the network of Catholic intellectuals that characterize the *renouveau catholique*¹⁶⁰. Yet despite the intransigence of his theological position, *Sous le Soleil de Satan* demonstrates a willingness to respond to the conditions of the postwar period in a radical way, offering a response that is both modern and eternal in its metaphorical reach. In responding to the First World War with what William James has called the "reality of the unseen"¹⁶¹, Bernanos reaffirmed the existence of Good, Evil, Sin and Redemption in a world that had lost sight of its moral boundaries. To apprehend the problem of evil in the world is not, Bernanos insists, simply a question of allegory or symbolism, of a sanitized version of evil:

Le mal peut bien pénétrer dans notre petite vie en détail sans que nous en soyons incommodés; au lieu que d'y introduire la notion surnaturelle et universelle du Mal risque de la bouleverser de fond en comble. Bref nous observerons toujours avec intérêt le Mal découpé en menus morceaux, soigneusement étiquetés et numérotés, mais nous n'en demandons pas plus.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ See Eric Benoît, *Bernanos, littérature et théologie*, Paris: Cerf, 2013.

¹⁶⁰ Léon Bloy's two novels and collected journals characterize the same intransigent Catholicism. See Chapter Two for an in depth analysis of Bloy's Catholicism.

¹⁶¹ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 2004, p.58.

¹⁶² *Op.cit.*, p.1084.

A psychology in which evil is simply an erroneous judgment, one in which we may explain the nature of evil in scientific ways can in no way account for the experience of evil during the First World War. In line with Baudelaire, and later Gide in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, Bernanos suggests that Satan's most powerful characteristic is his ability to remain unseen. As a corrective to the unseen nature of evil, running amok in the mediocrity of bourgeois Catholicism, Bernanos created a concrete vision of Satan that could validate the nature of evil that he had witnessed during the war. However, to interpret *Sous le Soleil* as an exploration of *le Mal* alone would be to ignore evil's vital corollary, grace. Accused of being "[un] explorateur de la terre des ténèbres"¹⁶³, the workings of grace in both Donissan and Mouchette are evidence of the binary of evil, the presence of God and the promise of the resurrection. Disenchanted with the world as Bernanos saw it, but enchanted by God's ineffable grace, *Sous le Soleil* speaks to the urgency with which Catholicism was sought and the complexity of its response in the postwar period.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this chapter I considered the ways in which the *Gueules cassées* were the embodiment of the ambiguous nature of French victory. Invoking their unprecedented wounds as symbols of both trauma and healing, this chapter has uncovered the same opposing directions in the French Catholic intellectual response to a demobilized France. The French Catholic intellectuals and thinkers considered in this final chapter were all, in different ways, engaged in the process of re-imagining France

¹⁶³ *Op.cit.*, p.1081.

through the Catholic lens. Acknowledging that the war had, to use Scarry's term, "unmade" the world, they nonetheless believed that Catholicism could "remake" it through reconciliation and the hope of the resurrection implicit in the Christian narrative. However, despite the clarity of their response to the war with its avowed need to respond with a language that was both centuries old yet radically new, it has been my proposition throughout that this vision of postwar reconstruction is undercut in their works by an unavoidable despair. Pursuing the point at which the personal experience of war and the doctrinal position collides - and frequently collapses - this chapter has asked such questions as: in the case of Rivière, was forgiveness of the German enemy ever truly possible? Or, in relation to Bernanos, was the ideal of redemption purely metaphysical or could it be applied in more terrestrial ways? What was the price of victory? What do heroes look like?

In her 2009 study *Reconstructing the Body*, Anna Carden-Coyne explores the ways in which classical motifs function in a post-war world. Proposing that classicism provided a "healing aesthetic" by delivering implicit messages of restoration and resilience, Carden-Coyne suggests that after the war there was a need to embrace representational strategies that were the antithesis, rather than the apogee, of modernism. In the same way, I have highlighted the manner in which the French Catholic position in the 1920s, with its emphasis on neo-Thomism, was radical for its insistence on certain eternal and unchanging forms. However, as I have shown in relation to Bernanos's realist strategy, French Catholics (despite prima facie appearances) did not reject modernism entirely but recognized the mutual reciprocity of Catholicism and modernity, either

aesthetically in the case of Bernanos's "vision du réel", or politically, in the case of Rivière's internationalism. In line with other scholars of this cultural and historical moment,¹⁶⁴ my analyses of Rivière and Bernanos have demonstrated that the division between traditional and progressive cultural practices is hard to defend during this period. Although the modern and the Catholic had been set in opposing positions during the Third Republic, here I argue that this distinction was contested by Catholicism if not during the war years themselves, then certainly after the war had ended. After the guns had stopped, Catholicism was no longer simply (if indeed it had ever been) a retreat to the distant Christian past. In the postwar era, demands placed upon Catholicism changed as the imperative towards reconstruction, driven by the horrifying sight of victims such as the *Gueules cassées*, asked the French people to forgive the indignities of war whilst also reminding them of the spiritual gravity of what had taken place. The continuum established between these two modes reveals that the despair evident in French Catholic writing after the war was interlocked with the search for reconstruction and healing.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ See Andrew Frayn, *Writing disenchantment: British First World War prose, 1914-30*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014, and Anna Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the body: classicism, modernism, and the First World War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

¹⁶⁵ The slippage between the rhetoric of reconstruction and that of abjection in the Catholic intellectual network in the 1920s is mirrored in the chaotic political fortunes of the Catholic Church after *Action française* was condemned by the Vatican in 1926.

Epilogue

In recent years, cultural historians in both the British and French traditions have been working on what they have called a process of destruction, one designed to tear down the now calcified history of the Great War. This history recounts the familiar story of the infantry soldier. Posted to the Front Line, the story of the French *poilu* vacillates between the unbearable stasis of the subterranean trench and the frenzied tumult of short but intense periods of combat. In a series of now familiar images, the *poilu*'s narrative is punctuated by the sinister sound of shells passing overhead and the slow march through the unrelenting rain and mud of the Picardy fields. It is a story of heroic but ultimately futile endurance in which the *poilu* fights with honour formed out of a mistaken sense of patriotism and an urgent need to maintain solidarity with his fallen comrades.

The construction of this narrative, with its now iconic references – Wilfred Owen's "The poetry is in the pity" for example - has much to do with the popularity and experiential authority of a number of war novels which quickly became canonized in the French post war period. This codified narrative, evident in novels such as Henri Barbusse's *Le Feu* and Roland Dorgelès's *Les Croix de bois*, became the lens through which soldiers and civilians alike interpreted the Great War. Such novels sought to provide a corrective to the discredited official accounts of the war offered by politicians and statesmen. They reflect, collectively, a firm belief that only those who were there could apprehend and convey the reality of a war that seemed to them "beyond words", an impulse cemented by Jean Norton-Cru's seminal *Du témoignage*. But literature did not

singlehandedly reinforce this vision. As scholars such as Daniel Sherman have noted, ceremonies of commemoration both preserved and reinforced the war story. Attempting to endow the war's cataclysmic losses with meaning, commemorative practices made the *poilu* the central figure, distilling the ineffable sense of sacrifice into the figure of the footsoldier, familiar to all, lost to a few.

In light of these arguments, my dissertation has been written with the aim of restoring a core element of the war story that has been hiding, almost in plain sight. It is my contention that French Catholicism radically alters our perception of several key features of the war myth in profound ways. These features of the myth – heroic enthusiasm, violence, sorrow and mourning – are addressed in each of the four chapters in this study. Although I have been careful to emphasize the magnitude of the war's losses, I have insisted that it is misleading to think of the war in terms of the usual binaries: victim versus aggressor, belligerent versus pacifist, disillusionment versus hope. Forged through a synthesis of Catholic dogma, patriotic sentiment and resistance to encroaching secularization, the French Catholic revivalists' response to the conflict forces us to reconsider the culture of the Great War in its mythologized form. As I have illustrated with reference to the key players of the French Catholic revival, war culture was not simply vertical, produced by propaganda dispensed from the authorities above, nor was it simply an ad hoc response to the conditions of war, as the oft-cited *Union Sacrée* of 1914 would have us believe. Rather, the French Catholic revivalists' response to war was horizontal, often disregarding official dictates from the French episcopate and stretching far back into the imaginary of the Christian past. In the post-war period in

particular, the synthesis with which the French Catholic revivalists confronted the devastation of war represents an extraordinarily radical response to war that aligns a once antiquated system of thought with some of the most avant-garde reactions to the wasteland that confronted France once the Armistice had been declared.

It may be instructive to look at Henri Ghéon's *L'homme né de la guerre* for some perspective on these issues. I cite it to raise questions about what we know, when we knew it, and how this knowledge might change the ways we understand the past and its hold on the present. A lapsed Catholic (and associate of Gide's) before the war, Ghéon's experience of the Front Line as a military doctor produced a spiritual epiphany that sliced his life in two. Dedicating his work to the "compagnons de ma vie mauvaise"¹⁶⁶, Ghéon cites his re-engagement with Catholicism as evidence of God's extraordinary grace, exhorting others to do the same: "Vos cœurs n'en sont pas plus indignes que n'en était le mien. Dieu veut le refaire pour vous." (2) Opening out this dedication to fellow Catholic, hero and Saint Dominique-Pierre Dupouey, Ghéon aligns his war sacrifice with the Passion and resurrection of Christ:

Et je dédie le récit de ma conversion à DOMINIQUE-PIERRE DUPOUEY
HÉROS ET SAINT qui m'apparut un matin de bataille; qui échangea quelques
paroles et quelques regards avec moi; qui tomba sur l'Yser à la veille de Pâques en
l'année sanglante 1915, pour participer pleinement à la Résurrection de son Maître
et, m'entraînant dans son sillage lumineux, me réapprendre la prière après plus de
vingt ans d'oubli et changer dans ma bouche le goût de la vie. (2)

These prefatory dedications offer a great deal of insight into the revivalists' vision of the First World War. Eliding his own conversion with an heroic exemplar, Dupouey, and

¹⁶⁶*L'homme né de la guerre : témoignage d'un converti : Yser-Artois 1915*, Paris: NRF, 1919, p.2.

latterly likening Dupouey's death to Christ's, Ghéon moves beyond the strict experiential testimony of realist war narratives calling up a storehouse of symbolic associations that anchor the First World War to the personal experience of conversion at the same time as universalizing this experience as an eschatological staging post in the Second Coming of Christ. As I have argued throughout this study, such a perspective re-orient's our perspective of the war, emphasizing the deep continuities with the Christian past rather than the mechanized vision of rupture and discontinuity that often accompanies any description of the Great War. Forgotten narratives such as Ghéon's underline the need to look at devotional texts that presented a third way, one that could absorb the experience of the war in ways that empiricism and liberalism could not. Furthermore, these texts demonstrate the inadequacy of the single metanarrative that has dominated histories of the war.

But identifying new perspectives can only take us so far. If the field of First World War studies is in the process of splitting open the dominant narrative of the conflict then how can this knowledge be brought forward to produce new histories? Studies such as Stephen Schloesser's *Jazz Age Catholicism* show how Catholicism helped to make sense of the unthinkable trauma of the First World War, engaging the Great War with theories of trauma and mourning, a field previously dominated by Holocaust Studies. But questions remain. If, as Schloesser suggests, the Catholic imagination helped make sense of the war, how would the discovery of this observation revise an understanding of the nexus of trauma, memory and conflict? Perhaps it is only by foregrounding the multiple, transnational, perspectives of Catholicism's relationship to

the Great War that we can begin to identify with greater analytic precision the powerful vector of Catholicism, work already underway by scholars such as Patrick J. Houlihan.

The centenary commemorations of the First World War force us to consider the resonance of the conflict in contemporary society. In looking anew at the Great War it seems important to ask why the war is experienced, paradoxically, with a sense of estrangement and proximity. As France suffers the deleterious effects of religion and war on her soil once more, new insights into the way religious consciousness changed during the twentieth century and how the pivotal period 1914–1918 connects intimately with contemporary realities must be made.

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