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THE NOVELS OF ROBERT MERLE

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The Novels of Robert Merle*

The novels** examine the situation of twentieth-century man as a member of the social or political group. The problem of individual responsibility is central, and its examination entails discussion of the motivation and effect of action.

In most of the novels attention is concentrated on a small group of characters in a clearly-defined historical context. The group are subjected to stress, usually caused by conflict, and their true nature emerges: a few revel in anarchy, but most long for a return to routine. It is through the leader, who is an intellectual, that these attitudes are channelled into progress. Individual responsibility is thus complicated by responsibility for the welfare of the group.

Just as the construction of the novels is manipulated so that setting, character and situation highlight the predicament of the central figure, so every aspect of expression is subordinated to the exposition of the theme. The novelist's control of the narrative is achieved by means of acceleration and climax, and his use of imagery and coincidence enables the reader to appreciate the significance of his commentary. At the same time, the reader may be involved in the action by means of the interior monologue or the use of first-person narration. The novels are therefore significant both as fiction, because of their exciting story development, and as fables, because of the evident manipulation of the narration for a purpose.

The conclusions reached in the novels are not always optimistic. The stress on the importance of individual commitment is balanced by the discouraging view of a society in which the uninterested, the ineffective and the selfish form the majority. The question of how far this majority should be directed raises the problem of whether true democracy may ever be achieved. The novels emphasise the importance of communication and compromise in the formation of a powerful group.

* abstract of an M.A. thesis submitted by E.B.Boyd, 1975

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Week-end à Zuydcoote, Gallimard, 1949;
La Mort Est Non Métier, Gallimard, 1952;
L'Île, Gallimard, 1962;
Un Animal Doué de Raison, Gallimard, 1967;
Derrière La Vitre, Gallimard, 1970;
Malevil, Gallimard 1972.

CHAPTER ONE

THE NOVELIST AND THE NOVELS

Robert Merle was born at Tébessa, in Algeria, in 1908. His father, an officer and Arabic interpreter, died in the Dardanelles in 1916, and two years later Merle came to Paris, where he attended the lycées Condorcet, Michelet and Louis-le-Grand. He continued his studies at the Sorbonne and gained his agrégation in English in 1933. From the age of eighteen, he spent his holidays in England, and he is completely bilingual.

His doctorate thesis on Oscar Wilde was completed in 1939, just before mobilisation. He served as a liaison officer with the British Expeditionary Force, and was taken prisoner at Dunkirk. During his three years as a prisoner of war, he conceived the idea of a novel about Dunkirk. Week-end à Kaydcoote, which was awarded the Prix Goncourt in 1949, contains many reminiscences by both Merle himself and his fellow-prisoners.

In 1944 Merle became professor of English Literature at the University of Rennes. Here his involvement with les Jeunes Comédiens encouraged him to write for the theatre. The first volume of three plays was published in 1950, but the second did not appear until 1957. Meanwhile, Merle had a year's study-leave (1950-1) and in 1952 produced La Mort Est Mon Métier, a novel based on the life of Rudolf Hoess, Commandant of Auschwitz.

The next ten years brought Merle chairs at the University of Toulouse (1957) and at the University of Caen-Rouen (1960), but were almost devoid of literary output. A translation of Swift's Gulliver's Travels appeared from 1956 to 1960, and a biography, Vittoria, Princesse Orsini, in 1959. The latter betrays a continuing fascination with Webster's The White Devil, of which Merle had published a translation in 1950, the same year as the publication of his play, Flaminéo, where the main emphasis is on the evil nature of Flaminéo himself.

The 'fifties also showed Merle's continuing preoccupation with Oscar Wilde - the thesis had been published in 1948. An

article in Les Temps Modernes, "Encore Wilde", in 1951, deals with the apparent injustice of Wilde's prison sentence, and the twin themes of contradiction and inequality are expanded in Oscar Wilde ou la 'Destinée' de l'Homosexuel, published in 1955. Here Merle examines the plight of Wilde in the general context of religious conversion, and with particular reference to the homosexual's frequently suicidal logic. A further work on Wilde was published in 1957 by Editions Universitaires. Two of Wilde's works have appeared in editions for students, with introduction and commentary by Merle: The Importance of Being Earnest (1945) and Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories (1963).

1962 marks Merle's return to the novel with the publication of L'Ile, awarded the Prix de la Fraternité and considered by many to be his best work. Based on the Bounty mutiny, it describes the experiences of a group of mutineers after their flight to an uninhabited island. Although set in the eighteenth century, the novel shows Merle's renewed preoccupation with the problems of his own time: it explores the pacifist position and the political organisation of society.

1962 also saw the appointment of Merle as professor at the University of Algiers, and the return to the country of his birth, with the opportunity to interview its President, led to the appearance in 1965 of a biography of Ahmed Ben Bella. In the following year, Merle wrote an introduction to Les Torturés d'El Harrach, a collection of testimony by people tortured by Boumedienne's secret police, calling for a statement on the whereabouts of Ben Bella, whose fate was, and still is, unknown.

1965 provided a further link with foreign politics when Merle visited Cuba, and interviewed Fidel Castro and other survivors of the Moncada attack. Moncada, Premier Combat de Fidel Castro is an authoritative work on this stage of the Cuban revolutionary campaign. Merle also furnished an introduction to a translation of 'Che' Guevara's Souvenirs de la Guerre Révolutionnaire, published in 1967, in

collaboration with Magali, his wife.

Merle's visit to the Americas was further reflected in the setting of Un Animal Doué de Raison, which appeared in 1967. Although the plot of this novel verges on science-fiction - it hinges on the employment of dolphins in nuclear attack, and is set in 1973 - its theme is based on actual research. The novel is also remarkable for its picture of American society.

In 1965, Merle became professor at the newly-established branch of the University of Paris at Nanterre, where he taught for four years before beginning a prolonged period of study-leave. In 1970, Derrière La Vitre appeared. This novel is based on the events of March 22nd, 1968, when students occupied the administration block of the University, but it is not exclusively factual.

Merle chose the Dordogne, where he spends as much time as possible, as the setting for Malevil, published in 1972. This study of a small community, which by chance survives nuclear war, is set in 1977, and is concerned with the moral and political ethos of an emerging society.

This brief account of Merle's writings may serve to explain certain emphases in his work. Of primary importance is his contact with cultures other than that of France. English and American literature have influenced him strongly, so that his works include, not only a novel in le style américain, popular in France in the nineteen-forties, but also a satire which he himself compares to works by Swift and Orwell (*1), and a novel which many critics thought to be in the Robinson Crusoe tradition (*2). Merle explains his choice of the microcosm theme by

(*1) Preface to Un Animal Doué de Raison, p.8*

(*2) cf. André Stil: "Robinson Demain?"; Humanité, 4.v.'72, and Jean Freustie: "Les Robinsons de la Bombe"; Le Nouvel Observateur, 17-23.iv.'72

* page numbers, which in the body of the thesis are indicated in brackets, refer to the original Gallimard edition of the novel in question.

referring to Jane Austen(*1), and echoes of Shakespeare occur naturally in his writing (*2). The influence of American and English literature is probably most striking in Merle's adoption of the science-fiction genre, which is sparsely represented in French. Although his writing seems rather derivative when compared to the work of Arthur C. Clarke or John Wyndham, it compares very favourably with other French science-fiction.(*3)

Merle's experience of life outside France is also reflected in the wide range of national types portrayed in his novels. The characterisation of the German central figure in La Mort Est Mon Métier is perhaps more stylised than that of the naturally depicted Scots in L'Ile and the subtly indicated racial consciousness of the second-generation American, Jewish or Latin in origin, in Un Animal Doué de Raison. The whole question of racial background is involved in the major theme of inherited culture and thought-processes, which merges in the later novels into an evaluation of the inheritance to be handed on to future generations, for in Merle's novels a man is seen, not simply as the sum of his own actions, but as the sum of the behaviour-patterns which are part of his nationality. The variety of races depicted in the novels gives a composite picture of the preoccupations of the average intelligent European. The author's contact with America, England and underdeveloped countries has equipped him to explore the nature of civilisation, as well as to examine the

(*1) See Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

(*2) eg: Maillat's conversation with the English officer in Week-end à Zuydcoote; p.82;

Mrs. Ferguson's name for Sevilla is Caliban: Un Animal Doué de Raison, p. 77-8;

The Hamlet theme in Derrière La Vitre.

(*3) cf. P. Boule: E=mc² ; Julliard, 1957.

intricacies of class, social and political prejudice, and often to provide a moral commentary emphasising the responsibility of the educated man. The breadth of Merle's experience enables him to evaluate the influence on European civilisation of the opulence and scientific superiority of the West, while retaining an awareness of those qualities of the simpler life which are threatened by the very progress this influence represents.

The autobiographical element in Merle's novels is not strong, although there is often an obvious connection between events in his life and his choice of subject or setting. Week-end à Zuydcoote and Derrière La Vitre are the clearest examples of this choice, but both are amalgamations of experience: the former includes reminiscences by Merle's fellow-prisoners, and the latter includes material gleaned from interviews with students. The central figure of Week-end à Zuydcoote, Maillat, has in common with Merle an understanding of the English language and character. (*1) Merle was himself one of a 'family' of soldiers whose 'mess' was an old car. The incident in the cellar with Jeanne (224-8*) and the soldiers who refused to jump from the burning boat (144) are described as Merle remembers them. (*2) The attempted rape of Jeanne by the two soldiers (*3) is also based on fact. But although the book was inspired by Merle's own experience, it is not simply

(*1) 'Maillat, c'est moi. Comme Belmondo ne parle pas suffisamment l'anglais, alors que je suis bilingue, et qu'il n'a pas absolument le genre intellectuel qui est celui du personnage, nous avons été obligés, Vermeuil et moi, de gommer un peu.' Merle, in an interview with Rémy le Poittevin about the film version of Week-end à Zuydcoote. Dimanche, 21.ii.'71.

(*2) The cellar incident, however, took place in Armentières. See Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

(*3) This was a story told to Merle in captivity. Two English military policemen were the culprits. The girl was rescued by a French sergeant. See Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

* page numbers in brackets refer throughout to the original Gallimard edition of the novel under discussion.

an autobiographical or historical account, but is concerned with war in general. (*1)

In Derrière La Vitre, Merle appears in the character of Frémincourt (*2) and one of his own lectures on Hamlet is used to comment on the theme of youth's rebellion against the values of the previous generation. It is significant, however, that Frémincourt is an impotent observer of the action rather than one of the central figures, for by this time Merle's work was developing a strong bias towards social comment in addition to the earlier emphasis on individual responsibility. (*3)

An examination of the connecting factors between Merle's life and his work between the years from 1949 to 1970 helps to account for this shift of emphasis within the novels, as well as to explain Merle's emergence as a novelist, rather than as a dramatist, historian or biographer.

It was during this period that Merle wrote six plays on varying subjects. The main themes which emerge are: the origin of evil, seen especially in Flaminéo; the question of the value of life and achievement, in Sisyphé et La Mort and Nouveau Sisyphé, and the influence of the family or political group on the behaviour of its members, in Justice à Miramar, L'Assemblée des Femmes and Les Sonderling.

(*1) '...pour nous, sans armes, sans chefs à Dunkerque, nous redevenions des civils destinés à la mort ou à la captivité, nous assistions à l'agonie de la guerre.'"Confrontation: Roland Dorgelès et Robert Merle": Jeanine Delpech, Les Nouvelles Littéraires, no. 1162, 8.xii.'49.

(*2) 'Frémincourt parle avec trop de lucidité pour ne rien devoir à l'auteur.' A Wurmser: "Leur Jeunesse (Derrière La Vitre)", Les Lettres Françaises, 4.xi.'70. pp6-7.

(*3) It is nevertheless Frémincourt's reminiscences of the University of Caen (317) which point the significance of the title of the novel. The passage describes the 'aquarium' where students were to be observed, grouping and regrouping like bees in an experimental hive.

Although Merle shows a certain flair for the stage, (*1) the main purpose of the plays, facilitated by his use of irony and anti-climax, is moral and political comment. Since Merle has not resumed writing for the theatre, it would seem that he found the novel a more convenient medium.

That the years preceding the publication of L'Ile were also characterised by an interest in historical narration is evidenced by Merle's own description of La Mort Est Mon Métier as a travail d'historien. (*2) It is significant that L'Ile began as an historical account and emerged as a novel. In his preface (*3), Merle accounts for the long period of gestation of L'Ile. He explains that in 1952 he was already contemplating an historical account of the development of the Pitcairn community, but that in 1958 he decided to abandon the historical treatment in favour of a roman romanesque :

'Dès lors, je cessai de ressentir cet ennui qui est le prix payé par le roman historique pour toutes les paresse qu'il s'accorde.' (*3)

A similar, if less conscious, choice is seen in Merle's rejection of biography in favour of the novel. The biographies are nevertheless of value as an indication of the subjects he found interesting. Vittoria, Princesse Orsini, a detailed picture of the central figure in The White Devil, is a precursor of the later, fictional investigation of woman's place in society in L'Ile and Malevil. Oscar Wilde ou la 'Destinée' de l'Homosexuel is a forerunner of Merle's emphasis on the sexual nature of personality. This is seen in the

(*1) The best examples of Merle's mastery of his medium include the detailed and effective sets for Flaminéo, the characterisation of La Mort as a colourless civil servant in Sisyphe et la Mort, and as a faceless, indefinite figure in Nouveau Sisyphe, and the use of the speaking skeleton in Les Sonderling.

(*2) The tone is disparaging. See Appendix A: Interview with Merle. Merle uses the expression, oeuvre d'historien, when describing La Mort Est Mon Métier in his preface to Un Animal Doué de Raison, p.7

(*3) Preface to L'Ile, p. 10.

minor characters of the microcosm, for example, Bob and Maggie, members of the research team in Un Animal Doué de Raison. It emerges more strongly in the student characters of Derrière La Vitre, Ménéstrel and Jacqueline. The theme recurs in the examination of the function in society of the traditional couple, in Malevil, where it is seen as an important factor in the assessment of individual and collective responsibility.

The biography of Ahmed Ben Bella and the account of Fidel Castro's Moncada attack (*1) reflect Merle's interest in the establishment of new systems of government and the responsibility and necessary subterfuges of leadership. It was after he had treated these very subjects in L'Ile that Merle examined them in real life, and it is significant that he resumed his analysis in fictional form, in Malevil. Merle finally chose the novel as the vehicle for his political, social and moral message.

As a novelist, Merle is influenced by the literature of both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. His work retains the traditional virtues of convincing characterisation and exciting story development. The reader is aware of an omnipresent narrator who manipulates events so as to provide a clear message. Even though the values of society are questioned, and in spite of the need to escape from the inherited ethos, the successful communication of Merle's message is dependent on an understanding, common to author and reader, of the social order which is challenged. Merle's work would therefore be considered old-fashioned by admirers of the nouveau roman, for whom the very questioning of the values of society implies that characters reflecting those values, and consequently plot, will disappear from the

(*1) Moncada, Premier Combat de Fidel Castro has been classed as a biography here because of the emphasis on Castro as the inspiring and directing genius behind the attack. The book nevertheless represents Merle's greatest achievement as an historian.

work of the discriminating author. (*1) Merle would not be placed in this category, since he is concerned less with the definition of his subject than with its implications.

Merle has in common with the philosophical novelists of the twentieth century a concern to evaluate experience, but he sees experience, not as the proof of existence, but as its justification. For him, the quality rather than the nature of existence is important. He is thus mentioned only briefly in evaluations of the 'serious' modern French novel, as he does not contribute to the mainstream of self-interrogation which leads to the despair of the author, his sense of isolation, and sometimes to a conviction of the hostility of his surroundings. Merle conveys the effect of a situation, recognisably factual because of its historically identifiable basis, on an amalgam of himself, the character involved, and the reader: he is less concerned with the effect of life on himself. Thus he has little in common with the purely philosophical novelist as represented by, for example, Samuel Beckett.

Week-end à Zuydcoote was typical of the 'action' novel of the nineteen forties, but the pragmatic hero who had so much in common with the early Sartre and Camus has been succeeded by those who begin with a moral or spiritual standpoint which is put to the test as the novel progresses. The Merle hero is progressively less free to begin his own existence; even when the society which has produced his criteria of judgement has been completely destroyed, he cannot escape from his inheritance. The threat to individual freedom is in the individual's

(*1) Robbe-Grillet is nevertheless aware that the vast reading public prefers a story:

'La plupart de nos romanciers du type traditionnel - c'est à dire ceux qui justement recueillent l'approbation des consommateurs - pourraient recopier de longs passages de La Princesse de Clèves ou du Père Goriot sans éveiller les soupçons du vaste public qui dévore leurs productions.'

Une Voie pour le Roman Futur, see M. Nadeau, Le Roman Français depuis la Guerre, p. 235. Editions Gallimard, 1963

own nature, and rarely comes from his surroundings. Isolation is experienced, but it is overcome by the emerging hope of communication and by a kind of spiritual communion. The latter is so far, however, ill-defined. The possibility of achievement by means of self-sacrifice for the good of the group is always present, and the individual's justification depends on his contribution to the welfare of the community.

Characters are subjected to a moral judgement which presupposes the existence of values outside and apart from their experience. This is not to say that good and evil are static: there is no code of conduct laid down - thus far at least Merle has rejected the inheritance of the nineteenth century - but there is always the assumption that justified behaviour approaches nearer to an ideal, however indefinite. Though Merle does not subscribe to the idea that values are absolute, neither would he accept the purely subjective values of the Existentialists.

In spite of these differences in attitude and belief, Merle's work has much in common with the French novel of the nineteen-fifties. The books he is writing today still stress the importance of involvement and the responsibility of the intellectual. Stylistically also, his work is typical of the 'fifties: the influence of British and American writers, such as Joyce, Hemingway, Dos Passos and Virginia Woolf, so very important in the novel of the previous decade, is discernible.

Merle's novels are more often described as passionnants (*1) than extolled as explorations of complex philosophy: Merle himself declares that he writes for a public which wants to enjoy a story. (*2)

(*1) The novels' popular appeal is such that they are recommended in periodicals with widely differing readerships: L'Humanité (A.Stil, 5. xi. '70); Antoinette (Merle interview, i. '71); Elle (Merle interview, iii. '71)

(*2) "Vous savez pourquoi 57% des Français ne lisent jamais? Parce que la plupart des romans qui passent pour bons sont illisibles." Merle, in an interview with D. Lasagne, published in a special edition of Derrière La Vitre for Le Cercle du Nouveau Livre, 1971.

Yet the novelist's ability to communicate his theme imaginatively is utilised to involve the average reader in an examination of contemporary problems: the organisation of society; the psychology of power and oppression; responsibility in the face of the threat of extinction. It may therefore be argued that Merle's novels are fables, where the story is presented in such a way as to encourage the reader to appreciate the moral generalisation which underlies, or which may have inspired, the plot. Simultaneously, the story assumes a reality in the reader's imagination.

It is the aim of this thesis to evaluate Merle as a writer of fiction, by examining the methods by which he involves his reader in the imagined world, and to trace the development of the more abstract moral message which emerges from a consideration of the novels as fables.

It is proposed to begin by examining the novels as they appear to fit into established genres, and to attempt to distinguish between those factors typical of other authors using a similar genre and subject and those characteristic of Merle. Then the method of narration will be discussed, especially Merle's function as director of the action, when he invites the reader to take up a standpoint outside the novel, and Merle's function as participator in the action, when he encourages the reader to experience the novel from within. This distinction between the two functions of the author reflects that between the two functions of the novels: the novelist as participant is involving the reader in the novel as fiction, whereas the novelist as controller or director is utilising the fiction as a vehicle for his theme. The use of the novel as an allegory, or fable, presupposes an author who is purposefully directing the action so that its ideological significance is not lost on the reader. Merle's arrangement of setting and character - an aspect also revealing the novelist as director - will then be discussed, and an analysis of patterns of construction attempted.

The construction of the novels, and its function in communication with the reader, whether as participant in the fiction or as perceiver of the fable, having been examined, chapter five will attempt an exposition of their philosophical content. This examination of the author's preoccupations and priorities will be followed by an evaluation of the way in which his criteria of judgement are reached.

CHAPTER TWO

GENRE

All Merle's novels are recognisably linked to established genres, but simply to attribute them to such types of writing as the documentary, science fiction, or the adventure story would be convenient rather than accurate. It has been seen that the autobiographical element in the novels, though apparent, is only part of the material utilised by Merle as a vehicle for his central message. Similarly, the novel form Merle adopts is a convenience, selected because it suits his subject as well as his intention. An analysis of genre, although it will therefore leave many important aspects of the novels unexamined, is nevertheless essential to an assessment of the novelist's method of construction.

The Documentary

Week-end à Zuydcoote, La Mort Est Mon Métier and Derrière La Vitre all depict historical events, and all appeared while the events were still of interest to the general public. (*1) The background to all three was compiled as a result of painstaking enquiry. The method of compilation closely resembles that used in the production of the works on Ahmed Ben Bella and Fidel Castro: personal interviews and informal discussions have been utilised to weave a tapestry of events which forms a realistic background to the main action. Week-end à Zuydcoote is based largely on stories about Dunkirk told in prisoner of war camps, Derrière La Vitre on interviews with students at Nanterre, and La Mort Est Mon Métier on

(*1) Merle's opinion is that La Mort Est Mon Métier was published when memory of the Second World War was being replaced by expectation of an alliance with Germany, and that the book was not therefore very popular. See Appendix A, Interview with Merle. It seems likely that the novel appeared too late, after the horrors of the camps had been well publicised by the press and the Nuremberg Trials, yet too close to the historical events for a rational analysis of the SS mentality to be appreciated by an unbiased readership.

information provided by Colonel Gilbert, an American psychologist who interrogated Hoess, (*1) as well as on research into the Nuremberg archives. In each case, factual details are manipulated so as to emphasise the tension to which the central characters are subjected.

The historical content has led the critics to regard the novels as hybrids of reportage and fiction:

'M. Robert Merle manifeste une grande habileté (on dirait même beaucoup de métier, s'il ne s'agissait pas d'un premier roman) dans cet art de poser une fiction légère sur un tableau d'après nature.' (*2);

'Dans ce procès, Robert Merle s'est voulu greffier et non procureur. Mais n'est-ce pas le greffier qui lit l'acte d'accusation? Celui-ci rapporte les faits, bruts, énumère, n'explique pas, pour justifier ou pour condamner. Mais c'est la base première sur quoi l'affaire se juge.' (*3);

'Le monde de Robert Merle est bien loin de l'imaginaire. L'auteur raconte, et surtout il témoigne, avec d'ailleurs une évidente honnêteté.....Ce sont l'intelligence de sa présentation, la générosité passionnée de ses lignes de force, qui confèrent à l'oeuvre sa qualité littéraire, et non pas l'intérêt porté au développement d'un récit en soi, à travers les richesses internes d'une écriture.' (*4)

It is with the element of reportage that the present examination of the novels is concerned, and with its contribution to the 'literary' aspect.

(*1) See Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

(*2) André Rousseaux: "Week-end à Zuydcoote"; Le Figaro Littéraire, no. 184, p.2

(*3) Régis Bergeron: "Le Monstre et 'l'Idée Nécessaire'", Europe, 31e année, no. 89, v.'53, pp115-120.

(*4) Lionel Mirisch: "Les Prodrômes"; La Quinzaine Littéraire, 1-15.ii.'71, p.8.

Which facts have been selected, and how have they been manipulated?

The laconic 'week-end' of the title of Merle's first novel covers the period of 28th-29th May, 1940. There is reference to the Belgian capitulation (46) and to the paddle-steamer which sank (127). Merle utilises selected details to depict the atmosphere of the Dunkirk evacuation. He is concerned, firstly, to depict confusion. Thus the men are a collection of people who have been separated from their units: 'Un immense rassemblement de soldats sans armes, sans chefs, toutes unités confondues'(30).

Crowds of men are making their way to the boats at Bray-Dunes:

'Un flot interminable d'hommes en kaki s'y pressaient, Anglais et Français confondus'(75).

Here the scarcely-controlled panic of stampede comes over well. Maillat marvels at the vast numbers of soldiers compared to the small size of the few boats waiting to take them to the transports. By the following morning, the situation has deteriorated still further:

'La foule était dense déjà, et sur la plage les files parallèles des tommies s'allongeaient jusqu'à l'horizon'(189).

The haste of the retreat is emphasised by means of references to the amount of abandoned equipment: the novel opens with the hero walking along a road littered with empty vehicles(11), only a few of which have been sabotaged according to instructions (27). Many have been left with full petrol-tanks yet, ironically, Virrel's company is without motor transport and is using a hand-cart. The climax of the description of the littered road comes with Maillat's reflection,

'Non, pensa Maillat, ce qui manque maintenant, ce n'est pas les autos, c'est la route'(27).

On Sunday morning, Maillat is surprised to see that the hundreds of weapons left behind on the beach have been collected (188), and his reflection that some officers retain their standards of behaviour emphasises how unusual organisation is.

The sense of confusion is reinforced by the lack of definite orders and the fact that only the English are being embarked. It is said that a French officer and his orderly, who were found on an English boat, were thrown overboard.(46)

'Et les Elus, pensa Maillat, sont tous Anglais aujourd'hui.'(85)

Both English and French soldiers are only too aware that they are unprotected by the Air Force; when Maillat wonders where the air support is, Atkins remarks that it must be their bed-time.(134)

The morale of the defeated army is understandably low, but Merle's picture is unflattering. By means of the character of Pinot, who has been separated from his unit in the course of a night march, Merle introduces information and commentary. Pinot tells Maillat that many of his companions marching along the dunes to Dunkirk abandoned their weapons in order to be able to move more quickly, and then had to be forced to find a gun as a condition of admission to the 'fighting' force awaiting rescue. Pinot is exceptional in that he has not only retained his machine gun but searched for ammunition with which to make his personal last-ditch stand against the attacking 'planes. He is very unpopular with the other soldiers, who think that his fire increases the risk of German retaliation. The average soldier is depicted as a coward, who is so terrified that he can only crawl into a flimsily covered hole in the beach and shiver. This episode (190), together with the bestiality of the soldiers in the rape scene (195) and the brutality of those in the body-wagon (213), was no doubt among those which led French patriots to refuse to sell the novel and to threaten Merle's life.(*1) Pinot is one of the few soldiers not preoccupied with what will happen when the Germans arrive. Rumour is rife about German methods of dealing with those who surrender:

(*1) These reactions are explained in Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

'Il y a des gars qui disent qu'ils s'amèneront avec des chars et des lance-flammes, et puis pan! dans le tas! jusqu'au dernier!''(25)

Even Maillat is afraid, although he conceals his fear behind a clever comment that he has heard so much about the Germans that he is looking forward to meeting the superior race (43).

It is interesting to contrast the immediacy of Merle's account with the reasoned explanation of an historian:

'Dans le courant de l'après-midi (*1) Weygand avait enfin sanctionné l'évacuation des troupes françaises qui se déversaient maintenant dans le périmètre, créant une certaine confusion en traversant les voies de passage britanniques afin d'atteindre le secteur français...ce fut, sous l'empire d'une nécessité cruelle, la coordination de toutes les ressources disponibles ainsi que la détermination de tous les participants, qui amenèrent le succès, mais par-dessus tout, ce fut la discipline et l'esprit combatif des soldats du Corps expéditionnaire britannique, et de la première Armée française qui se montrèrent à la hauteur des épreuves qui accablent une armée en retraite'(*2).

The latter is part of a long-term view, where the events of Dunkirk are seen in relation to the war as a whole; it is a rationalised evaluation. In contrast, Merle's picture is fragmented and episodic, coordinated only by the vision of the central figure. (*3) Merle is concerned, not with long-term evaluation, but with the impact of events as they were happening, because the action of Dunkirk is for him the primary inspiration of a novel about people in the war situation.

One episode stands out as a description in journalistic style. This is the account of the burning boat (140-54), which is

(*1) ie., the afternoon of May 29th., 1940.

(*2) M.G.Saunders: L'Evacuation par Dunkirque; Revue d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale, Presses Universitaires de France, 1953.

(*3) The angling of the action to the viewpoint of the central figure will be treated in Chapter 3: The Method of Narration.

touching in its use of contrast and conjures up an atmosphere of half-stupefied terror. We know from Merle's own comments that he was only a spectator of this drama,

'J'ai senti cette sorte de fascination, d'hébètement collectif qui transformait un transport d'hommes en un troupeau, pire qu'un troupeau, puisqu'il n'avait même plus les réactions de la vie...>(*1), but the reader appreciates how well he has conveyed the horror of an event which, over thirty years later, he still remembers vividly.(*2)

His method of communicating the atmosphere of the boat incident is similar to that by which he depicts the confusion on the beaches: he introduces a typical soldier, whose reactions are representative of the group. The introduction of Atkins personalises the account, and allows Merle to build up tension over whether the soldiers will jump into the water, and to emphasise further his opinions about the effect of war on human beings.

The episode has in common with others in the novel a temptation to sentimentalise; this is a defect necessarily risked by the depiction of Dunkirk in a series of personal encounters. This account escapes bathos, however, by the sheer horror of details such as the dying soldier rescued by Maillat, the half-corpse on the beach, and the recurring 'chant psalmodié' of the screams of those still on the boat. At other points in the novel, Merle does perhaps over-emphasise pathos. For instance, Maillat in the camp at the Sana changes places to drink his whisky because he cannot help worrying about the dead soldier whose shoelace is undone, and whose shroud is too short for him. (34) When a shell has fallen, it is with satisfaction that Maillat sees that that particular body is undisturbed.(155) This lends a more macabre

(*1) Pierre Loiselet: "Week-end à Rennes: Entretien avec Robert Merle."; Les Nouvelles littéraires, 10.xi.'49.

(*2) See Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

atmosphere to the accompanying details of attendants putting parts of corpses into a sufficiently large pile, then covering them with a blanket, without having time to worry about whether the collection of pieces has two left feet. Other examples of pathos include: the old commandant in the embarkation queue weeping for his country(77) and the very young military policeman at Armentières who is desperate to find a brothel(29). Maillat's reflections about the random nature of encounters in wartime are perhaps over-emphasised:

'Et il y avait eu des centaines et des centaines d'autres visages que Maillat avait entrevus dans un éclair, et il y en avait qui s'étaient fixés en lui une fois pour toutes, et il en revenait d'autres encore, et à chaque fois, Maillat savait qu'il ne les reverrait jamais plus.'

(29) (*1)

The problem of sentimentality does not arise in La Mort Est Mon Métier. Here Merle's style is intentionally arid and, in spite of the device of the fictionalised autobiography (*2), the central figure is far removed from the reader's sympathy.

The story of Rudolf Lang is that of Rudolf Franz Ferdinand Hoess, commandant of Auschwitz from 1940 to 1943. Hoess at Nuremberg gave the testimony quoted in the closing chapter of the novel:

'Je n'en ai tué que deux millions et demi.'(321)

Merle has not departed from the truth:

'...tout, à part son nom, est vrai dans l'histoire de Rudolf Lang.'(*3)

A close comparison on the historical level reveals Merle's method of construction and indicates his aim in writing the novel.

Lang-Hoess became a member of the Nazi party in 1922 and in

(*1) The romanticised picture of Dunkirk is typified by the Butler-Braidford account, with its personal stories of ordinary people who, for the good of their country, sacrificed the boats which were their pride and joy, and with its history of the Isle of Wight paddle-steamer, the 'Gracie Fields'. See Butler, Lieut-Col.E., and Braidford, Major J.S.: The Story of Dunkirk (previously published as Keep the Memory Green); Hutchinson, London, 1955.

(*2) This subject is treated in Chapter 3: The Method of Narration

(*3) Preface to Un Animal Doué de Raison, p.7.

1922 was sentenced to lengthy detention for his part in a political murder (Kadow-Fémemord). In 1934 he became a member of the SS and was appointed to the administration of Dachau concentration camp. In May, 1940, he proceeded to Auschwitz to build another camp: geographical details of terrain and vegetation, of distances between the neighbouring towns, Auschwitz and Birkenau, and of accessibility, are given. A secret meeting with Himmler in Berlin in June, 1941, was the occasion when Lang-Hoess was ordered to establish extermination facilities at Auschwitz. He was ordered to maintain strict secrecy, and not to tell even Goertz-Geuchs, Himmler's immediate subordinate, about his mission.

Then followed the choice of Birkenau as the site for the 'special treatment' unit, Lang-Hoess' visit to Treblinka and his observation of methods of exterminating Jews from the Warsaw ghetto by means of monoxide gas, his inspired improvement of the process by the substitution of 'Giftgas' containing 'Cyclon B', and the added efficiency of 'treating' two thousand Jews at a time, and wasting no part of their effects or their bodies which was of commercial value. Lang-Hoess was gratified by the official visit of Himmler to the camp in 1942, and volunteered information about the time taken for the victims to lose consciousness, or to die, about the irregularity of shipments - two or three trainloads daily, each containing about two thousand Jews - and about the establishment of an experimental unit for the advancement of medical science. The only record of figures was kept by Wulfslang-Eichmann, who was a frequent visitor to the camp.

Lang-Hoess kept his vow of absolute secrecy until 1942, when his wife's curiosity was aroused by allusions made by the Gauleiter of Upper Silesia. By 1944, the family had moved to Berlin, where Lang-Hoess was employed in the inspectorate of concentration camps.

Merle successfully incorporated into his novel a great deal of information, without making it read like a history book. It is noticeable, however, that while he alters nothing, he does omit Hoess'

move in 1938 to Sachsenhausen camp as adjutant to the commandant and head of the protective custody camp. There was no need to amplify Lang's experience of work in the camps; the period is portrayed in the novel by means of allusions to Lang's satisfaction at successive promotions.(205)

Merle adds much that explains his hero's motivation. A picture is given of his entire childhood from the age of thirteen, of his family background and of his religious and educational milieu. Details are provided of Lang's early army experience in the First World War, when he served with distinction in Iraq and Palestine, and of his service with the German 'defence' forces in Lithuania and the Ruhr. Half the novel is over before Lang enters the National-Socialist Party in 1922.

Motivation for Lang's adherence is provided by his experience of hunger and want during a period of unemployment and manual labour in the post-war uncertainty. He is on the point of suicide when the Party gives him a new lease of life.

A gap in the Nuremberg account is filled by details of Lang's life between 1929 and 1934, when he was employed on a farm owned by Colonel Baron von Jeseritz. Included are details of the drainage of poor land to restore useful fields to Germany, Lang's marriage, his organisation of SS adherents and compilation of dossiers, the growing violence of the movement and the desire for positive, armed action. The novel is two-thirds over when Lang receives with surprised pleasure the news that in spite of his small stature he has been admitted to the SS.

When Lang is sent to Auschwitz in 1940, Merle is thus able to establish a link with his previous experience of draining land by means of dams. He is able to provide contrast, by describing the reactions of lieutenant Setzler to the arrangements at Treblinka and the experimental station at Culmhof. Merle has established the

pattern of unquestioning obedience of Party orders, so that Lang agrees blindly with Hitler's decree that the Jews must be exterminated, yet he has also established Lang's ambition, so that when Himmler suggests that he is to carry out the extermination we understand his flattered acceptance of the compliment to his organising ability.

The significance of Lang's repeated attempts to leave administration for the front line is not neglected: he puts in an application immediately before being ordered to Auschwitz in 1940, and again applies just before the meeting with Himmler in Berlin in 1941. Further explanation of his continued contribution to atrocities is provided by emphasis on the time-factor when he is ordered to prepare the experimental unit at Birkenau: the demands of efficient organisation are more important to Lang than the grisly nature of the work he is organising. His participation is seen as a series of promotions against fierce competition, and always there is emphasis on his sense of honour at being admitted to the SS at all. His pride in promotion is a much deeper emotion than his hatred of the Jews. The reader becomes interested in the series of rewards gained as Lang's career progresses. When he joins the Party, he is given a brown shirt; when he goes to Dachau, he becomes an officer; at the age of thirty-nine he becomes a captain. As a reward for organising the new Auschwitz-Birkenau, he is appointed commandant, and then as a further reward for arranging the running of the 'special treatment' centre, he is promoted to lieutenant-colonel. Although the novel is in no sense a justification of Lang's actions, Merle has attempted some explanation, and the reader appreciates Lang's attitude enough to feel a kind of 'sneaking sympathy' for him>(*1)

The emergence of a monster is further accounted for by the details given of Lang's childhood. The background of family and

(*1) Merle's own expression. See Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

religious strictures is seen as a preparation for his acceptance of moral and political authority in his later years. (*1)

'On ne sait trop qui contribua le plus à faire de Lang un monstre: de l'hitlérisme ou des années qui l'ont précédé.' (*2)

Yet strong as this theme is, it is not allowed to outweigh disgust at Lang's crimes. The novel contains gruesome details, such as the method of disposal of the bodies of exterminated Jews, in exactly-measured pits, scientifically packed with faggots, petrol and people. The final effect is to horrify the reader.

A similar effect may be achieved by a purely historical account of such a macabre subject; the Report of the Nuremberg Trials (*3) is just as horrifying. An extra dimension is present in La Mort Est Mon Métier because of the narrative form and the concentration on the experiences of one person. This differentiates the novel from factual accounts such as L'Etat SS (*4) and L'Univers Concentrationnaire (*5) which explain the organisation of the camps. The fact that the latter are written from the point of view of the victims of oppression ensures instant sympathy on the part of the reader, regardless of the method of narration. L'Etat SS, in particular, is exhaustively detailed and relies heavily on the fascination of its subject. (*6)

(*1) This aspect is treated more fully in Chapter 5: The Inheritance.

(*2) R. Bergeron: "Le Monstre et 'l'idée nécessaire'"; Europe, 31e année, no.89, v.'53.

(*3) Nuremberg International Military Tribunal: The Trial of German major war criminals: Proceedings of the International Military Tribunal sitting at Nuremberg, Germany. London, 1946-51.

(*4) E. Kogon: L'Etat SS: Editions du Seuil, 'Politique', no. 34, 1970.

(*5) D. Rousset: L'Univers Concentrationnaire: Editions du Pavois, 1946.

(*6) The author's intention was to produce an objective analysis of the system: '..bien que j'aie voulu conserver ce maximum de calme objectivité, adopté dès le début, et qui s'efforce d'éviter la politique, si pénible que cela soit en certains cas..' Introduction, p.18.

La Mort Est Mon Métier also differs in atmosphere from those accounts which attempt to explain the SS phenomenon. Anatomy of the SS State (*1), for example, quotes at length from Hoess' autobiographical notes (*2) to explain the persecution of the Jews, the methods adopted and the dilemma of a subordinate ordered to commit an atrocity. The resultant examination consists of a series of theoretical statements supported by reference to SS pronouncements: 'That atrocities were usually the result of individual initiative is indicated in a report (still unpublished) by Rudolph Hoess on the Rapportführer (N.C.O. in charge) at Auschwitz. It says:

"P. is primarily to blame for these savage excesses and the inhuman maltreatment of prisoners. As Rapportführer he could have prevented most of it but in fact he approved it in order to satisfy his own lust for power." (*3)

In contrast, La Mort Est Mon Métier gives the report without the theoretical statements; Merle judges that the reader is capable of inferring the moral. The novel is far removed from the pure theory of explanations of antisemitism, although they may state what the reader of La Mort Est Mon Métier has inferred from the narrative.

'Ainsi, l'analyse psychologique des individus anti-sémites nous les montre affectivement et émotionnellement prédisposés à devenir anti-quelque chose et non pas précisément anti-sémites. On pourrait alors penser que l'investissement de cette prédisposition en anti-sémitisme ne soit dû qu'à un fortuit concours de circonstances. En réalité, c'est toute une trame très précise d'événements qui contribue à cet investissement. Pour connaître la réalité exacte de ces événements, il nous faut abandonner la psychologie et nous tourner vers l'enquête

(*1) Anatomy of the SS State: H. Krausnick and others; Collins, London, 1968.

(*2) R. Hoess: Le Commandant d'Auschwitz Parle (Kommandant in Auschwitz); Julliard, 1959.

(*3) Anatomy of the SS State, p. 372.

sociologique.'(*1)

Comparison of La Mort Est Mon Métier with other novels with similar settings reveals a difference in atmosphere and impact. Le Dernier des Justes (*2), for example, is the life-history of a typical Jew, narrated over approximately the same period of time as the story of Rudolf Lang, and containing episodes about schooldays, employment, and life in concentration camps. It is a compelling tragedy, perhaps rather sentimental, but haunting in its effect on the reader. The central figure, like Maillat in Week-end à Zuydcoote, is probably an amalgam of several real people, placed against an historical background. Le Dernier des Justes successfully evokes sympathy in the reader in a manner which is impossible for La Mort Est Mon Métier because of the choice of a torturer rather than a victim as the main figure in the latter.

Successful works of fiction where the main characters are the Nazi persecutors are arranged so that the atrocities perpetrated are assumed to be known to the reader and are therefore not described in detail. Thus Les Séquestrés d'Altona (*3), although it deals with the question of responsibility for war crimes, is set after the end of the Second World War, and The Representative (*4), although it is about the 'final solution', is set in Rome. Thus both works view the atrocities from a distance, which is not only preferable because they are plays - what is described would hardly be practicable on the stage - but also because distance facilitates the formation of judgement

(*1) Shentoub, S.A. "Le rôle des expériences de la vie quotidienne dans la structuration des préjugés de l'anti-sémitisme nazi." Les Temps Modernes, vii.'53. p.6

(*2) Schwartz-Bart, A. Le Dernier des Justes; Editions du Seuil, 1959

(*3) Sartre, J.P. Les Séquestrés d'Altona; Gallimard, 1960

(*4) Hochhuth, R. The Representative; Penguin, 1969.

uncomplicated by sentiment. Merle therefore attempted a difficult task when he undertook a novel about an antipathetic main figure whose crimes are narrated in detail as they are committed.

In Derrière La Vitre, Merle returned to the formula of the more successful Week-end à Zuydcoote. Fictionalised characters are presented against a recognisably historical background. Moreover, the main action of the novel is also historical: it covers the events of March 22nd., 1968, at Nanterre:

'Mon projet était la vie quotidienne des étudiants à Nanterre, et cette vie resta, bien entendu, quotidienne pour la majorité d'entre eux, même quand la contestation des éléments actifs prit tout d'un coup un tour dramatique'(*1).

Merle attempts to give his reader some insight into what it was like to be a student at Nanterre, on a typical day which happened to include some protest against authority. He is aware that the student protest of that day

'....fut magnifié par ce qui se passa ensuite'(*2), but his concern is with its importance at the time.

The narrative proceeds on two levels, and depicts both personal and political relationships. Merle was already contemplating a novel about communication and isolation before the events of March took place, but he saw that a choice of March 22nd. as a typical day would provide a contrast between the preoccupations of the few militants and those of the majority of moderates. The emphasis is on the latter, and the political unrest is utilised to highlight the everyday worries of the average, uncommitted student.

It is with this end in view that a detailed description of

(*1) Derrière La Vitre, Introduction, p. 8

(*2) *ibid*, p.8

the university campus is given. This emphasises solitude and isolation, the main theme. The isolation is two-fold: the university is cut off from the outside world, just as the students feel isolated from one another, and deprived of meaningful communication with their teachers. The Dean, Grappin, reflects:

'Quelle erreur d'avoir placé la Résidence à l'intérieur de la Faculté en plein désert industriel, sans rien qui vive autour, sans aucun contact de diversion avec le milieu urbain'(72),

and students also find the campus lifeless and depressing:

'On était cerné de tous côtés par les voie ferrées, les usines, les bidonvilles. Ah, Boul'Mich, où es-tu, avec tes cafés, tes lumières, tes gens qui vivent?'(237)

The novel reflects the prevalent dissatisfaction of the inhabitants with the architects' planning. It is pointed out that the four buildings housing the Faculty are all built to the same plan, and that the only variety in perspective arises from

'...une asymétrie recherchée'

which has placed the Administration tower between blocks A and C, instead of centrally. The five blocks are connected by a gallery, which is glassed in where it passes between buildings, but is assumed to gain enough light from the lecture-rooms as it passes through the blocks, (51)

'...et cette galerie désespérante, cafardeuse, une sorte d'énorme couloir de W.C., étiré de A à E...'(208).

Merle does not provide any excuse for this lack of variety. He does not mention that the disappointment of the students was shared by the architect, who, full of enthusiasm at the thought of creating the Sorbonne of the twentieth century, had his imagination restricted by the necessity for economy, the short time available:

'Christian Fouchet, Ministre de l'Education nationale de l'époque, sous

le lustre de cristal de son bureau de la rue de Grenelle, avait même dit à Chauliat: "L'inauguration aura lieu le 15 septembre de l'année prochaine ou ce sera votre tête au bout d'une pique"',(*1) and the fact that only a narrow strip of land along one edge of the destined site was released by the army for immediate building.(*1)

In Derrière La Vitre, the impression of sterility is reinforced by references to the yellowing, unhealthy grass, and the vast expanses of concrete, some of it still being laid outside the hall of residence. Inside, the walls are uniformly grey and the rooms cramped and depressing. The novel communicates the impression that the buildings stifle their occupants.

The reader is surprised to learn that, not only is the library to be built half a kilometre away from the Faculty of Arts, but no library at all had been envisaged by the designer. As Grappin reflects:

'Le désordre avait commencé dès le plan.'(70)

The historical perspective is strikingly convincing. Although, true to his intention, Merle resists the temptation to point out what was to come in May, he does not neglect the background of student unrest which is essential to an appreciation of the situation on the chosen day. Past events are not presented in any chronological recapitulation, but the reader is enabled to build up an acquaintance with the facts, from the reports given by different characters. By means of a conversation between David and Brigitte (44-5), the reader is informed that in March, 1967, an 'invasion' of the girls' hall of residence had led to the Dean calling in the police, that a strike had taken place in November, that the Dean had been assaulted during an incident in January, and that another 'invasion' of the girls' hall

(*1) R. Mauge: "Nanterre, L'Université Ingouvernable"; Paris-Match, no. 1090, 28.iii.'70, p. 94-99.

of residence had taken place in February.

Speculation about exactly what was said at the opening of the new swimming-pool in January is utilised to give an idea of the prevalence of rumour in an enclosed community. A confrontation occurred between M. Missoffe and a German student, Daniel Cohn-Bendit. When the Minister was reproached by Cohn-Bendit for omitting from his summary of student problems all reference to their sex lives, he told Cohn-Bendit that he could resolve his sexual problems by jumping into the pool. Both the official and the apocryphal versions of Cohn-Bendit's reply are quoted in a staff discussion (216) and elsewhere in the novel there is yet another version, in which Cohn-Bendit accused the Minister of adopting a typically Nazi attitude.

The January incident involving the Dean is explained at various points in the novel. It arose from a student protest at the proposed expulsion of Cohn-Bendit, in the course of which the Dean was physically assaulted and called a Nazi.(71) The flouting of authority on St.Valentine's Day by means of another occupation of the hall of residence incurred no reprisals.

The most recent incident, leading to the occupation of the administration block, was the arrest of six members of the Comité Vietnam Central, who were involved in an attack on the American Express office on March 18th. Reactions of students of various persuasions, ranging from the apolitical Ménestrel to the Communist Jaumet, to the projected occupation, are unenthusiastic.

The political aspect of student life is represented by a multiplicity of student groups, (*1) presented so as to give the impression that cooperation on any one issue is entirely accidental. Trotskyists, Communists, Marxist-Leninists, anarchists and prochinois

(*1) '..un tohu-bohu de sectes..' C.Prévost: "Derrière La Vitre"; France Nouvelle, no. 1310, 16.xii.'70.

may, or may not, agree with Maoists on any particular topic:

'...il y a deux groupes trotskystes antagonistes et deux groupes chinois qui se bouffent le nez. Je ne compte pas, bien entendu, les étudiants communistes...'(61).

Each group is unsure of the likely reactions of the others, and the manifesto of each is often in itself a compromise. The doctrine of the group hardens into a creed which permits no deviation.

Politically-minded students are constantly claiming solidarity with the factory-workers, but the fact that the university's catchment area produces a majority of well-brought-up daughters from rich homes does not lead the reader to expect a mixture of town and gown. The double standard of inverted snobbery is typified in student encounters with Abdelaziz, an Algerian worker on the site. Although the character of Abdelaziz is based on real people whom the students of Nanterre supported financially during their studies, (*1) the novel makes clear that only a small proportion of the students are interested in helping Algerians.

The enthusiasm and concern of the minority of committed students are not infectious. The committed are conspicuously unsuccessful in involving, or even interesting, the majority of their fellows, in spite of the wholesale distribution of pamphlets (120) and misrepresentations of Marx (279). Occasionally a student may become involved in a brawl out of a sense of fair play - Ménestrel is an example (124) - but for the most part the masses are non-political. The ejection of the militants who invade the concert hall is proof of this; Beaujeu reflects with satisfaction:

'Il l'avait toujours pensé: les contestataires n'étaient qu'une poignée, une minorité infime, ils n'arriveraient jamais à entraîner derrière eux la masse des étudiants.'(366)

(*1) See Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

The invasion of the administration block and the confusion of the crowded meeting held on the ground floor are described in detail. Once the students have occupied the council-chamber, Merle reports the speeches by the divers factions, and the formulation of a manifesto. This contains an appeal to all students on the campus to devote March 29th to discussions about capitalism, imperialism, and worker and student democracy. Building C is to be occupied for this purpose. The result of the concluding ballot is also faithfully reported: 142 for, 2 against, with 3 abstentions.

The abrupt ending, in the middle of a conversation, as two of the main figures walk back to their rooms, reinforces the impression that the novel is about an average day selected at random. In an attempt to present student politics in perspective, the occupation of the administration block is portrayed as only one in a series of climaxes, most of which are of a personal rather than a political nature. Merle is faithful to the order of priorities revealed by the interviews with individual students on which the novel is based.

The students who were interviewed provided the basis for imaginary characters, but the novel gains in authenticity from the inclusion of real people alongside the invented characters. These real people are obligingly listed by Merle in his introduction:

'...le doyen Grappin, l'assesseur Beaujeu, le secrétaire général Rivière et, du côté étudiant, Cohn-Bendit, Duteuil, Tarnero, Xavier Langlade.'(*1) The combination of fictional and real characters is

achieved by attributing to fictional characters opinions of the real ones. Thus Josette Lachaud thinks of Cohn-Bendit:

'...oh certes, on ne peut pas dire qu'il est beau, il est plein de taches de rousseur, il est gros, roux et sale mais quand il parle, je ne fais plus attention à ça, je l'écouterais pendant des heures, il me fascine, il a un aplomb formidable, il est astucieux et marrant,

(*1) Derrière La Vitre, Introduction, p.8

il éclipse tous les autres, on s'ennuie dès qu'il n'est pas là.'(302)
David Schultz' appraisal is far more critical. He notices that Cohn-Bendit's speeches inevitably begin with a claim to inadequacy, to allay suspicions that he may be making a bid for leadership, and continue with some lewd remark designed to make his listeners laugh; usually the latter entails comment about the sex life of the previous speaker. It is implied that Cohn-Bendit is an astute politician, always ready to reflect the opinion of the majority, yet able to influence it by ridiculing what the majority might have accepted, and, in any case, always in the right place at the opportune moment. During the debate in the council-chamber he was,

'...là où il fallait, en l'occurrence à l'extrémité de la table ovale, près de la porte à deux battants, dans une excellente position stratégique, lui permettant à la fois d'être vu de tout le monde quand il parlerait et de s'escamoter en un clin d'oeil en temps voulu.'(329)

Merle pictures Cohn-Bendit as idolised by the majority, but analysed by the politically more astute.(*1)

Merle comes closest to political comment with his introduction of the government spy, Nunc. The facts leading the students to suspect that they have in their midst an informer in the pay of the authorities are explained by David Schultz. Twenty-nine students, of whom twenty-five took part in the first occupation of the women's hall of residence and four were well-known leaders in student political circles, received warnings during the Easter vacation that the continuation of their grants, and of their residence at Nanterre,

(*1) cf. 'Moi, j'ai été fasciné par Cohn-Bendit. J'ai trouvé que vraiment si quelqu'un incarnait tous les talents, le talent de maniement des masses, le talent politique, le talent d'orateur, c'était lui.'

Merle, in an interview with P. Neuvéglise; France-Soir, 16.x.'70.

would depend on more sensible behaviour in the future. As those students who took part in the occupation did not have their names taken, and were moreover assured that no reprisals would follow their surrender, it is reasonable to assume the existence of an informer.

Merle is careful to explain that

'Nunc ne dépendait en aucune façon du doyen ou de l'assesseur, qui étaient censés ignorer jusqu'à son existence,'(371),

but he does describe the character as,

'..malheureusement très probable'(*1),

although,

'..j'ai transposé à Nanterre des observations que j'avais faites et des soupçons que j'avais conçus en d'autres lieux.'(*1)

The inclusion of Nunc among the students in the council-chamber discussion intrudes a rare note of personal opinion on the part of the author, and implies a certain naïveté in the student leaders.

Other works about Nanterre differ from Derrière La Vitre in that they describe the events of March as a prelude to the May revolution. They are concerned, not to describe the political events of March 22nd in relation to ordinary, everyday life in the University, as Merle does, but to select the unusual happenings and emphasise their contribution to the wider stream of protest leading up to May. In fact, the Nanterre episode in the student revolution is usually included in introductory chapters building up the background of student unrest, before the authors embark on the main subject. Nanterre becomes one of the 'causes of the French revolution'. Thus, in French Revolution 1968 (*2), the Nanterre incidents provide an introduction, under the heading of 'Revolting Students', and in

(*1) Derrière La Vitre, Introduction, p.9

(*2) French Revolution, 1968; P. Seale and M. McConville, Penguin, 1970.

Reflections on the Revolution in France:1968 (*1), they are referred to under the headings, 'Prelude' and 'Fermentation'. Similarly, the events at Nanterre are dealt with in the introduction to Mai,1968.(*2)

All these accounts include the details of the geography and atmosphere of Nanterre which appear in Derrière La Vitre, but they place them among other factors and grievances leading to violence. Derrière La Vitre does not explain that the occupations of the women's hall of residence were significant of the desire to be treated as adults rather than a claim for specifically sexual freedom. It was more convenient for Merle to allow his reader to infer a sexual motive, as this was more in keeping with his emphasis on the sexual preoccupations of the student age-group.

In Derrière La Vitre, historical events are an important, but contributory, factor in establishing the personal perspective. Other accounts utilise the same factual details to explain student unrest, but for Merle, political discontent is only one aspect of student revolt. Similarly, the lack of communication with the authorities, while explained more clearly by the other authors in the context of the French educational system, is for Merle only one facet of the central problem of isolation, and the accusations of paternalism levied against the authorities form only one part of the dominant Oedipus theme.

Merle's use of factual situations is in keeping with his declaration,

'D'ailleurs je ne crois pas que le rôle du romancier soit d'inventer des histoires. Créer des situations de toutes pièces, c'est mentir. Et le roman doit toujours rester proche des faits.'(*3)

(*1) Reflections on the Revolution in France:1968, edited by C.Posner. Pelican, 1970.

(*2) A.Dansette: Mai,1968. Plon, 1971.

(*3) See: P.Loiselet:"Entretien avec Robert Merle", Les Nouvelles Littéraires, no. 1158. 10.xi.'49.

Historical situation in his work is used to provide a convincing background, but subjected to the demands of the books as novels. Reportage is the means to an end: the exploration of the dominant theme.

Science-Fiction

Un Animal Doué de Raison and Malevil also depend on a combination of factual background and fictional characters and situation, but there are two important factors which distinguish these novels from the 'documentaries'. Firstly, the factual background, especially to the former, is scientific, but is itself developed imaginatively. Connected with this development, and essential to it, is the setting of the novels in future time. Thus Un Animal Doué de Raison, published in 1967, is set in 1970-73, when a breakthrough in the study of dolphins has supposedly resulted in communication with them, both in English and in their own 'language' of whistles and clicks. Malevil, published in 1972 and set in 1977, presupposes that the nuclear catastrophe has already taken place, leaving only small pockets of survivors. The reader is reminded of the advice to Sevilla to spend his fortune on a fall-out shelter (*1), and is tempted to see Malevil as a sequel to an ending of Un Animal Doué de Raison where Fa and Bi do not escape to Cuba.

The scientific basis of the novels is well established.

Merle writes of Un Animal Doué de Raison:

'J'ai rassemblé les données zoologiques sur le dauphin à nez de bouteille, ou Tursiops truncatus, et seul leur exposé fait l'objet d'une présentation romanesque: les données elles-mêmes sont vraies - jusqu'au seuil qui sépare le documentaire de la fiction.'(*2)

Merle goes on to explain that, whereas at the time of writing dolphins could understand and reproduce separate words, they had not yet started speaking in sentences, and that the assumption in the novel

(*1) Un Animal Doué de Raison, pp. 222, 342.

(*2) ibid, Preface, p.10.

that this had taken place marks the point where romance takes over. The reader is aware that Merle assumes a parallel development in dolphin psychology, that is, that he assumes not only that the dolphin can speak connected English, but that the speech is indicative of a complex, emotional personality. For instance, many observers report that the dolphin is gentle, and basically friendly towards man. Sevilla mentions 'son extraordinaire gentillesse' in his lecture to the ladies' luncheon club, and goes on to describe the dolphin which played with bathers at Opononi. Later, Sevilla reports with satisfaction that the new dolphin, Daisy,

'...ne s'éloigne pas, sauf quand je sors moi-même en bateau.'(263)

The dolphin's love for man is used to add to the irony of the final escape scene, when Bi refuses to kill the frogman waiting to attack Sevilla; the latter reflects on the sheer power of the animal:

'...l'eau et leur corps ne faisant qu'un, leur seul poids, à cette vitesse, une arme terrible, sous la gaine de leur peau élastique cent soixante à deux cents kilos de muscles, commandés par un cerveau aussi rusé que celui de l'homme, mais contrôlé par la bonté'(365).

The inference is that the dolphin is not only friendly, but also good. Further emotional depth is imputed to the dolphin with Arlette's reference to the 'petit delphineau mort-né'(244) and Bi's admission that she and Fa have continued to practise their English 'pour apprendre aux petits'(350). Throughout the novel the strength and beauty of this reasonable being are stressed. Even in experienced researchers, Fa and Bi inspire amazement at their powers of endurance and the beauty of their movements. The chapter describing the mating underlines a fact of which the reader loses sight later in the novel: Fa and Bi are sub-human. It is significant that references to their natural state occur mainly in the first half. Bi's 'je ne parle pas, je nage'(322) comes as a shock reminder that this talking being is a

cetacean.

The dolphins' intelligence is also emphasised. Sevilla tells the ladies' club how dolphins will not only learn a game, but adapt it. Dash is used by Morley to demonstrate to Mr. C. that dolphins can differentiate between objects and their names. Mr.C.'s informant reminds him about Tuffy, which provided a news service for men working in an undersea compartment. Arlette tells Mr.C. that 'Ivan s'est élevé à la notion spécifiquement humaine du mot-symbole'(71), and Michael describes how dolphins are being trained to wear a harness, and to return to base when summoned. All these facts do not depart from what was known about dolphins in 1967. With the progress from the word to the sentence, however, Merle's imagination takes control - although the reader is uneasy about exactly how much is imagination. For instance, the psychologists' study of Fa and Bi, which assesses their intelligence as being about the same as that of the average teenager, 'à cela près qu'ils ignorent l'argot et s'expriment en anglais correct' (203), does not seem to be stretching credulity too far.

Merle is further correct in his explanation of the dolphin's sonar. (*1) Hagaman demonstrates to Mr.C. how the dolphin, Dick, can distinguish between different kinds of fish even when blindfold. Mr.C. is quick to ask:

'Mais ne pourrait-on pas utiliser le sonar des dauphins? ...par exemple, en utilisant les dauphins à des tâches de détection sous-marines..' (56)

All the powers of the dolphin are seen to be exploited in bringing about the final horror. Fa and Bi are trained for speed and endurance, practise recognising different types of ship, and are instructed in the placing of mines. They explain how they find the submarine and

(*1) John C. Lilly, in Modern Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises, as Challenges to our Intelligence (University of California Press, 1963), shows how a mother dolphin detects a gas bubble inside a baby and bangs its belly with her beak to remove it - a change in the dolphin's buoyancy could cause it to turn over and drown.

the base 'au goût de l'eau'(352), and, because no one has yet been able to ask a dolphin how its sonar works, and because the incident occurs near the end of the novel, the reader assumes that this is part of the fiction. André Billy remarks, with studied naïveté:

'Le fond de l'affaire est ingénieux. Figurez-vous qu'en 1970 les Américains ont eu l'idée d'utiliser les dauphins pour la guerre sous-marine.'(*1)

His comment ignores Merle's remark in his introduction:

'..et encore, je ne suis pas sûr d'anticiper vraiment. (*2) Même aux Etats-Unis, il y a toujours un décalage entre les découvertes scientifiques et leur diffusion publique. A plus forte raison quand il s'agit de recherches intéressant la défense nationale...Hélas, c'est le cas. Ce charmant, ce délicieux dauphin, cette bête, si puissamment armée par la nature, et pourtant, si douce, si bonne, si amicale à l'égard de l'homme, l'homme, dans sa folie, envisage de l'enrôler et de l'envoyer porter la terreur et la dévastation dans les ports et les flottes de l'ennemi.'(10)

This statement, and the fact that most of the details of dolphin training occur early in the novel, before the dolphins can speak connected English, lead the reader to conclude that it is not in the sphere of the dolphins' usefulness to the navy that Merle is romancing.

The departure from scientific fact, which occurs with the progression to the connected sentence, and the knowledge of dolphin psychology which becomes accessible as a result, stress the dolphins'

(*1) A. Billy: "Un Animal Doué de Raison, ce n'est pas l'Homme"; Le Figaro, 18.xii.'67.

cf. '..27 décembre une dépêche d'agence annonce que les dauphins ont été envoyés au Viet-Nam par les forces armées des U.S.A. Hélène Tournaire a demandé à Robert Merle si les dauphins pouvaient empêcher le ravitaillement du Viet-Nam par les navires soviétiques et éventuellement chinois.' Entretien entre H. Tournaire et R. Merle à propos de Un Animal Doué de Raison; Radio France-Culture, 11.ii.'71.

(*2) cf. 'En 1972, les dauphins devenaient opérationnels dans le golfe du Tonkien.' R. Merle: "Futurisme très Réaliste et très Proche", Parisien Libéré, 29.iv.'72.

eagerness to communicate with man, whom they admire. Fa is horrified to find that man dies (191). The extension of language reveals that the dolphin has some metaphysical appreciation; although Fa asks a reporter, 'Qui est Dieu?' (205), Bi explains the dolphin concept of earth as a paradise where dolphins go to die. (*1) This is used by Merle to give an added dimension of a dolphin 'soul', which serves to make them more vulnerable, adding pathos to the reader's horror at what they are being trained to do.

Merle utilises the possibilities of science to pinpoint the human and political implications of research, an important factor in his study of responsibility. The fiction, too, is directed towards a connected factor also central to Merle's thought: the achievement of communication.

The factual element in Malevil is limited to information about the possibility of surviving a nuclear attack. A series of happy coincidences ensures the survival of the central figures on the day of l'événement. Thus great emphasis is placed on the situation and construction of the château of Malevil: it is built half-way up a South-facing cliff, which almost overhangs it. (39) Thus the cliff protects the castle against the heat-blast when Paris is annihilated.

Also fortunate are Emmanuel's repairs and innovations:

'Mais j'ai dû restaurer sa charpente en bois et sa lourde toiture en pierres plates, car elles avaient moins bien résisté au temps que la voûte de pierre du donjon.' (41)

(*1) cf. R. Merle: "Les Dauphins ne meurent pas parce qu'ils s'échouent, ils s'échouent parce qu'ils se sentent mourir", France-Soir, 5.iii.'70. The article posits an explanation of the behaviour of a dolphin which 'committed suicide' near Cannes, in spite of the efforts of three men to turn it towards the sea again. Merle also comments in this article: 'En Amérique, au Japon, en Chine, en France même, dans une base navale établie à Biarritz et qui, notez ce détail, dépend de la Défense nationale, les savants étudient passionnément le dauphin, sont émerveillés par son intelligence, touchés par son attitude amicale à l'égard de l'homme et essaient d'entrer en communication avec lui.'

The account of the repairs makes clear that they were in keeping with the vastness and solidity of the original building. This provides insulation against the heat of the explosion. The fortunate escape of the animals in the 'Maternité' is due to its situation in a cave running back into the cliff. The adaptation of the cave, by halving its height to provide storage for fodder in the upper part, ensures further insulation for the animals.

The castle also has its own water-supply, from an underground spring, which is assured by gravity, without the need of an electric pump. The survivors inhabit a fortress designed to withstand siege, '...où une poignée d'hommes en armes pouvait tenir en respect un grand pays.'(40)

The survival of the group on Easter Day is mainly due to their presence in the cellars at the time of the explosion. The cellars are provided with water, wine, food and candles. The ham distributed by La Nenou (88) was one of the best things they could have eaten after exposure to a temperature of over seventy degrees centigrade.(76)

Where the bomb itself is concerned, only enough scientific data to ensure involvement in the story is introduced. Thus we learn from the scientist, Thomas, whose presence is in itself fortuitous, that it must have been 'une bombe propre'(112) and this is confirmed when the long-awaited rain comes(269) and the Geiger counter, inherited by Emmanuel from his uncle, reveals that there is no radio-active fallout.

More disturbing than the actual événement is the description of what remains afterwards. The picture of the complete devastation of the surrounding countryside (94-6) is rendered horrifying by the detail of the dog roasted alive where it stood, with its feet trapped in melted tar. With commendable restraint, Merle does not give details of what Emmanuel's friends found when they returned to their

homes; the emphasis is on the terror and despair of the survivors.

The 'terrible et extraordinaire vraisemblance du moment même où la chose arrive'(*1) is exciting because of Merle's intentional emphasis on the accidental nature of the survival of the main figures(*2). The fortuitous presence of a Geiger counter and of a scientist who knows how to use it has already been mentioned. Equally fortuitous is in Menou's insistence that Emmanuel must bottle wine on that particular morning before he leaves for his appointment in La Reque. Meyssonier, Colin and Peyssou visit him to ask if he will stand for election as chairman of the local council, and Thomas, who has come only to tell Emmanuel that he will be out for lunch, fortunately stays a little longer than he planned, in an attempt to mend Nomo's transistor radio, which unaccountably stops.

Tension is built up by means of emphasis on the doors to the cellar. Irony is achieved here, for the reader is aware of what is about to happen, as he has been warned by Emmanuel's reference to the departure of Boudenot, the postman:

'La 2CV jaune, on réussit plus tard à l'identifier, tordue et calcinée. Mais de Boudenot, pas la moindre trace, rien, pas même un os.'(65)

Thus although it is clear from the narrative that Emmanuel is concerned about the temperature of the wine when first Colin, then Nomo, leaves the doors wide open, the reader is aware of a deeper significance, and

(*1) André Stil: "Robinson Demain?" ; Humanité, 4.v.'72

(*2) J. Hersey: Hiroshima (Penguin 1946), a collection of accounts by survivors of the real bomb, justifies the emphasis in the first part of Malevil on the everyday nature of events immediately before the explosion, and the entirely accidental factors contributing to the escape of the survivors. The Hersey account, however, includes description of the harrowing scenes which followed the explosion: its effect is therefore more distressing.

shares Emmanuel's relief when Thomas carefully closes the doors behind him.

The emphasis on accident, especially during the early part of the novel, while making the events realistic, subtly reinforces one of the underlying themes. It will be remembered that the novel ends with the decision to devote time and energy to the manufacture of weapons, in preference to the abandonment of technology because of the evil it could once more bring to the world. The ending completes the cycle: Thomas' account reveals a determination to acquire nuclear weapons as a defence, or as a deterrent. Yet the early part of the novel has suggested that the outbreak of hostilities was an accident:

'Il est possible, d'ailleurs, que l'événement ait été imprévisible. Terrifiante erreur de calcul d'un homme d'Etat à qui ses états-majors avaient fait croire qu'il détenait l'arme absolue? Folie subite d'un responsable ou d'un exécutant, même à une échelle assez humble, donnant un ordre que personne, ensuite, ne peut plus rappeler? Accident matériel entraînant par des réactions en chaîne des réponses automatiques, celles-ci en déclenchant d'autres des parties adverses, et ainsi de suite, jusqu'à l'anéantissement final?'(64)

Even more disturbing are comments made elsewhere by Merle, who seeks to establish that such an accident is more likely than his reader may care to believe:

'Il existe au Département d'Etat Américain une étude de prospective traitant de ce sujet. Le champ de bataille désigné est bel et bien l'Europe. Une région des Etats-Unis a failli être anéantie très récemment. Une mégabombe dispose de treize dispositifs de sécurité: pour celle qui faillit détruire la contrée U.S., douze des treize dispositifs de sécurité avaient déjà "lâché"'.(*1)

(*1) R. Merle: "Futurisme très Réaliste et très Proche"; Parisien Libéré; 29.iv.'72

Thus both novels utilise scientific facts, and both leave facts behind and launch out into the realm of pure fiction at a certain stage. In each case, the facts are a means of anchoring the fiction in reality, and of endowing the story with immediacy and credibility.

Because of the use of scientific data about animals in Un Animal Doué de Raison, and especially because of the fictional exposition of dolphin psychology, the novel would seem at first sight to belong to the tradition of the animal myth. It is difficult to situate Un Animal Doué de Raison in this genre, however, because it involves real animals and a real setting. The fanciful story-development, and the fact that the animals talk and build up relationships with man, nevertheless tempt the reader to draw comparisons.

The recognisably American background to the novel differentiates it from novels where a fictional animal world is depicted, such as The Hobbit(*1) and Watership Down(*2), even though the latter is about a real animal, and in both the psychological nature of the animal concerned is a powerful factor in plot development. The use by Merle of a real animal differentiates Un Animal Doué de Raison from novels where man discovers a fictional species, such as Vercors' 'missing link' or Capek's salamanders(*4). Because these two novels lack a factual link with real life - both are about the discovery, in a far-flung corner of the globe, of a new species - and because both are making an obvious moral commentary on man, they are unconvincing, and their function as fables is too apparent. It is true that their common theme is the cruelty of man, as revealed by his treatment of a lower species,

(*1) J.R. Tolkien: The Hobbit; Allen and Unwin, 1966.

(*2) R. Adams: Watership Down; Penguin, 1973.

(*3) Vercors: Les Animaux Dénaturés; Albin Michel, 1952.

(*4) K. Capek: La Guerre des Salamandres; Les Editeurs Français Réunis, 1955.

and that this is also one of the themes of Un Animal Doué de Raison, but in Capek and Vercors the moral intention is so obvious as to limit enjoyment of the story for its own sake. The books do make some telling comments about society in the twentieth century, with its emphasis on exploitation and consumption, but they lack the subtlety of social comment in Un Animal Doué de Raison. Perhaps the point where the latter most nearly approaches the satirical method of the Capek and the Vercors is in the description of the press conference (194), where it becomes obvious that Fa and Bi have been indoctrinated.

The emphasis on inter-species communication in Un Animal Doué de Raison differentiates it from novels where animals represent a threat to man, or take control of the world. Of these, La Guerre des Salamandres contains a definite indication of retribution in its final pages, when the creatures intend to make more and more land into sea, and the human race is doomed. It is clear, however, that the gentle salamander has developed the less attractive traits of its character only as a result of contact with human beings. Similarly, the successful revolutionaries of Animal Farm (*1) are contaminated by contact with humans: the novel makes clear that those farm species nearest to man in intelligence are also nearest to him in greed and acquisitiveness. The most fully-developed satire of this type is probably Swift's Voyage to the Houyhnhnms (*2), where the repulsive Yahoo represents the human being, and the polite Houyhnhnm, the uncontaminated animal. In these intentionally transparent fables, the animals provide a convenient medium for comment on the human race. This is true of Merle's dolphins, too, but the placing of a small number of animals in a story involving a much greater number of people facilitates

(*1) G.Orwell: Animal Farm: a Fairy Story: Penguin, 1969

(*2) J.Swift: Gulliver's Travels, Part iv : A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms: Dent, 1951 (text of 1735)

more subtle comment. (*1)

The other animal novels have in common that they are so concerned to make clear to the reader the interpretation of the parable that they neglect to make the parable itself convincing. This is especially true of La Guerre des Salamandres and The Voice of the Dolphins (*2), where details such as how dolphins learn to walk, or salamanders to talk, are dismissed rather quickly in the author's haste to reach the main point of the story. It is interesting to note that Animal Farm does not require quite the same 'willing suspension of disbelief' because interest in the animals as individual characters carries the reader past details such as how a pig could climb a ladder. In this connection Merle's novel is superior, because it is clear that his dolphins' achievements belong to the realm of anticipation rather than to that of impossibility.

Un Animal Doué de Raison is a story about human beings who come into contact with another species, and is therefore similar to stories where contact with creatures of superior goodness reveals the shortcomings of man, but where the animal species is not given any unusual power such as speech. Novels where the animal in question has close connections with the professional life of the main character, and influences his moods and decisions, are nearer in tone and subtlety than is any of the animal novels so far discussed. For instance, the fascination inspired by another species is well brought out in Moby Dick (*3) and The Hunter and the Whale (*4): in these, the species exerts a clear influence on the human characters, whose philosophy of life is called into question as a result. A similar effect is achieved in

(*1) The implied comparison between man and animals is treated at greater length in Chapter 3, under Imagery.

(*2) L. Szilard: The Voice of the Dolphins, and other stories: Gollancz, 1961.

(*3) H. Melville: Moby Dick; Bobbs-Merrill, London, 1925 (text of 1851)

(*4) L. Van der Post: The Hunter and the Whale: Penguin, 1970.

Forbush and the Penguins (*1), which is nearer in theme to Un Animal Doué de Raison as the penguins are being studied, and not pursued, by the hero. The central figure's concern for the penguins, his desire to protect them from other men, his exasperation at their behaviour and his occasional impulse towards a kind of insane cruelty: all are part of an experience he undergoes with the penguins, and all contribute to the central theme of resolving his personal problems in the isolation necessitated by his study. Un Animal Doué de Raison is also about a man working out his personal creed in such a context.

Un Animal Doué de Raison, however, differs from all these books about animals, because it speculates about future developments in delphinology, but limits its speculation to the improbable possible. It is nearer to Science Fiction than to the animal story.

An assessment of Merle as a writer of Science Fiction must take into account that the genre is sparsely represented in French. Probably the only exponent, apart from the authors of the animal stories already mentioned, is P. Boulle. His short story, E=mc² (*2), a satirical fantasy about the nuclear equation, has a transparently obvious moral message, and is so patently designed to convey the teaching that man is bound to destroy himself, for good reason or bad, that the fable containing the message is utterly lacking in credibility.

In Malevil and, to some extent, in Un Animal Doué de Raison, Merle is conforming to a genre established mainly in English and American writing. These romans d'anticipation anticipate by only a few years, and therefore differ from the large number of Science Fiction works which are set in the distant future. Some imagine Earth as a waste land explored by beings from another planet (*3), or assume that inter-

(*1) G. Billing: Forbush and the Penguins; Hodder and Stoughton, 1970

(*2) P. Boulle: E=mc²; Julliard, 1957

(*3) cf. L Szilard: Grand Central Terminus, and F. Brown: Pattern. Both are reports of the activities of exploratory teams from other planets.

galactic travel (*1), or at least time-travel(*2), is possible. In contrast to the multiplicity of novels set in the mechanised world of the future (*3), the Merle novels have settings clearly recognisable as belonging to the twentieth century.

'La Terre après l'explosion atomique, c'est le point de départ de centaines de livres, anglo-saxons surtout.'(*4)

Most treatments of post-nuclear existence concentrate on the effects of shock and privation, or on the organisation of the survivors; they are more concerned with the situation after the bomb than with the actual moment of destruction (*5). Whereas Merle also is concerned with the resultant situation, he courageously describes the experience of l'événement in a compelling eight-page account (72-80), which leads into the problems of survival, and hence to the main theme.

When Merle's analysis of post-holocaust society is considered, it is seen to contain little that is new. Many of the main points in the story lack originality. For instance, it is a convention of Science Fiction that it is entirely by accident that the narrator escapes to tell his tale.(*6) Sevilla and Emmanuel owe their escape to a combination of happy coincidences. By chance, like Emmanuel, the Science Fiction hero has a refuge ideally suited to withstand the

(*1) cf. A.C.Clarke: 2,001 AD: Arrow Books, 1968.

(*2) cf. H.G.Wells: The Time Machine; where the hero travels to the distant future, and R.Bradbury: A Sound of Thunder; where it is possible to go on safari in a primeval forest.

(*3) eg. E.M.Forster: The Machine Stops; where each individual lives in an underground, 'push-button' cell.

(*4) J. Freustie: "Les Robinsons de la Bombe"; Le Nouvel Observateur, 17-23.iv.'72.

(*5) But see R. Bradbury: Embroidery; where a woman engaged in needlework at the moment of destruction experiences the unpicking of the fibres of her body.

(*6) cf. 'The way I came to miss the end of the world- well, the end of the world I had known for close on thirty years - was sheer accident. J.Wyndham: The Day of the Triffids; Penguin, 1960, p.7. In The Midwich Cuckoos, by the same author, the narrator and his wife are away from the village on the night of the 'visitation'.

rigours of the new existence (*1), after the destruction of civilisation has resulted from a human blunder (*2). As in Malevil, existence after the end of civilisation degenerates to the tribal level, with a necessary reduction in living standards. Life reverts to a struggle for survival in a world where machinery is almost unknown. Murder becomes an unpleasant necessity (*3), and every decision is dependent on what is necessary for the continuation of the race(*4). Malevil is therefore hardly important to the development of Science Fiction as a whole, but it is noteworthy as a contribution to the genre in French.

In Un Animal Doué de Raison and Malevil, Merle utilises established genres for the purpose of avertissement. It is for this reason that he sets the novels just far enough into the future to give the impression that the stories could come true within the lifetime of the reader. (*5) The hypothesis based on the present is an effective

(*1) In The Day of the Triffids, it is a farmhouse on the Sussex downs with its own electricity and water supply.

(*2) cf. ' -Please tell me. How did it - how could it - happen?
-Simply by accident, my dear - though it was the kind of accident that was entirely the product of its time. A piece of research that showed unexpected, secondary results, that's all.' J.Wyndham: Consider her Ways; Penguin, 1970, p.62.

(*3) cf. J.Wyndham: The Chrysalids, Penguin, 1959.

(*4) cf. J.Wyndham: The Day of the Triffids. This novel has in common with Malevil a series of small communities which have to decide whether monogamy is not a threat to the race, as well as a description of the rapid descent of man to animal level, seen in widespread looting and the helpless dependence of the majority on anyone willing to assume command. The novel touches on the qualities of the leader, and outlines emerging democracy and dictatorship.

(*5) Anticipation of this kind is also found in the novels of J. Wyndham, which is why they have been chosen for purposes of comparison with Merle.

medium for the transmission of a warning for the future. Merle himself points out that, whereas Science Fiction is set in the distant future, politique-fiction, with its message for the present day, needs to be removed from the present only marginally, either by setting the political system in a fictional country, or by predicting events in a real country in four to ten years' time:

'Mais le décalage dans le temps devient nécessaire dès que l'auteur développe une hypothèse politique qui intéresse un pays réel. La question que se pose alors le romancier suppose qu'on transporte la scène dans l'avenir.'(*1)

H. Henry emphasises the link between anticipation and avertissement in a discussion of Merle's classification of Un Animal Doué de Raison:

'A ces genres voisins, cousins, Robert Merle lui-même en ajoute un autre, de style plus récent: ce qu'on appelle aujourd'hui aux Etats-Unis la politique-fiction, et dans laquelle il distingue très précisément le thème de la terreur atomique; l'épouvante d'une nation devant sa propre puissance de destruction, une puissance qui peut se mettre en mouvement presque toute seule; le goût de l'espionnage ultra-perfectionné avec les derniers gadgets à la James Bond; et la tragédie d'un personnage: le président des U.S.A. quel qu'il soit, Lyndon Johnson ou son successeur éventuel, son écrasante solitude, sa responsabilité démentielle, ses pouvoirs illimités et les limites de son intelligence.'(*2)

Political and historical anticipation are added to the more usual scientific prediction: the intention is clearly to warn the reader of the immense power of the United States, and of the frightening diversification of its interest. Thus the assertion by Adams (41) that

(*1) R. Merle: "Politique-Fiction et Angoisse Planétaire"; Supplément Littéraire au no. 7074 du Monde, 11.x.'67.

(*2) H. Henry: "Un Animal Doué de Raison"; Europe, no. 467 (mars 1968) pp. 273-9.

the richest nation will necessarily make the most useful scientific discoveries, is ironically accompanied by a picture of America as a country which does not know its own strength. Ever-present in the novel is the threat of the Third World War:

'...la nôtre, celle qui frappe déjà à notre porte, et vraiment la dernière, celle-là, puisque après elle il n'y aura plus rien à détruire;' (114)

'...personne n'y croit, même ceux qui nous poussent dans la guerre, ils sont incapables d'imaginer leur propre fin, la mort, pour eux, c'est toujours la mort des autres..' (336).

The terrifying responsibility of the scientist who gives authority to use the weapon he has created when he hands over the weapon itself, is extended to the possible responsibility of ensuring the survival of the entire human race. The ending of the novel, with its emphasis on chance, underlines Merle's motive in writing:

'Mieux que les lecteurs intéressés par l'intrigue de quelques-uns, ce sont des témoins concernés par les problèmes de tous que Robert Merle a voulu toucher en élaborant une fiction qui ne s'écarte du réel que pour en faire mieux sentir le précaire équilibre.' (*1)

The avertissement aspect of Malevil is reinforced by the description of life after nuclear devastation, but the main effect is gained by the discouraging picture of mankind. It is clear from the ending of the novel that as soon as a reasonable standard of living is attained, man will once more forge ahead in technology, in pursuit of further self-destruction.

'Malevil n'est que le constat désabusé de l'obstination de l'homme dans sa passion de mourir.' (*2)

The risk of a second annihilation is envisaged in the closing lines of

(*1) G. Rohou: "Un Animal Doué de Raison"; Nouvelle Revue Française, janvier, 1968, pp.138-9.

(*2) P. Sénart: "Malevil de Robert Merle"; Combat, 11.v.'72.

the novel:

'... nous nous attaquons, toujours dans le domaine de la défense, à des projets beaucoup plus ambitieux. Nous pouvons donc d'ores et déjà envisager l'avenir avec confiance. Si du moins le mot 'confiance' est celui qui convient.'(537)

The element of avertissement is stronger in Un Animal Doué de Raison than in Malevil. This is due to two factors: the scientific basis of Un Animal Doué de Raison is more clearly established, and therefore the events are more convincingly possible than in Malevil; Malevil is so pessimistic about the future that the reader feels he can only hope to be one of the lucky ones when the holocaust takes place.

The comment by one of Merle's critics,

'La frontière entre ces deux genres (anticipation scientifique - conte philosophique) n'est pas toujours nettement marquée ... Je retrouve d'ailleurs les deux éléments: science et morale, dans le romans de Robert Merle,'(*1)

makes clear that to discuss the novels simply as Science Fiction is to discuss them only in part. The Science Fiction genre is utilised by Merle for avertissement, but it is only one of the means by which his message is conveyed.

The Adventure Story

Merle's novels may be seen to owe something to other genres, connected with the roman d'aventures. The influence of the twentieth century 'James Bond' novel, as well as that of an earlier type involving castaways on tropical islands, may be clearly traced.

'Arlette chérie, c'est vrai, le 'james-bondisme' est en train de devenir notre vie quotidienne',(127).

says Sevilla, in Un Animal Doué de Raison, and it is true that the

(*1) P.Gamarra: "Des Dauphins et Des Hommes"; Chronique Littéraire de la Vie Ouvrière, décembre 1967, p.40-41.

novel has all the attributes of the modern spy-thriller. Merle has included many elements of the successful spy story. A scientist is engaged on secret work of national importance, and agents and double agents abound. A vindictive struggle takes place between the rival security forces, represented by the 'bleus' (Lorrimer, Adams, Al, the 'A' commando), and the 'verts' (Mr.C., Bob, 'B' commando). Every room is 'bugged', even the supposedly inaccessible bungalow where the hero and heroine spend their weekends. Every conversation in the laboratory complex is recorded on a miniature tape-recorder installed behind the panelling in Bob's room. Specialist squads are employed to install concealed microphones, to follow suspects, to code and de-code telephone conversations. Confidential reports and discreet inquiries form the background to the emergence of information about what dolphins can achieve. Detailed files are kept and rigid security checks followed. Helicopters are fired on by hidden machine-guns by day, and frogmen place mines in tense darkness at night. It is only by a coincidence that the two main characters are not déchiquetés. Against this background, it is hardly surprising that the hero, finding himself in sole possession of information that will avert a Third World War, and of course in danger of assassination, trusts no one.

Escape seems almost impossible. Sevilla's car is situated in the far corner of a parking-lot, behind hundreds of second-hand vehicles which are unlikely to be sold, so that any attempt at reaching it will attract the attention of his enemies. Even when they are no longer employees of the State, Sevilla and Arlette are unable to leave the country, as their passports have been confiscated. Sevilla tells Michael:

'Bien que mes relations avec des personnes politiquement suspectes soient critiquées, je ne suis pas un risque de sécurité, et j'ai toujours été loyal envers mon pays. Cependant, si je devais me rendre à l'étranger,

on ne pourrait pas m'assurer une protection adéquate.'(262)

Such details occur so frequently in popular literature that it would be superfluous to attempt a detailed comparison with the works of other authors. Suffice to say that similar situations may be found in the works of Graham Greene, John le Carré, and Alistair McLean, as well as in the James Bond stories of Ian Fleming. Critics of Un Animal Doué de Raison tend to comment rather sourly on its 'thriller' aspect, and treat the James Bond element as a weakness that Merle should have avoided>(*1) It is therefore important to establish why Merle should utilise the genre, assuming that this was not simply a means of ensuring that the novel would be a best-seller. Three explanations emerge, all connected with the communication of Merle's message to his reader.

Firstly, the characters themselves are incredulous when they realise what is going on. The insane system of spies and security is a background against which the action of the individual is thrown into relief, just as human society throws into relief the purity of the dolphin. Merle is aware of the unreality of situations met by the average person only in fiction: he is concerned to show that they are based on fact, and this is linked with his concern to warn the reader that the impossible may one day happen.

Secondly, the anonymity and helplessness of the average person, in the face of nuclear strategy directed by governments, is accentuated by the depiction of a faceless power, the American Secret Service, which works in so complicated a manner that few of its employees seem to know which side they are working for.

'...la concurrence interne est la règle d'or de tout espionnage, dans un pays, il n'y a jamais une police secrète, il y en a toujours

(*1) cf. '...seldom far from straight suspense..' S. Etchart: "Science and Suspense"; Times Literary Supplement, 5.ii.'68. p.125.

plusieurs, et même parfois, à l'intérieur de chaque police, il y a des clans qui se combattent, les polices, c'est comme les serpents, à force de se lover sur elles-mêmes, elles finissent par se mordre la queue.'(128)

Lorrimer's comment that when Mr. C. gets home he probably watches himself through the keyhole as he empties his pockets (42) is amusing, but it is inspired by the idea of an administration which trusts no one, and therefore spies on itself.

Finally, the security services are shown to be the real power in America, controlling the President, who is simply a figure-head.

'En apparence le plus fort, le président est en réalité le citoyen américain le plus ligoté, il est un simple point où converge un ensemble complexe de forces.'(*1)

During the President's sleepless night in Chapter XI, he wonders whether China's claim, that she would not have exploded an atomic weapon when the wind was blowing towards her own coast, is true. The argument has been given little coverage in the American press and is therefore lost to the average American. The President wonders whether he is the tool of those who want war - have they provided a challenge which is inescapable if America is not to lose face? Merle makes clear that the President is merely a puppet, or a scape-goat, and that the real power is in the hands of those who advise his advisers.

While the pessimism behind the novel is undoubtedly Merle's, in his picture of American politics his own feelings - he is savagely anti-American, especially concerning Vietnam - are not emphasised. The political picture gains in credibility, however, because the reader's scepticism is directed towards the experiences of the central figures - experiences which the figures themselves find hardly credible.

(*1) A.Billy: "Un Animal Doué de Raison, ce n'est pas l'Homme"; Le Figaro, 18.xii.'67.

L'Île and, more especially, Malevil, are assumed to be 'Robinsonian' in theme, and therefore they would seem to contribute to a genre which has its roots in the eighteenth century. The former is an examination of the community on Pitcairn Island; the latter, set in the Dordogne, is an account of the survival of a community almost equally isolated.

The novels have in common with Robinson Crusoe(*1) that they utilise a recognisable situation. The three-year ordeal of the marooned Alexander Selkirk was fictionalised by Defoe; the Pitcairn community did erupt into a civil war of which there was only one European survivor, and there is some scientific basis for the belief that survival after an atomic war is possible. Although the protagonists are all isolated, the manner of their isolation differs. Crusoe was accidentally marooned after a shipwreck; the Malevil community also is isolated through no fault of its own. The Pitcairn survivors, however, intentionally sought out an inaccessible island. The attitude of the characters to their situation pinpoints the first important difference between Robinson Crusoe and the Merle novels: whereas Crusoe's island is a prison, the château and the island are refuges where the inhabitants are safe. The mutineers' attitude to possible invaders is hostile - only Purcell is unwilling to use force to repel an attack - whereas Crusoe and the Malevil community eagerly anticipate contact with others. The first invaders of Crusoe's island are savages, and the first group of outsiders to come to Malevil are like animals, and have to be killed before they eat the new shoots of corn; the view of human nature is in each case pessimistic. Crusoe succeeds in building up a relationship with Friday, who brings joy and companionship to the life of exile. The equivalent in Malevil is Agnès, one of the La Roque

(*1) D. Defoe: The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner; Oxford University Press, 1972.
(text of 1719)

community, who, like Friday, have to be liberated from their oppressors.

The natives in Robinson Crusoe are revolting savages, pitied by a condescending narrator, who tries to understand that they know no better than to pursue their horrible customs. In Malevil, although the natives are French peasants and manual workers, there is more than a hint of condescension on the part of Emmanuel, who is their superior in intelligence and, they believe, in rank. He is concerned to educate them for their own good. In L'Ile, however, the situation is ironically reversed. The sailors who believe themselves superior to the simple Tahitians are shown to be brutes at heart and to be motivated by selfish interests, whereas the gentle courtesy and concern for honour of the Tahitians shows them to be the truly civilised race.

In all three novels the survivors are well provisioned. Accident dictates that Crusoe shall be able to salvage many useful articles from the wreck, including an armoury of weapons, kegs of powder and a sufficient quantity of ammunition. The château of Malevil is conveniently stocked to withstand a siege, and what is lacking in seed, or animals for propagation, is discovered at l'Etang. The Blossom's mutineers are also well equipped but, considering that they set out to found a colony, their standard of living does not compare as favourably as might be expected with that of the characters in the other novels. The inhabitants of the island, like Crusoe, are able to utilise the entire contents of the Blossom before they scuttle her.

Life in all three novels is characterised by a return to the soil. This is no hardship for Crusoe, who is content to have some means of passing his time, or for the Tahitians, except that they are naturally consumers rather than cultivators. It is understandably a strain for those who have enjoyed the benefits of civilisation to have to return to the life-style of the Middle Ages. This is most obvious in Malevil, where Emmanuel reflects,

'Curieux comme, l'argent parti, les faux besoins se sont évanouis avec lui. Comme au temps de la Bible, nous pensons en termes de nourriture, de terre, de troupeau et de conservation de la tribu.'(212)

Malevil and L'Ile have more in common with novels about groups of survivors than with Robinson Crusoe. Indeed, judging from the comparative abundance of supplies and the availability of raw materials, one is tempted to draw a comparison with the escapist Swiss Family Robinson (*1). Such a comparison would reveal the difference that The Swiss Family Robinson attempts no analysis of group relationships; the family structure is unaffected by the long years of isolation and, at the end of the novel, the children are older, but just as respectful and obedient, the parents equally affectionate, with Mother just as subservient and Father just as domineering, as at the beginning. Harmony and the team spirit are triumphant, in a glorious adventure; civilisation is assumed to be an integral part of character and the strain of isolation is combatted by the group in unison. Stress is not seen as a divisive force. In contrast, Malevil and L'Ile reveal the necessity for compromise between ideal behaviour and procedures which in other circumstances the main characters - both men of high moral character - would despise. Compromise in The Swiss Family Robinson occurs only on the material level: Mother, who is very fond of coffee, assures her husband that her palate will not disdain the inferior product they have been able to grow; the boys' manners fall short of truly gentlemanly behaviour because for so long they have lived as manual labourers. For Emmanuel and Purcell, on the other hand, compromise is necessary on the ideological level; both must subjugate the demands of conscience to the necessity of ensuring the survival of the group. Purcell had to forgo his pacifism, and Emmanuel must resort to the use of selected information, rather than the whole truth, to

(*1) J.D.Wyss: The Swiss Family Robinson; Doubleday, 1949.

manipulate the decisions of the democracy where he is a benevolent dictator. The nearest approach to a moral dilemma in Robinson Crusoe is Crusoe's debate about how he should treat the cannibals, should they return to his island. His religious belief that it is wrong to kill overrides his first inclination to murder as many of them as possible, and during the rescue of Friday he kills only in self-defence, although he does not prevent Friday from beheading a cannibal who is only stunned. Crusoe himself is not aware of the irony of this situation, nor does Defoe underline it: the fact that Crusoe has not committed murder but merely benefited from another's crime - forty or fifty more cannibals could have been summoned to hunt him down, had the man escaped - leaves him with a clear conscience. There is a parallel here with the position of Purcell in L'Ile. He refuses to kill, but stands by while others do so. His neutrality salves his conscience for a time, but the doubt which eventually assails him differentiates his position from Crusoe's:

'Qui sait si je ne me suis pas menti à moi-même avec de nobles raisons?'
(392)

Emmanuel is prepared to kill to protect the livelihood of the community. The pillagers who kill Momo (359) provide the impetus, and the Malevil defenders advance systematically, exterminating the intruders. After this incident, a formal decision is reached that anyone threatening the food-supply will be killed. The rather immature attitude of Purcell is represented in Malevil by Evelyne, who begs Emmanuel not to kill Vilmain's men in the ambush. Emmanuel explains that to leave alive anyone who threatens the community would be a mistake.

A similar breakdown of a taboo against killing is seen in Lord of the Flies. (*1) This is nearer to L'Ile than to Malevil, in that the people killed are some of the original group of survivors.

(*1) W. Golding: Lord of the Flies; Faber, 1956.

The novel differs from both the Merle treatments in that the killings are unprovoked. Even the most vicious of the schoolboys, marooned on a tropical island, is at first unable to kill a small, wild piglet. As he hesitates with raised knife, the piglet escapes. It is pointed out that all the boys realise the enormity of the step they would be taking if they were to kill. The first death is accidental, when a boy strays into the path of a forest fire started by the others. Later in the novel, when one little boy is throwing stones at another, he throws to miss: the stones land outside an imaginary circle round the target, which symbolises the protection afforded by the conditioning of civilisation. Shortly after this, the boys, 'liberated from shame and fear' by the application of war-paint, succeed in killing a pig. Then, in the course of a ritual pig-dance, one of the boys is beaten to death. Further manslaughter follows with the killing of another boy by means of a large boulder. The others are all shouting hysterically and the executioner, 'with a sense of delirious abandonment', leans on the lever which sets the boulder rolling. The novel concludes with an attempt at premeditated murder: Ralph, the leader, is hunted like an animal, and the intention is to offer his head as a sacrifice. The novel presents a pessimistic view of human nature: evil is waiting to be released from the inhibitions of civilisation.

The main question underlying all these treatments of the theme of isolation may be summed up as an investigation into how well the standards of ordinary life stand up to the test of life in a completely changed environment. Robinson Crusoe and The Swiss Family Robinson conclude that the standards of civilised life may successfully be applied to life in isolation. The strong religious tone of both novels accounts for this success. The assumption is that morality is God-given, and that, although man's circumstances may have changed, God's laws have not. The novels typify the moral attitude of the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This old-fashioned view is what Merle discounts in L'Île when Purcell's puritanical outlook is examined. His belief that right and wrong are the gifts of a force existing outside life is first challenged by the very existence of Tahitian society, with its different standards of morality. Purcell's attitude towards the Tahitians is reminiscent of Robinson Crusoe's view of the cannibals: they need educating in the correct way of behaviour. Mac Leod similarly assumes superiority: the British, being the superior race, know best and may expect the Tahitians to obey. What none of these British heroes understands is that morality is the product of civilisation, and that as they are founding a new society a new system of behaviour must evolve. The climax of L'Île occurs when Purcell realises that he must share with Tahiti the burden of providing a code of behaviour suited to society on the island.

In Malevil and Lord of the Flies, outside authority has been removed. In the former, the church has already lost its hold over Emmanuel, and in the latter, there are no adults to direct. The responsibility for morality therefore rests with the protagonists themselves; a new authority must be established, to give a sense of security. It is clear that in both novels the weaker characters are happy to be led positively, and to leave to the leader the decision about which direction they should take. In Malevil, Emmanuel senses that the authority should have religious overtones if it is to inspire trust in the community, and he therefore integrates the political system into a religious system of prayer and Communion. In Lord of the Flies, once the taboo of convention is broken, there is no definite leader, but there is some indication that superstition might have become a dominant force had they stayed longer on the island. Jack finds fear of the 'Beast' helpful in maintaining cohesion and obedience, in much the same way as Emmanuel utilises religion. The motivation of the

leaders differs, however: Jack wants power for himself, while Emmanuel is concerned to promote participation.

The novels are noteworthy for their portrayal of the evolution of social organisation. L'Ile, Malevil and Lord of the Flies depict the evolution of a kind of parliament with rules: in L'Ile, this meets under the banyan tree; in Malevil, in the dining-room; in Lord of the Flies, by the lagoon. The composition of the parliaments is also interesting. The schoolboys have one vote each; the sailors, but not the Tahitians, are allowed to vote; the men of Malevil, but not the women, have a vote. In the two novels where civil war breaks out, the parliament soon loses its power: in L'Ile, separate party meetings of the MacLeod faction, the Tahitians, and the women presage the resultant conflict; in Lord of the Flies, Jack's followers soon take part in a separate council of war. In Malevil, whether because of the smaller numbers involved, or because of the existence of one strong leader, the communal meeting continues, and absorbs those who join the community.

The question of possessions occurs only in L'Ile, and is attributable to the mixture of races present on the island. The problem of marriage occurs in both the Merle novels, and the arrangement reached by the end of L'Ile, where a man has several wives, is repeated in Malevil, where a woman has several husbands. Probably objections to the 'sharing' arrangement in L'Ile are due to the assumption of God-given morality referred to above. The moral standpoint of L'Ile and Lord of the Flies becomes less definite as living-standards degenerate; Malevil, however, depicts a growing sophistication in attitude as primitive conditions are gradually overcome.

All the novels are about the effect of stress on human beings. Anxiety is caused by uncertainty over material problems, but a deeper anxiety, bordering on despair, is born of isolation. That this is partly attributable to the absence of outside authority there is no doubt, but

the despair afflicting the characters of the novels written in the twentieth century is rooted in uncertainty about the purpose of existence, and the fear that they may be degenerating to animal level. Under the stress of a primitive way of life, man becomes a primitive being. This is seen in the painting and dancing of Lord of the Flies, and in the tribal emphasis of the Merle novels. The brutalising effect of the struggle for survival is most obvious to the sensitive or intelligent. Thus Emmanuel and Thomas in Malevil, Purcell in L'Île and Simon in Lord of the Flies all at some point come near to despair, as it were on behalf of the others. Nowhere, however, is the despair as complete as that experienced by one character in isolation, as Forbush and the Penguins and Pincher Martin (*1) testify.

L'Île and Malevil are therefore twentieth-century treatments of the Robinson theme. The situation is similar, apart from the numbers of characters involved; the development is not, because Merle is writing at a time when authority has a different source: standards must evolve with society, rather than being imposed upon it from outside. This evolution is one of the reasons why Merle chooses the microcosm, or the utopia, as his subject.

The above examination of genre indicates which factors are of importance to Merle in a novel. Firstly, a setting which is historically or geographically recognisable is utilised to give substance to the story and the characters. Merle relies on this basis as the novel progresses, to explain the reactions of his characters and, occasionally, to account for the direction of the story development. Secondly, it is clear that, whatever the genre to which

(*1) G. Billing: Forbush and the Penguins; Hodder and Stoughton, 1970.
W. Golding: Pincher Martin; Faber, 1970.

Merle is contributing, the community which forms his subject is restricted numerically, or geographically, or both. This prepares the way for a study of relationships within the group, and of responsibility, whether individual or collective. Finally, a study of the novels according to genre is based on the choice of subject or setting, and indicates only vaguely the theme or message of the novels. To establish what Merle has in common with other writers of books on similar subjects is useful in determining what is not peculiar to Merle, but does not necessarily reveal what is most typical of his writing.

Having outlined the subjects of the novels, it is proposed next to analyse the style of writing. This will still not isolate Merle's main objectives, but it will give some indication of how the reader's involvement in the fiction is achieved. The study of the mechanics of communication will be followed by an investigation of the pattern of a Merle novel. Not until the final chapter will any attempt be made to assess Merle's reason for writing, or the values he communicates to his reader.

CHAPTER THREE

THE METHOD OF NARRATION (1)

THE NOVELIST AS CONTROLLER AND PARTICIPANT

Merle is simultaneously controller and participator: he directs story and characters, while privileged to know every detail of thought and attitude. His control of the novel is exemplified in the arrangement of coincidence, irony and climax, which, along with a certain taste for the melodramatic, ensures the rapid and consecutive progress of the story on the horizontal plane. At the same time, he conveys an intimate knowledge of character, to encourage the reader to experience events alongside the people involved, thus ensuring that the reader participates in the progress of the fiction at a deeper level.

The Controller of the Narrative.

Merle gives the impression of faithful reportage by skilful use of historical detail. As has been seen in the preceding chapter, documentary evidence is used to introduce the main theme of a novel. He combines the selected details in such a way as to produce the desired effect. For example, in Derrière La Vitre, the author's omnipresence is utilised to convey the confusion and anonymity of life at Nanterre. Situations are juxtaposed so as to imply significance: in an attempt to present politics in perspective, as merely one facet of student life, the occupation of the administration block is seen as only one in a series of climaxes, most of which are of a personal rather than a political nature. The occupation has a dominant position as the last climax in the novel, but it has been preceded by others, such as the important interview affecting promotion (66), the dreaded seminar (75), the dismissal of a workman from his job on the site (160), the lecture on Hamlet (198) and the loss of Jacqueline's virginity (229). It is succeeded by an event of importance to only two people, when

Denise Fargeot at last plucks up courage to ask Jaumet to accompany her on a holiday in Scotland. The occupation is thus seen in its true perspective as far as the Communist party is concerned.

The apparently haphazard selection of events is achieved by means of the technique of simultanéisme. The technique is useful because it enables Merle to control both selection and juxtaposition of material, so that the reader is able to see what is happening in different parts of the campus each time the clock stops. Separate existences combine or coincide for a time, then the author's hand shakes the kaleidoscope, and the separate particles of existence combine to form a different pattern for his examination. The technique is utilised to provide both confusion and recognition: individuals who on one occasion are lonely or depressed may later be presented with their friends. Usually, only two or three important characters appear in any one scene, but there are occasions when many characters are present and the reader is the only one to know them all. Thus, in the cafeteria, or during Frémincourt's lecture, or during the occupation of the administration block, people whose innermost thoughts are already known to the reader are seen through the eyes of a stranger. For instance, Denise does not know Ménestrel:

'Il y a un type qui te dit bonjour'(124),

and Ménestrel observes that,

'...la militante de Jaumet, était debout, les yeux pleins de larmes, la main de Jaumet sur son bras'(134).

Personal, political and social affairs are interwoven so as to bring out their dissimilarity. Thus the novel opens at 6 am., with Abdelaziz waking up in the shanty he shares with five other Algerian workers. Then at 7am., Ménestrel wakes in his comfortable room, while David wakes in Brigitte's equally comfortable room and discusses over breakfast the student protests of the last few months. At 4pm., Frémincourt's lecture is attended by several of the main figures, then

followed by a discussion in the staff common-room, while Jacqueline visits Jaumet. At 8pm., Frémincourt has a frightening dizzy spell in the lecture theatre, where he has returned to look for his gloves, while the students have installed themselves in the administration block, Beaujeu is attending a classical concert which is invaded by a group of student activists, who are thrown out, a visiting German professor is having a serious heart attack and Ménéstrel is called to the telephone in time to prevent his going out to baby-sit for the evening.

Some critics decried Merle's use of simultanéisme as old-fashioned:

'..une technique très traditionnelledu beau travail de chirurgien plutôt que d'artiste.'(*1);

'C'est une suite de scènes qui s'imbriquent les unes dans les autres et où une dizaine de personnages - je ne les ai pas comptés - réagissent dans tous les sens, sans qu'il y ait progression dramatique comme il se doit dans un roman de structure traditionnelle'(*2).

The second critic seems to be arguing that the novel is at the same time too traditional and not traditional enough. He omits to mention the plainly-indicated time-sequence, which is clear: even though the author describes events which occur in different places simultaneously, the chronological order of events is not confused.

The choice of an out-dated form of narration is explained by another critic, who argues that Merle has intentionally chosen a traditional presentation, either to please a conservative public, or to reflect his theme that the grievances of youth do not change with the generations:

'Robert Merle, en revenant au roman à tiroirs des années 1930, en

(*1) M. Galey: "Romans de Mai"; Le Monde, 16.x.'70.

(*2) A. Billy: "Derrière La Vitre"; Le Figaro, 9.x.'70.

profite pour "prouver" que la jeunesse est plus hantée par les difficultés sexuelles que par la politique, pour prouver sa supériorité d'homme d'expérience sur ces fauteurs de trouble inconséquents. Pour lui, comme pour Anouilh, les conflits humains se ramènent à ce qu'ils ont toujours été. Le roman, le théâtre, la jeunesse ne se portent ni mieux ni plus mal qu'avant et il n'y a rien de changé sous le soleil'(*1).

This comment is a little biased in favour of Merle, for the novel does not give the impression that Merle is concerned about his own position in relation to the younger generation. The argument about the suitability of the method of the narration seems particularly artificial, in view of Merle's comment in the introduction to the novel: 'Je suis encore étonné, je dois le dire, qu'un intellectuel puisse considérer la mode comme un critère légitime dans l'appréciation d'une oeuvre littéraire.'(*2)

Both arguments by this critic are seen to be unnecessary if one accepts simultanéisme as the author's means of retaining control over the novel without intruding his own opinions. Unfortunately, another critic accuses Merle of being too objective:

'By the device of ubiquity (ie. by having a standpoint nowhere in particular) Merle reduces the events to an ironical spectacle and, despite the potted biographies, the psychological analyses and the highly convenient interior monologues, an anonymous spectacle at that.'*3) It would seem that this critic is accusing Merle of achieving the very effect he is striving for: the preservation of anonymity for himself as reporter, and the communication to the reader of the sense of anonymity produced by the complex, crowded campus. Is it not possible that Merle's

(*1) G. Dumur: "Le Mal de la Vieillesse (J. Anouilh: Ne Réveillez pas Madame, et R. Merle: Derrière La Vitre)"; Le Nouvel Observateur, 2.xi.'70, p.40.

(*2) Derrière La Vitre; Introduction, p. 9.

(*3) "Equivocal Voyeur"; The Times Literary Supplement, 15.i.'71.

choice of simultanéisme was dictated by his subject?

'Il s'agit de personnages, présentés sans liens entre eux et vivant isolément et parallèlement, dans un même lieu, dans un même temps, des existences séparées. C'est parce que le thème de la solitude et de l'incommunicabilité m'est apparu dès le début, à travers les confidences qui m'étaient faites, comme le thème majeur de la vie d'étudiant à Nanterre, que j'ai utilisé ce type de narration. Je ne l'ai pas choisi par une décision arbitraire. Mon projet me l'a imposé.' (*1)

Other critics appreciate what Merle is attempting, and judge that he succeeds:

'La grande difficulté était sans doute de décrire la vie organique de Nanterre, des multiples cellules que l'on voit encastrées les unes dans les autres, depuis l'allée de gazon jaune pollué, sans tomber dans le particularisme ou les grandes envolées lyriques. A cet égard, le livre est une réussite.' (*2);

'Derrière La Vitre n'est ni démodé ni dépassé, c'est au contraire un livre neuf, d'une actualité et d'une vérité indiscutables.' (*3)

The important question to be answered about Merle's use of simultanéisme is not whether it is old-fashioned but whether it is suitable as a vehicle for his subject. The method of narration conveys realistically the turbulent mixture of ideologies and personalities. The political and emotional confusion of the students involved is reflected in the haphazard presentation of scenes and events. The confusion, however, does not become chaotic: the juxtaposition of conflicting interests is kept under control by insistence on the time-sequence as the day progresses.

(*1) Derrière La Vitre, Introduction, p.9.

(*2) J.L.K: "Derrière La Vitre, Roman pour mai de Robert Merle"; Tribune de Lausanne, 5.iii.'71.

(*3) A.Wurmser: "Leur Jeunesse (Robert Merle: Derrière La Vitre), ou Jeunesse 1968"; Les Lettres Françaises, 4.xi.'70.

A similar control is exercised by other authors using simultanéisme. In La Mort Dans L'Ame, for instance, the author gives dates, times and place-names to retain a sense of perspective over a much wider canvas (*1). In dos Passos' U.S.A. Trilogy also, the action is spread over a more extensive geographical region, and it is made clear, at the beginning of sections, where the action takes place.(*2) The wider picture afforded by these two authors requires a considerably greater effort of comprehension on the part of the reader than does Merle's presentation of different attitudes to, and aspects of, life within a confined area. The occasional references to events far away from Nanterre, such as Ménestrel's reminiscences of the château at Belmont, are so closely connected to the characters known to the reader that they impose little strain on his powers of imagination. Similarly, the restriction of the action to one day at Nanterre means that there is little character development, only a certain amount of investigation of background, and this in turn simplifies the task of the author. The choice of March 22nd. as the selected day is also a unifying force, as the reader is already aware that events are leading up to a climax. The novel therefore has observance of the three unities as a simplifying factor, as well as the common theme of isolation. It is thus a much less ambitious project than those envisaged by the writers of the trilogies.

Other occasions when Merle uses simultanéisme also make only a limited demand on the reader. Purcell's vision of the massacre of the water-party in L'Ile (*3) is strikingly effective, since the vision is a projection of his worry over the fate of his friends when

(*1) J.P.Sartre: La Mort Dans L'Ame, vol.3 of Les Chemins de la Liberté, Gallimard, 1949.

(*2) J.dos Passos: USA Trilogy, Random House, New York, 1930.

(*3) L'Ile, pp. 299-30.

he knows of the discovery of the rifles by the Tahitians. It is an example of the kind of extra-sensory perception of which, it is hinted, the Tahitians are capable, and as the vision is an experience Purcell shares with three of the Tahitian women, it serves to emphasise the ties which bind them. Yet the use of simultanéisme at this point makes little demand on the reader's credulity, as the vision is so closely connected to the main plot development. Similarly, the close connection with the main plot renders Merle's use of simultanéisme unremarkable in Un Animal Doué de Raison (*1), when he describes world reaction during the week following the sinking of the Little Rock.

As it would seem, from a comparison of Derrière La Vitre with the trilogies of dos Passos and Sartre, that Merle makes few demands on simultanéisme, it is interesting to compare his use of this technique with a novel of narrower scope. In As I Lay Dying (*2), the situations of the characters in time and space, their relationships and the plot itself, all emerge from a tissue woven from the reflections of those involved. The construction entails much less narration and description than that of Derrière La Vitre, where the same event may be described by two or more characters as well as being narrated by the author (*3). In As I Lay Dying, the omission of narrative enables the reader to build up a picture of events seen through the eyes of the characters: this has the effect of immediacy and participation, as plot becomes an appendage of character. The challenge to the reader's imagination is much greater than in Derrière La Vitre, where the clear time-scale, the details of situation and the use of straight narration

(*1) Un Animal Doué de Raison, pp. 268-292.

(*2) W.Faulkner: As I Lay Dying; Chatto and Windus, 1958 (text of 1930)

(*3) eg. The situation after the invasion of the ground floor of the administration block is narrated by the concierge, (298), described by the author (299), by David (301), Josette (304) and Denise (306)

leave the reader in no doubt as to what is happening>(*1) The chronological progression of Derrière La Vitre is much clearer than that of As I Lay Dying, where the pattern woven by different views of the present is seen in the perspective of a similarly woven pattern of past events. Although personal relationships in Derrière La Vitre are developed against a background which also forms a pattern, on the psychological plane, the emergence of a political or historical perspective is dependent on a putative future. Whereas the emphasis in Faulkner is on how the attitudes of various characters produce events, the emphasis in Merle is on judgement by different characters of the same event. In As I Lay Dying, for example, the other characters do not understand Vardaman's identification of his mother with the fish he caught on the day she died, but the reader, having privileged access to Vardaman's thoughts, does. In Derrière La Vitre, in contrast, the occupation is discussed from various points of view while it is still only projected. The event is accounted for on several levels, as in Faulkner, but the characters themselves are aware that it is a symbol. In Faulkner, only the reader and the author are aware of the symbolism. In the Faulkner, also, it is assumed that when the reader realises the significance of an event he will arrive at the same positive explanation as the author, but in Derrière La Vitre the reader is not encouraged to come to any definite conclusion, because the author's attitude to the events is ambivalent. Thus, whereas the reader of As I Lay Dying deduces from the various accounts what has taken place, and the reader of Derrière La Vitre with less difficulty fits together the jigsaw of attitudes to form a picture of the action, the first reader finds he has an answer, but the second realises he has only a clue to an indefinite message.

The methods used by Merle to make clear what action takes

(*1) The use of first- and third-person narration, and of the interior monologue, are discussed in the second part of the present chapter.

place - the restriction to a short period of time and a small geographical area- were seen as an attempt at unanimisme (*1). The use of the beehive image, with its emphasis on the closed world of the university (317), would seem to support this opinion. But this view of Nanterre is a fleeting one: here the author, through the character of Frémincourt, is able momentarily to visualise university life as a whole. The emphasis in the rest of the novel is dissimilar: the main perspectives are drawn from within an enclosed, contradictory world. The narrative moves from one cell of the beehive to the next(*2), showing the parallel existences within, but the emphasis is on division and lack of communication. Because Merle's aim in writing was to stress the problems of isolation and to present Nanterre as a world lacking in cohesion, his irritation at comments about the use of unanimisme in the novel is understandable.(*3)

The final picture presented by Derrière La Vitre is one of confusion, and the overall impression of division is heightened by the equivocal attitude of the author. This is not a pose assumed to fit an apparently haphazard selection of events,

'..je ne vois pas pourquoi...il me faudrait feindre de ne pas être incertain quand je le suis.'(*4)

The lack of a definite opinion on the part of the author does not prevent him from firmly controlling the narrative; his disinterest makes his omniscience more probable, when he allows the reader to share his knowledge of the intimate lives of his characters.

(*1)eg. G. Dumur: "Le Mal de la Vieillesse"; Le Nouvel Observateur, 8.xi.'70

(*2) This is not the sense of cellule in the novel: Merle uses the word in connection with the monastic, enclosed existence of each individual.

(*3) See Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

(*4) Merle: Introduction to Derrière La Vitre, p.12.

A similar privilege is afforded the reader of Un Animal Doué de Raison, who shares with the author access to confidential reports and documents. The lecture, utilised in this novel less subtly than in Derrière La Vitre, where the discussion of Hamlet parodies the main theme, is instrumental in informing the reader about dolphins and the progress in delphinology which Merle imagines possible by 1972-3. The book opens with Sevilla giving a talk about his research to a ladies' luncheon club. Later, during the mating of Fa and Bi, Maggie, who is not a scientist, is conveniently paired with Bob as an observer: he explains to her, and to the reader, the difficulties attendant on the mating of dolphins. Sevilla's introductory talk at the press conference establishes what Merle foresees when scientists are able to teach dolphins to talk in English. Used in a similar fashion is Arlette's explanation to Mr.C. of the difficulties of persuading dolphins to progress from single words to connected speech. It is noteworthy that the lectures combine scientific fact with assumptions by Merle. This combination is instrumental in carrying the reader past the threshold of speculation, and therefore in ensuring a smooth transition from fact to fiction.

Reports of experiments, typed from tape-recordings, and of laboratory discussions, also help to advance the plot. There is a fifteen-page report of the comments made by observers of the mating of Fa and Bi, and a report dictated by Sevilla about how he re-established verbal contact with Fa, who for fourteen days after the mating had not pronounced a word of English. Further information is provided when the team of scientists discuss their achievements, after the mating and before re-establishing linguistic contact, and following the disappointment at Bi's refusal to accept another dolphin in the pool - it had been hoped that new subjects would learn English from the first two. Such passages encourage the reader's participation in the scientists' hopes. It

is significant that they all occur fairly early in the novel, while the problem is how much will be discovered rather than what use will be made of the discovery. The reports and discussions cease when Sevilla sets up his own laboratory: we are given few details of how he learns to emit whistles and clicks in order to communicate with the dolphins in their own language.

Useful in giving an impression of the political background are the confidential documents, many of which involve Lorrimer and Adams, whose rôle is to investigate Sevilla and, later, to protect him. A copy of Adams' interrogation of Sevilla after Liz' resignation and Michael's arrest, is succeeded by Adams' report to his superiors, summing up Sevilla's political naïveté. Adams' further interview with Sevilla, when it is explained that Fa and Bi are to be taken away for training, is followed by the correspondence between Adams, Sevilla and Lorenson, which leads up to Sevilla's resignation. There is also a transcript of Sevilla's interview with Michael in Sing-Sing. In addition, there are copies of reports by Mr.C., who is investigating Lorrimer and Adams: these include a conversation with an informer, where they are referred to by their code names, Atalante and Azur. All the reports are furnished with convincing details of time, place and date, including realistic room numbers, such as 56279, and are marked 'confidential'. All are interpolated into the main narrative without introduction. This has the effect of making the reader appreciate his privileged position: like the author, he is in possession of all the facts, and knows more than any one character.

The use of confidential reports and documents in Un Animal Doué de Raison is one means by which the author retains a firm control over the narrative on the 'horizontal' time-plane. The construction of several of the novels depends on the progress of the action towards some future event which is expected by the reader. In Week-end à Zuydcoote,

this is the arrival of the Germans, in La Mort Est Mon Métier, it is the defeat of Nazism, in Un Animal Doué de Raison, it is the expiry of the ultimatum and, in Derrière La Vitre, it is the occupation of the administration block. The use of times and dates in Un Animal Doué de Raison, and the insertion of times in Derrière La Vitre, are reminiscent of the chapter-headings of Week-end à Zuydcoote and La Mort Est Mon Métier: all give the reader a clear indication of how time is passing and add to his anticipation of the future. In L'Île and Malevil, which progress away from the main events - the mutiny and the explosion - the expectation of the reader concerns a moral confrontation. The time-perspective is nevertheless clear in these novels also.

Having established a definite time-plane, Merle accelerates the pace of the narrative as the novels progress. Often the effect of acceleration is achieved by increasing the amount of violence. Even in Derrière La Vitre, the only novel in which no one is killed, the stocktaking and theorising of the earlier chapters eventually give way to definite action. In all the other novels, the increasing violence involves the threatened death of the central characters and the death of other people.

In Week-end à Zuydcoote, violence and brutality are part of the normal life of the soldier. Death and blood are everywhere. In the opening scene, Maillat meets a soldier transporting the body of a young girl, on a hand-cart. Even in the comparative peace of the Sana camp, there is a row of dead soldiers nearby. Later in the novel, a shell which falls near them produces a macabre effect: the piles of dismembered bodies have to be sorted out again into heaps of suitable composition (63). The picture of the normal life of a soldier necessitates horrifying detail in events which follow, if the author is to avoid an anti-climax. Subsequent descriptions therefore include details of the soldier whose fingers have been ripped away (147), of the man in the water who is so badly burnt that Maillat hardly dares touch him, and of

the half-body at the water's edge (150). The description of the burning boat does not go into detail, but implies untold suffering by means of repeated reference to,

'... une plainte interminable, psalmodiée, aigüe["] comme une plainte de femme. Quand le panache de feu se tordait par arrière, elle devenait plus forte...' (151).

The violence is further built up by means of the rape scene and Maillat's murder of the two soldiers (201). Again, the macabre intrudes, in the description of Maillat dragging the body of the second soldier down the stairs: an arm hooks round the banister and, as Maillat struggles to release it, the man's head lolls against his shoulder (208). This is followed by the arrival of the two soldiers with the body-wagon (214). Finally, Alexandre's death is horrifying: his head is severed from his body. The image is repeated when, at the end of the novel, the dying Maillat feels for Jeanne's head and cannot find it.

It is hardly surprising that some critics found the events of Sunday, ie. those involving Jeanne, rather melodramatic (1*). In an attempt to describe the horrors of war, Merle begins with a terrifying picture, which merges naturally into the even more terrifying description of the abortive embarkation and the burning boat. Because of the compelling excitement of the events of Saturday, those of Sunday must be even more shocking if they are to have any impact. It is significant that the death of Alexandre is complete fiction: Merle had to invent a fitting culmination to the series of horrors. The author's control of events is therefore rather too obvious for the second part of the novel to be completely convincing, if it is viewed purely as a series of actions, but this conclusion does not take into account the order of

(*1) cf. C. Delaunay: "Week-end à Zuydcoote"; Revue de la Méditerranée, vol.8, no.1. (janvier-février, 1960);

and R. Kemp: "La Vie des Livres"; Les Nouvelles Littéraires, no. 1162, 8.xii,'50.

priorities of the hero. (*1) Nevertheless, since the events of Sunday gain added significance because they affect Maillat more personally, it should not have been necessary for the author to make them quite so gruesome. Merle goes to the opposite extreme in La Mort Est Mon Métier, where the attitude of the central character detracts from the impact of so many deaths. Here the author's control is such that the '10,000 unités par jour' of which Lang is expected to dispose become simply a number for the reader also. (*1)

The use of violence in L'Ile is the more interesting because of the central theme of pacifism. The novel opens with four deaths. Burt kills Jimmy; Mason shoots Burt; Hunt strangles Boswell; MacLeod knifes Simon. From this point to the establishment of the community on Pitcairn, there is no violence at all, as if to emphasise that a new life is beginning. The first potentially dangerous situations on the island have, moreover, added details which make them seem unlikely to be serious. When the sailors are about to hang Mason, tiny, gaily-coloured birds perch on the noose and on the shoulders of the men who are contemplating murder (125). Omaata's punishment of Smudge, which could have gravely injured him, degenerates into farce as his trousers give way and he runs from the 'assembly' (182). Yet all the time the author ensures that the reader is aware of dangerous undercurrents, by mentioning the discrepancy in the numbers of men and women, by pointing out the injustice of the division of land, and by describing how easily the Tahitians learn to shoot. The predictable description of the deaths of Kori and Mehoro (266) reinforces the impression of nightmare, as if unpleasant sensations and events are part of a bad dream of Purcell's. The sense of unreality is dispersed when the gentle Tahitians kill. The reader has been waiting for this to happen, and Merle ensures that the

(*1) The angling of the narration to the viewpoint of the central character is treated in more detail in the second part of the present chapter.

effect is striking. The impact is all the more horrifying because the victim is a woman (*1)!

'J'ai vu Amoureia, homme ' Elle est pendue par les deux mains à la branche d'un avocatier. Et elle a le ventre grand ouvert de là (elle montra son estomac) jusque-là (elle montra son sexe) Homme, c'est horrible !'(358).

The involvement of the pacifist hero occurs with the death of Timi. Here the description is less horrific, but the impact is greater because of the murderous intention of the hero. Merle allows the reader's interest in Purcell's reactions to produce the effect, instead of emphasising the physical horror of the crime.

Violence in Un Animal Doué de Raison is at first merely implied by references to the power and potential of the dolphins. The reader is told that a dolphin could kill a man with its tail-fin, but the emphasis is originally on the restraint of the animal, which behaves with gentleness towards its captors. The descriptions of the potentially destructive power of the animal are placed against a background of world peace, and the symbolism is clear. When violence erupts, it affects many people: the Little Rock is blown up off Haiphong with the loss of hundreds of sailors; radio-active fall-out affects a larger number of Chinese; the incidence of suicide, murder and rape in the United States reaches alarming proportions; a hundred and twenty-six people die, and over nine hundred are injured, in the Stockholm disaster. The impact of these casualties is less horrifying because they are anonymous numbers far away from Florida; the effect achieved resembles that in La Mort Est Mon Métier. Then Merle introduces a factor which he over-emphasised in Week-end à Zuydcoote and avoided in La Mort Est Mon Métier: characters known to the reader and beloved of the hero die horribly, which stresses

(*1) It is very rarely that women are subjected to violence in Merle's writing. The death of Amoureia is a exception, possibly attributable to the important part played in the novel by the female characters.

the dreadful consequences of the war situation. The deaths of Daisy and Jim are more shocking than the events of Sunday in Week-end à Zuydcoote because, for the first time, Sevilla is present when death occurs; the contrast with the earlier, distant deaths adds to the effectiveness. The murder of the dolphins emphasises that what Sevilla had assumed to be an unreal world of violence is only too real: he must therefore take action. Here, as in L'Ile, the violence is angled by the author so as to pinpoint the situation of the central figure.

In Malevil, violence is present throughout, but the kind of action perpetrated by the protagonists becomes more disgusting as the novel progresses. Violent action reflects collective morality rather than individual responsibility. Again, there is progression from the general to the particular, from the distant, accidental événement brought about by unknown people, to the individual murder necessitated by the personal struggle for survival. Emmanuel kills, firstly, in self-defence, then, to protect the crops. This is followed by the pitched battle against Vilmain, the rationalised murder of the survivors, the justified lynching of Fulbert, and the determination to go to any lengths to protect the community. As the crimes become more reprehensible, the attitude of the characters becomes more cold-blooded. Merle is directing the development of violence towards a climax which is still not reached by the end of the novel: eventually war on a wider scale will break out, at a point on the horizontal time-scale which has not yet been reached.

Merle's control of narrative is also evidenced by his manipulation of events to phase the action in a series of climaxes. In Week-end à Zuydcoote, L'Ile and Malevil, these climaxes coincide with the development of violence, but in the other novels, events which are of purely personal interest also form part of the series of steps by which the narrative progresses. In La Mort Est Non Métier, the climaxes occur when Lang overcomes a challenge: when he escapes from

his family, when he proves he is a brave soldier, when he stands up for his principles in the factory, or when he sleeps with a woman. Similarly, the narrative is advanced by successes in his career: his election to the SS., and his subsequent promotion to posts of increasing responsibility. Un Animal Doué de Raison also progresses through a series of personal triumphs. The breakthrough from the word to the sentence, the formation of the Sevilla-Arlette relationship, the establishment of an independent laboratory, the renewed communication with Fa and Bi: all are instrumental in bringing the plot to an intended stage. In Derrière La Vitre, with its emphasis on personal problems, there is a climax connected with each thread of the story. Danièle, who dreads giving a seminar, survives it; David, who longs to establish relations with the workers, installs Abdelaziz in a room of the résidence; Jacqueline, who is concerned about her lack of sexual experience, sleeps with Jaumet; Ménestrel, who is concerned about money and sex, finds that Jacqueline provides both; Denise finally asks Jaumet to go on holiday with her.

It is noticeable that in all the novels the climaxes are spaced out, so as to provide a continuing focus of interest. This phasing of the action is accompanied, in all the novels except Derrière La Vitre, by an arrangement of the climaxes in ascending order of significance, which gives accelerated pace to the narration. Each succeeding climax is of greater importance to the story and the main theme, and this encourages the reader's involvement to such an extent that he is not aware of the author's directing hand.

The reader is, however, aware of the author's manipulation of events when he notices how often coincidences occur in the novels, and their importance to both story and message. Frequently, the author speaks through his characters to draw attention to some trick of fate which has ensured survival or prevented disaster. In such cases, the author's presence as an observer or moraliser outside the action is positively established. The fact that coincidences are often a factor

contributing to theme or message may justify their inclusion, but this does not prevent the reader from gaining the impression that he is reading in company with a commentator who is determined to ensure his appreciation of the finer points.

By coincidence, in Week-end à Zuydcoote, the hero narrowly escapes death several times. Maillat, sheltering in a garage, sinks down onto the floor only seconds before a shower of shrapnel flies through the door at chest height. This is emphasised by the reflection, 'Il avait eu de la chance d'être assis. C'est à cela qu'avait tenu sa vie, à ce hasard infime.'(102)

Later, Maillat suggests to Gabet that they change queues on the beach, to avoid embarking on the antiquated paddle-steamer, which is later sunk. On board ship, Maillat, for no explicable reason, suggests to Adams that they move to the stern, just before the forward section vanishes. Again, the luck involved is emphasised:

'Et tout d'un coup, il pensa: et Gabet? Gabet, qui était à l'avant?'(141)

Maillat again escapes when, because he has wrenched his knee, Alexandre goes to fetch water in his place, and is killed at the well:

'-C'est moi qui devrais être là.

-Si tu ne t'étais pas cogné le genou, dit-il au bout d'un moment, tu aurais eu le temps d'y aller avant que l'obus éclate.'(261)

The manner of Alexandre's death recalls disquietingly the earlier comment by Pierson that Alexandre resembled John the Baptist. Moreover, in case the reader has not appreciated the significance, Maillat reminds Pierson of the comparison.(265) Ironically, these escapes lead up to the final coincidence: Jeanne's house, which has survived no less miraculously than Maillat, suffers a direct hit. The commentator underlines Maillat's realisation that there is some action he should have taken - his 'j'aurais dû' is a repetition of the 'tu aurais..' immediately before Alexandre's death - but this time his inaction does not save him. Just as he was unaware of his earlier escapes from death, at the end of the novel he does not realise that he is dying.

In L'Ile, fate plays an important part in directing the action. Mason escapes hanging, because Hunt has once seen a shipmate hanged and, even more unlikely, remembers the occasion:

'Il devait la vie à ce hasard infime: un souvenir qui s'était accroché quelque part dans les pauvres méninges confuses de Hunt.'(130)

The rule of the majority in the 'assembly' is dependent on White's erroneous assumption that Purcell was making fun of him on a previous occasion,

'Le sort de l'île avait tenu à cette mimique'(270),

on the lack of understanding by all the sailors except Mac Leod of how to vote, and on the vote of the subnormal Hunt. Mason, when he decides to make a cache of arms, happens on the very cave where Avapouhi and Itia are hiding. Fortunately, the cave is so constructed that they can see Mason, but he cannot see them. By another coincidence, Timi is killed by a shot from his own rifle at the moment when Purcell attacks him, so that the hero is absolved of blame, if intention is discounted, and released from a conflict he seems unlikely to win. Finally, when there seems to be no hope of reconciliation between Purcell and Tetahiti, and although they are careful to choose a fine day to try out the boat, a storm separates them from the island, and a fog separates them from each other, so that they appreciate finding both the island and each other. Thus coincidence is first manipulated to the disadvantage of the hero, then, later, to produce a happy ending.

Coincidence in Malevil is manipulated to produce the opposite conclusion. At first, the emphasis is on the good fortune of the survivors: the fact that Emmanuel and his friends are in the cellar saves them. Their good luck is further emphasised by the deaths of Germain, 'Si Germain était parvenu quelques secondes plus tôt dans la cour du donjon, il est possible qu'il eût sauvé sa vie'(81), and of Meyssonier's son, who had been left at home because Meyssonier did not want to risk another argument with his wife.(125) The story of

the fight for survival is also full of fortuitous coincidence, notably Emmanuel's decision to take a prisoner, who warns him that La Roque is in enemy hands:

'....je nous vois, cloués, en terrain découvert, par le feu dévastateur de dix-sept fusils.'(407)

In keeping with the pessimistic tone of the ending is the less happy coincidence by which Emmanuel postpones the removal of his appendix until after the Easter holiday. As medical treatment is no longer available after Easter Day, his doctor's comment that to delay is a 'grosse négligence'(62) is remembered by Emmanuel on his death-bed: 'C'était une négligence et je la paye.'(529)

Like the death of Maillat in Week-end à Zuycoote, Emmanuel's death, following so many miraculous escapes, seems the more ironic because it is the result of something he omitted to do.

Irony is also conveyed by means of a system of corresponding images, which achieves on the plane of imagination what coincidence achieves on the plane of events. Here the author does not intrude to comment, but allows the reader to draw his own conclusions from the parallels which are repeatedly implied.

Probably the best example of the extension of a metaphor to express an important theme is the Hamlet image in Derrière La Vitre, which is used to emphasise the Oedipean motivation dominating the personal and political attitudes of the student generation. The whole of student society is presented in terms of a new struggle against the father-figures which have replaced the parents left at home. The struggle is expressed in specifically sexual terms, for the symbol of the phallus is linked with oppression in the student mind. Cohn-Bendit coins the phallic metaphor applied to the administration block (303), and the link between the council chamber and oppression by an older generation is clear:

'Ce n'était pas par hasard si l'architecte l'avait placée au dernier

étage de la tour, c'était le témoignage monstrueux de la domination des mandarins sur les étudiants, le mirador d'un camp de concentration, le symbole phallique de la répression administrative. Il fallait à tout prix l'occuper'(302).

The theme of revolt is explained by Berguèse in sexual terms: 'Bien entendu, c'est un mythe oedipien. Le fils, incarné par l'étudiant, insulte le père, incarné par le ministre, et symboliquement, le châtre. C'est Chronos émasculant Ouranos. A mon avis, le drame qui se joue ici depuis la rentrée, c'est le drame symbolique de la perte de pouvoir du père, que le père soit ministre, doyen ou professeur.'(216)

Although the students would probably agree with this interpretation no more than does Delmont (217), indications in the novel are many that jealousy of the new father-figure is replacing jealousy of the original. Too many of the characters are looking for father- or mother-substitutes for this not to be significant. For example, Ménestrel, who hates his mother, finds that Tatalaine appears in many of his day-dreams. While he is eating Jacqueline's supper, his thoughts go back to the apple store at Belmont, and 'les gros bras rouges pleins de bonté de Louise'(391). Jacqueline, during a seminar, contemplates Levasseur:

'...je crois que j'adorerais ça, qu'un homme de cet âge me prenne sur ses genoux et me dorlote et me tripote comme sa petite poupée en me regardant avec indulgence de ses yeux ridés...'(78).

Denise may well be attracted to Jaumet because he is older than the average student. As she watches him deliberately filling his pipe,(130), she thinks of her father. Brigitte sees a resemblance between Gérard, her mother's lover, and David. Presumably she is jealous of her mother (178). It is implied that the popularity of Cohn-Bendit, where women students are concerned, may be due to a subconscious identification of him with their fathers (302). Josette Lachaud finds that Frémincourt has unaccountably replaced her father in her recollections of childhood (204). Frémincourt reflects:

'J'aurais dû comprendre plus tôt qu'elle m'identifiait avec son géniteur.

Et maintenant que je ne suis pas de son avis, je l'"abandonne", comme son père.' (244)

The theme is emphasised by the thoughts of Marcel Gély during the lecture given by Frémincourt. He remembers his horror when he accidentally saw his parents making love, and there is clear evidence that he is jealous of his father. The extension of the theme to a student who appears only on this one occasion indicates that the attitude is common. (*1)

The lecture on Hamlet, which is placed centrally in the novel, may well be intended to apply to the student population as a whole. Indeed, Jacqueline has already reflected that she looks like a young Hamlet when she is wearing her black mini-dress. The interpretation of Hamlet's dilemma given in the lecture could well be an allegory of the student problem. Hamlet, we are told, was jealous of his dead father. Here is a picture of the student alienated from his parents, often by some ill-defined idea of sexual competition. Hamlet hates his step-father. The student is opposed to the university authorities, with their old-fashioned ideas about being in loco parentis. Hamlet's hesitation may be due to indecision about whether he hates Claudius more as his mother's lover than as his father's murderer. The same confusion of personal and political motives may be seen in the student attitude. Hamlet's desire for any action at all, seen in the stabbing of Polonius behind the arras, could represent the motiveless malignity of the attack on the Dean, and the way the students accused him of being a Nazi. Josette Lachaud shows in her conversation with Frémincourt (196) that she is not satisfied with philosophising, and feels an urgent need to act, no matter how.

The students who decry a Freudian interpretation of Hamlet are themselves in revolt against a previous generation. Their

(*1) '...surtout que parmi ces jeunes gens et jeunes filles, j'ai été très très frappé par le nombre de complexes d'Oedipe que j'ai rencontrés.' See Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

psychological confusion is entangled with their animal existence, even though they claim to be intellectuals. The immediate ambition of the students is to make their mark as anarchists before settling down to a conformist future. Thus the student population of Nanterre has much in common with the confused figure of Hamlet, although the men have less difficulty than the women in separating the personal and political aspects of their lives. Jaumet, in particular, emerges as a well-balanced person who can organise his private life so as to leave time for important political activities, but then Jaumet, as Denise reflects, is quite old - about twenty-five - and the more mature Hamlet of Act V is committed to definite action.

The Hamlet image may be seen as a unifying factor in the novel, utilised to place the central theme in perspective. The omniscient narrator by this means evaluates the achievement of the characters he describes. A similar treatment is seen in La Mort Est Mon Métier, which also is concerned with the nature of authority. Here again, the author does not intrude, but ensures by means of images that connections are established in the reader's mind.

The dominant influence in La Mort Est Mon Métier is Rudolf's father. The strict religious upbringing, the expectation that Rudolf will become a priest, and his loss of faith, all of which are substantiated by Hoess' autobiography (*1), are given a sinister significance by the author's creation of a paternal authority which is both physically and morally corrupt. Rudolf's father terrorises the whole family, for he is determined that they shall expiate his sin - shortly before Rudolf's birth, he had contracted venereal disease in the course of a Parisian adventure. Although ostensibly concerned that his family shall be protected against evil by a way of life so strict that no time is left for thought, he is really punishing his family for his own failure; it is as if the unborn Rudolf had been the cause of, and not the excuse for, his fall from grace. The terrifying Christ-dream in which the father

(*1) R.F.Hoess: Le Commandant d'Auschwitz Parle; Julliard, 1959.

persuades himself that he is willing to assume responsibility for the sins of his entire family,

'Je fis l'aveu - de ma faute - à ta mère et je décidai - désormais - de prendre sur mes épaules - en plus de mes propres fautes - les fautes de mes enfants - et de ma femme - et de demander pardon - à Dieu - pour elles - comme pour les miennes'(16-7),

is in reality a way of blackmailing Rudolf into providing an eternal insurance against the wrath of God, by entering the priesthood.

Merle so arranges the facts as to establish that the father is replaced by a series of authoritarian figures, all of whom dominate Lang. The possibility of transferring Lang's allegiance from his father to the Church vanishes, when Lang believes that Père Thaler has broken the confidence of the confessional. The new authority is a soldier and a patriot, Rittmeister Gunther, whose creed is,

"Für mich gibt's nur eine Kirche, und (de) heisst Deutschland!"(61)

The replacement of the father's authority is complete when Gunther makes fun of penitence, and convinces Rudolf that the only sin is not to love Germany. It is emphasised that Gunther's mime of a penitent reminds Rudolf of his father (60). Gunther's influence is reinforced by that of Siebert, who assumes authority over Rudolf when he is about to commit suicide. On this occasion also, Rudolf himself remarks that it is as if his father were present (141). Significantly, the reappearance of authority brings 'une torpeur heureuse'(142). Patriotism becomes Rudolf's new religion, and fighting to protect the German race, his ideal. His identification of a Jewish face in a cartoon with the Devil is ironic, not simply because the Devil in question was a picture affixed to the door of the lavatory during his childhood - father Lang was making sure that no opportunity for meditation was lost - but because the identification is unthinking, and Rudolf's outlook is ostensibly intellectual. It is not until he reads the Bible in prison that he rationalises his hatred of the Jews (156). Religion, to Rudolf, is an

allegory in which God and the Devil represent Germany and the Jews.

The harshness of Rudolf's father is reproduced in von Jeseritz, on whose estate Rudolf works for five years. Again, a stern figure directs Rudolf's every action. Von Jeseritz even arranges his marriage, to a girl of suitably pure German pedigree. The overruling of Rudolf's own inclinations is complete, at the point where he recognises 'les yeux de Père'.(181)

Apart from Rudolf's comments, a link between authorities is provided by the image of Rudolf's father, 'vêtu de noir, ganté de noir', which persists in those who replace him. The woman who witnesses Rudolf's attempts to dispatch Henkel (127) is wearing black gloves, von Jeseritz rides a black horse, and Himmler meticulously buttons his black gloves. Himmler, in particular, takes over the father rôle. The circumstances in which he meets Rudolf are similar to those in which interviews with his father occurred: he too is an emotionless figure in black, whom Rudolf visits in a darkened study with only a circle of light from a small lamp. Rudolf's questioning of the value of loyalty to the German cause, after the Treaty of Versailles in 1918 (128), and when he narrowly avoids imprisonment in 1932, ceases after the two interviews with Himmler. The stress on secrecy over the arrangements for Auschwitz makes the reader suspicious that Lang is once more being exploited: indeed, it is implied that all the successive authorities replacing his father are as corrupt as the father's diseased body. Lang's reaction to Himmler's suicide underlines this point:

'Il s'est défilé! Lui que je respectais comme un père!'(313).

The reader is, moreover, aware that Lang himself grows to resemble the father he despised. After the father's death, he takes his place in the family, orders the routine of the household, and supervises the prayers. More significant is his repetition of his father's self-inflicted punishment. This takes the form of a compulsion to work in a freezing study in bad weather, and to continue the suffering until he is

blue with cold, the permission to close the window deferred until the rain or snow has ceased. The example of his father gives Lang the strength to persevere in the face of difficulties(192). The irony of this development of Lang's character depends on the establishment, early in the novel, of an authority which is suspect and corrupt: this emphasises the questionable nature of Lang's sense of duty, which is the central problem of the novel. The linked theme of authority is utilised by Merle to provide the reader with a key to the main question, that of responsibility. The image makes available to the reader implications which Lang himself cannot, or will not, acknowledge.

Merle's use of animal imagery serves to accentuate his position as an outside observer, indicating the moral of the story. Most of the novels contain some animal imagery, but that in Malevil and in Un Animal Doué de Raison is especially significant.

The dominant images in Week-end à Zuydecoote and La Mort Est Mon Métier are, respectively, those connected with violence and authority, and what animal imagery there is, is connected with peace time. Maillat, on his way to the beach on Saturday afternoon, passes a field containing three horses, of which one is dead, one wounded, and one comforting its wounded companion.(74) The incident is a forerunner of others, notably Jeanne's cleaning of her house, which convey the impression that the everyday life of innocent people has been invaded by war. Horses are again used to represent peace in La Mort Est Mon Métier, where Rudolf's love of horses provides an incentive to ignore the offer of a post in the concentration camp service. The breeding and raising of horses is von Jeseritz' main interest, and represents a more innocent and peaceful aspect of patriotism. The implication of innocence continues in L'Ile, where the beautiful, untamable Horoa is frequently described as a mare.(*1)

L'Ile and Malevil contain many animal images, which stress

(*1) cf. L'Ile, pp. 170, 171, 200, 431.

the importance of nature in the life of people living in primitive conditions. Unpleasant characters are referred to as animals which threaten domesticity: Smudge looks like a rat (320) and, after Omaata's attack under the banyan is known as iti ore - little rat. For Mac Leod are reserved the really telling comparisons emphasising his extreme thinness and guile: fox (206); eagle (245); spider (245); grasshopper (250) and his nickname, le Squelette (336, 350, etc.) Comparisons to dangerous wild animals are few, but are used to denote above average size or strength. Omaata is compared to a tigress, and Hunt to a bear (54).

Inoffensive characters are referred to as small, or domesticated, animals. Purcell is described by Omaata as 'mon petit coq' (257); Itia is as mischievous as a squirrel (132); the women move as silently as weasels (337) and the graceful Mehani is compared to a greyhound (165). Domestic imagery is developed further in Malevil. Although la Menou, because of her size and fussy disposition, is compared to 'une vieille petite souris' (107), the dominant image for the women is that of the hen-house:

'Elle règne toujours en maîtresse sur la gent femelle du château, becquetant de préférence la plus vieille ou la plus caquetante, mais au besoin, bien qu'avec plus de circonspection, n'épargnant non plus les poulettes, et Catie plus que Miette, vu que Catie a bon bec aussi' (383).

When la Falvine joins the household, she is described as a pebble thrown into the henhouse (440).

A medieval concern for the continuation of the race is reflected in the preoccupation with those animals which have survived. They first have young, are mated, and have their future assured, before the humans in the novel. There is rejoicing when Princesse's calf is a bull, and despair when Bel Amour's foal is female. Excitement follows the discovery of Malabar, the uncastrated stallion, at l'Etang. This precedes by only a few pages the discovery of Miette, the first woman of child-bearing age. The domination of the male, hinted at in

Emmanuel's contemptuous reference to the hen-house, is forecast by his reflection about how Wahrwoorde ordered the primitive life at l'Etang: 'Car c'était un luxe exceptionnel de les retrouver réunis dans une ferme si petite: un verrat, un étalon, un taureau: dans un coin où les cultivateurs n'élèvent que des femelles, nos vaches étant des vierges inséminées, le Wahrwoorde, lui, avait le respect du principe mâle...' (194)

The comparison drawn between humans and animals is utilised to stress the emergence of the Malevil community as feudal overlords. When Amarante is covered by Malabar, Emmanuel notices the difference in their pedigrees, and he also remarks that the cow,

'...s'appelait Marquise, ce qui la plaçait dans l'échelle nobiliaire bien au-dessous de notre Princesse.' (193)

The parallels are used to bring out the humans' animal dependence on the soil, but the connection is with man's domestic nature. It is noticeable that the animal imagery becomes less significant as violence increasingly reveals man's savagery.

In Un Animal Doué de Raison, the innocence of nature is shown by means of a wild animal. The taming and training of wild dolphins by civilised man is used to comment ironically on civilised man's behaviour.

'Les dauphins deviennent miroirs pour l'homme....l'inconnu des dauphins parlant pour tout ce qui nous reste inconnu en ce monde...' (*1)

Dolphins are basically innocent and good; their wisdom is as yet uncorrupted. Merle insists on the purity of spirit of the dolphin: Maggie observes, during the mating of Fa and Bi, that she cannot understand why some people think of 'ce genre de choses' as sinful (104). Once Fa and Bi have adapted to American ways, Merle reminds the reader of their original nature by introducing Daisy, the dolphin studied by Sevilla at his private laboratory. The dolphins provide a standard by which to judge human beings, rather as the vahinés of L'Ile provide a means of

(*1) A.Stil: "L'Homme, c'était aussi..."; L'Humanité, 7.xii.'67.

judging the civilisation by which they are influenced. In each case, the innocent are corrupted, and civilisation is shown to be a thinly-veiled savagery which has lost the innocence of the true savage.

The establishment of interspecies communication in Un Animal Doué de Raison provides the author with the opportunity to comment on two species. As André Billy points out (*1), the title of the novel could define either species. The novel is so constructed that the stages in the dolphin story reflect the stages reached in human relationships.

This first emerges in sexual terms. The ironic comment by Mr.C.,

'Pourquoi n'y aurait-il pas un lien entre la philologie et la sexualité?' (74)

is shown to be significant a few pages later, when Sevilla is making love to Grace, and thinking,

'...quelle conversation imbécile, que c'est triste, ces gestes, quand il n'y a même pas d'amitié'(79).

The end of the Sevilla-Grace relationship is reflected in Arlette's account of the failure to mate Ivan with Mina (80-81); during the same interview, her account of the two homosexual dolphins serves to highlight the character of Mr.C. and the behaviour of Bob. During the courtship of Fa and Bi, the reader is aware of method behind Sevilla's apparently casual pairing of the observers: Suzy and Peter, who later marry; Maggie and Bob, whose relationship is especially important to Maggie; Liz and Michael, the traitor and the idealist; and Sevilla and Arlette. Arlette exclaims during the mating that the dolphins seem so happy that she almost wishes she could change places with them, and, predictably, the establishment of the Arlette-Sevilla relationship soon follows. Liz underlines the significance of the parallel, for the benefit of the reader:

'Mais personne ne m'empêchera de constater que pendant quinze jours nous n'avons rien fait que les regarder faire l'amour -- je parle de Bessie et

(*1)A. Billy: "Un Animal Doué de Raison, ce n'est pas l'homme"; Le Figaro, 18.xii.'67.

d'Ivan...'(118)

Arlette's jealousy over the women who have written to Sevilla is followed by Bi's jealousy over Fa, which destroys Sevilla's hopes of gradually introducing more dolphins into their pool, to learn English. The dolphins' desire to identify with man (237) is sad, for the true nature of man, highlighted by that of the dolphin, is emerging. The dolphin view of man expressed by Fa at the press conference,

'Ils sont bons, ils sont lisses, ils ont des mains et ils savent fabriquer des choses'(188),

has changed by the end of the novel, when Sevilla reflects how accurate is Bi's summary,

'Ils mentent. Ils tuent. '(350)

The dolphins learn the meaning of evil from their relationship with man. At first, they have difficulty with 'les si', that is, they have absolute values, and cannot appreciate anything which is neither true nor false. The honesty and innocence of the dolphin species is used to underline the brutality of their treatment by man, especially as the search for communication with the dolphins has as its aim, not a genuine desire to know them better, but a cynical intention to take advantage of their trust.

Having ensured, by means of a clear time-scale, that in spite of the diversity of information offered to the reader the progression of the plot is clear, and having captured the reader's interest in plot-development by means of devices such as climax and coincidence, Merle uses imagery as a culminating factor in his control of the novel, so that the reader, who has followed the story to its conclusion, may see it as a whole, and appreciate what is often an ironic message.

This discussion of Merle's method of narration has so far dealt with only those aspects of his style which show him to be standing outside the action, pointing out to the reader what is significant. On this level, the novels are fables: the reader is aware of standards of

judgement which exist apart from the story, and which coincide with the standards of the narrator. The reader is therefore aware that the story is being related for a purpose, and in spite of the interest generated by a well-developed narrative, he is reminded, by the comment implied in imagery and irony, that he is expected to form a moral opinion. The reader remains outside the narrative, in company with the author.

His position would remain the same were it not for the techniques used by Merle to involve the reader's emotions as well as his intellectual appreciation of pattern and significance. It is essential, if the novel is to succeed as fiction, that the reader should be implicated in the passage of events on a vertical as well as on a horizontal scale, that is, that he should become so involved in the action that he adopts a viewpoint within the story, in addition to the more obvious viewpoint outside it.

The Novel Experienced from Within

Merle uses various methods in an attempt to draw the reader into the story as co-experiencer of the action. One of the most successful is the admission of the reader to a private interior, where a character believes himself to be unobserved. The place often represents security, or privacy for communication.

A succession of such interiors is seen in Week-end à Zuydcoote, all connected with safety or the ideal of peace. For instance, Jeanne's home is an oasis of cleanliness, where a soldier will be asked whether he objects to washing in well-water, and given a clean towel. The house gleams from frequent polishing, and Maillat feels he has come home, to a place where war cannot penetrate, when he finds pattins by the door, which will prevent him marking the floor with his dirty boots(193). The

blood and vomit from the fight are mopped up assiduously, as if it were possible to dispose of the war outside. Jeanne is convinced that, so long as she stays, the house will escape the bombs. Maillat finds this ludicrous, but the same belief is present in the thoughts of some of the toughest soldiers. Those sheltering in the flimsy dug-out (189) have a similar sense of security. Maillat is thankful to gain the shelter of a garage, but the illusion of safety is shattered when shrapnel flies through the door.

Many soldiers have their own picture of peacetime bliss. Virrel describes the intimacy of the bedroom, when the wind is howling outside(24); Alexandre imagines a house built of wood, with a room where he can be alone (253). The borrowed ambulance provides a secure base for the group of soldiers, and Alexandre has everything in order: the others tease him about his domesticity, but they are glad of the stability the 'home' provides. At the same time, the reader is aware that the sense of security connected with these places is illusory, and appreciates why the characters cling to these symbols of peace. The scenes are rendered more intimate by their frequent connection with sex. This is seen particularly in the case of Virrel's bedroom, Jeanne's bedroom, and the cellar where Maillat shelters with Jeanne, with its grotesque symbolism. Gradually, as the novel progresses, each refuge is proved unsafe: the order of the villa rose vanishes after a bombardment, the popete does not protect Alexandre, and Maillat and Jeanne die as the house is bombed. The violence of war gradually obliterates all the refuges connected with peace.

A sense of privacy and safety is communicated in La Mort Est Non M tier by the picture of Rudolf's study. This time the reader's attention is concentrated on what Rudolf does there, rather than on the place itself, but the sense of complete privacy comes over well. It is Rudolf's habit to sit quietly, having made the room as cold as possible, or, alternatively, to brush his boots long and lovingly - there is

perhaps a sexual significance in the latter occupation. That the study is a place for secrets is established by Rudolf's early interviews with his father. The confidential encounters continue with Himmler's visits to von Jeseritz' estate, and Rudolf's visits to Himmler's office. There is rather more detail given of the rooms concerned than in Week-end à Zuydcoote, which may indicate that Merle expected the reader to have more difficulty in identifying with Lang than in understanding Maillat; the author therefore adds detail in order to reinforce spatial recognition.

No such reinforcement is necessary where the interiors of L'Ile are concerned. The Blossom's cabin, the banyan tree and, above all, the cave, are endowed with a sense of intimacy. The emphasis once more is on escape (*1). In the cabin, Purcell may be faced with Mason's obstinacy but at least he understands that Mason's reasoning is based on class-consciousness: outside, on deck, the Tahitians are taking part in a wild dance and, although Purcell 'poussa un soupir' when the order to go below arrives, the reader appreciates that the order in the cabin is more comprehensible, if less exciting, than the disorder outside. The banyan tree is at first the meeting-place for the 'assembly', then develops into neutral ground during the hostility which characterises life on the rest of the island. The cave is Purcell's individual retreat from the responsibility he would have had to face, had he not run away: he is so determined not to become involved in hostilities that he is hated by both sides and in danger wherever he goes. The darkness and cold of his refuge convey his struggle with his conscience, and reflect his dissatisfaction with his choice. The lack of external details, as the cave is as black as pitch, helps to concentrate the reader's attention on Purcell's inward debate. The thought-processes of Rudolf, in La Mort Est Mon Métier, are less complex, and therefore externalised in a way

(*1) C. Godel, in "L'Ile, ou la tentation de l'Innocence", sees the cave theme as symbolising Purcell's desire to return to the womb, and links this to his relationship with Omaata, as a mother-figure, and with the Tahitian women, who protect him throughout the novel.

which suits the practical Rudolf but would not suit the more introspective Purcell.

Three interiors in Un Animal Doué de Raison represent an escape from society, into a more personal world. These are, Sevilla's car, his bungalow on the cliff-top and his house on the island. The intimacy of the interior of the car during the beginning of a hurricane enables the reader to understand Sevilla's feelings for Arlette. His choice of the bungalow because it is so inaccessible and, he believes, will afford them complete privacy, reflects his desire for escape from the complex moral and political implications of his work. Here he hopes to enjoy a private life with Arlette, away from spies and publicity. The house which Sevilla buys after his resignation is built in concrete thick enough to withstand a hurricane, and isolated from the rest of the United States, and therefore from political intrigue. The reader is aware of Sevilla's desire for privacy, yet he is also aware of the growing threat of interference by the real world. While he appreciates the intimacy of Sevilla's personal life, he also understands his dread of the decision he must inevitably take, to face the implications of his research. Significantly, it is when Sevilla finally comes to a decision that he abandons his refuge and heads out to sea.

Most of the action of Derrière La Vitre takes place inside Nanterre, and buildings are used to convey a dual impression of intimacy and isolation. The desire for communication on the part of the average student is paradoxically accompanied by a desire for privacy. Throughout the novel, in their single rooms, the residents either defend their privacy or undergo torments of loneliness. These single rooms echo the opening references to monastic cells in the explanation of the religious origins of the town of Nanterre (15-16). The 'cells' are sometimes seen as refuges, but for most of the time they symbolise to the students the separation of the sexes, as in a prison. The room that to Abdélaziz is a paradise, is to David a prison cell, and Denise Fargeot reflects that she is enclosed like a convict (243). The isolation, however, is only

illusory, for the artificial mahogany partitions are not sound-proofed, so that a raised voice produces a volley of protesting banging on the wall from an unknown neighbour.

Parallel existences, outside the individual rooms, are separated by areas of plate-glass: there is particular emphasis on the number of plate-glass doors which cut off lecture rooms and separate one block from another. These doors give the illusion of communication: one character remarks that he can never tell whether they are locked or open (315). They are reminders of the illusion of communication of which an observer becomes aware when he moves into an apparently homogenous world. For example, their significance is stressed when Danièle Toronto repulses a friendly overture by Ménestrel outside the lecture room. The lecturer, who is attempting to open the door, remarks,

'Cette clef est si compliquée...que je n'arrive jamais à l'introduire du premier coup dans la serrure.'(54)

The vast expanses of plate-glass look out onto nothing. The mature trees on the scale model in the Dean's office - itself protected by a plastic cover - have not yet been planted. The title refers, not to the university world looking outward, but to the real world looking in. The novel takes the reader behind the glass of the aquarium (97) to show that the inhabitants' employment is neither sheltered nor fruitful. Seen from outside, the students appear happy and harmoniously grouped; the reality is different.

Communication is illusory: Denise Fargetot reflects that she might as well be in a glass cage, so far removed is she from really knowing other people (139). For there is a second barrier within the world behind the window: this is the façade of word and gesture which is the image of themselves the characters present to each other. (*1) Both

(*1) L.Mirisch: ("Les Prodromes"; La Quinzaine Littéraire, 1-15.i.'71) remarks on the two levels of penetration by the author, and concludes that the reader is successfully transported behind both barriers.

Méneſtreſel and David ſtudy their mirror-image, and neither is ſatisfied with what he ſees: the ideal which he would like to be is much more attractive. Méneſtreſel, for inſtance, ſees himſelf as a prize-fighter, ſeveral inches taller, knocking out the image of his real ſelf in the mirror(28). On two ſeparate occaſions, Denise and Méneſtreſel look at pretty girls and remark that they are like models in a ſhop window, that is, they are conſciously preſenting an attractive image of themſelves.

Communication is never certain, even when people are oſtensibly liſtening. Frémincourt reflects, during his lecture, that he is vainly attempting to eſtabliſh contact with the minds of his ſtudents: there are too many of them, ſo that he has to uſe a microphone, which in itſelf impedes personal contact. The novel ſhows that even in private converſations the perſon addreſſed often ſtops liſtening and concentrates on his own thoughts. Also, it is taken for granted that people of rival political convictions do not liſten to their opponents' opinions. Delmont's amazement when he hears one don admit that what another ſays enables him to ſee the problem in a new light (213) encourages the reader's conſluſion that, while communication is poſſible, it is alſo extremely unlikely.

In contrast to the cells of Nanterre, the interiors of Malevil represent a ſecure refuge from which to ſally forth to confront the evil world outside. It has been ſeen that the caſtle itſelf is a means of preſerving the ſurvivors, and, as the novel progresses, the caſtle, and eſpecially the dining-room, becomes the ſcene of ſhared experience and of communion at an ever-deeper level. It is here that the inhabitants gather round the fire after their day's work, that they have their diſcuſſions and take votes, and that they hold their Communion ſervice. Yet in ſpite of ſharing the relief of thoſe who come ſafely home, and the confidences the characters exchange, the reader does not experience real involvement, largely becauſe the two main narrators explain how the other characters are manipulated.

It would seem from this discussion that it is in La Mort Est Mon Métier and Malevil that the reader's involvement, as far as the geographical interior is concerned, is least intimate. This is counter-balanced, however, by his direct access to the thought of the main figures, for both novels are narrated in the first person. It seems probable that Merle's choice of this method of narration was influenced by his awareness of the difficulties inherent in the depiction of a main figure somewhat less sympathetic than those of the other novels.

Both Lang and Emmanuel are completely frank, and the reader is enabled to see into the workings of their minds. In La Mort Est Mon Métier, for example, the reader appreciates the psychological aspect of Lang's striving after self-confidence. His whole background has left him with a feeling of insecurity; he fears he lacks the strength to live up to the standards set by others. The fear begins in his childhood, when he is ordered by his father to walk in step on the way to church, and continues in later life, for example, when he finds himself physically incapable of matching the rhythm required to feed the cement-mixer. Later, the demand by the authorities that he accomplish in one year the task of establishing Auschwitz-Buchenwald - work he had decided would take four years - inspires him to superhuman effort. Once the camp is open, he is continually distressed by the impossibility of dealing adequately with the influx of prisoners. The anguish of coping with ever-increasing numbers is at its height when he is struggling to meet the deadline of four weeks for the completion of the planned extermination process. Wulfslang's information about the numbers Lang may expect stupefies him: any concern he may feel about the personal fate of the victims is submerged in his own angoisse:

'J'éprouvais un profond sentiment de honte et d'impuissance à la pensée que j'étais si inférieur à la tâche que le Reichsführer m'avait donnée.' (23)

In his despair over the problem of the disposal of bodies, Lang seizes on the solution of crematoria and burning ditches with a relief

equalled only by his satisfaction at the performance of Giftgas. Both solutions provide a way of justifying his appointment: he must not on any account reveal himself inept. The reader may be carried along by Lang's personal involvement, but his sympathy with Lang stops short when Lang takes stock of the situation:

'Il y avait, en effet, quelque chose de satisfaisant pour l'esprit dans la pensée qu'à partir du moment où les portes du vestiaire se refermeraient sur un convoi de 2,000 juifs jusqu'au moment où ces juifs seraient réduits en cendres, toute l'opération se déroulerait, sans heurt, dans un même lieu'(262).

In Malevil, also, the hero strives to attain an ideal of behaviour, and the reader is admitted to his innermost thoughts as the pressure of events drives him to take a series of logical steps. Emmanuel is obliged to be less than honest in order to maintain discipline in the Malevil community. He uses Machiavellian cunning in his manipulation of the other characters. He is politically astute, and knows how to prepare for a meeting, how to control discussion and how to influence decisions. He resorts to bribery and blackmail to ensure that events take the course which seems to him correct, and he is prompt to assume sole command when the occasion arises. These methods are explained by Emmanuel in his journal:

'Demain, j'utiliserai sans vergogne cet incident contre lui, mais pour d'autres raisons. Parce que c'est, j'en suis sûr, un homme sans bonté qui ne veut pas de bien à Malevil, et contre lequel je referai l'unité de Malevil'(245);

'C'est pour le coup que les mouvements divers se multiplient. Je feins de ne pas m'en apercevoir. Je continue...'(409).

The logical application of Emmanuel's principles reaches a climax with the mock trial where Fulbert reveals his own duplicity. True to his beliefs, Emmanuel stands aside and allows the majority to reach a decision: Fulbert is murdered. Emmanuel's admission,

'La justice populaire n'est pas agréable à voir, mais en l'occurrence

elle me paraît juste. Et je ne vais pas faire mine, hypocritement, de l'arrêter ou de la déplorer, alors que j'ai tout fait pour la mettre en marche!(506),

makes the reader aware that he may not find Emmanuel's logical conclusions acceptable.

If the use of the first-person narrative is intended to involve the reader, and to encourage him to identify with the central character, it is therefore seen to be only partly successful, because the subjects of both novels demand a moral verdict from the reader, in his capacity of observer outside the action. The effect of the method of narration is to confuse the reader's judgement. His difficulty in evaluation is not experienced in the other novels, where the more diverse presentation heightens his awareness of possible alternatives. For instance, in the other novels, the stress to which the hero is subjected is seen also from the standpoint of the narrator, or of the other characters, and the reader is enabled to form an opinion of what the hero ought to do, often before the hero himself realises what his duty is. Lang and Emmanuel are both committed to a course of action they believe to be right, and, although both occasionally admit to doubt, they take what seems to them the only possible course, and explain to the reader their logical reasons for adopting it. The reader accepts the explanation, until a point is reached where he realises he has given intellectual approval to an action which is abhorrent to him. At this point he also realises that he has seen the story from only one point of view, and that this has limited his capacity to form his own judgement.

In La Mort Est Mon Métier, although the reader's understanding of the hero's motivation is helped by the inclusion of details of his early life, the explanation of why Lang acted as he did does not facilitate moral judgement of his actions. Moreover, those factors which, in a more diversified narrative form giving weight to

other opinions, could have balanced the presentation, are narrated only as Rudolf sees them. Thus Elsie's attitude to the camps, Setzler's suicide, and the repetition of the disappointed dream of working close to the land, are seen only from Rudolf's point of view: the first two as embarrassing inconveniences, and the third, as a temptation to escape from the logical way of life. That the method of narration is successful to this extent represents a considerable achievement by Merle, as far as an explanation of motivation is concerned. Yet the novel does little to encourage the formation of opinion: in the matter of judgement, Merle relies heavily on the reader's expectation. The reader expects to find a monster, and finds instead an overworked functionary who can hardly cope with the demands of his job. The idea of the monster fades as the reader follows Lang's career, but at the point where Lang sums up his achievements he is shown to be a monster, after all. It is not necessary for Merle to point the moral: the reader's shocked realisation of his intellectual approval of Lang's explanations is enough to reinforce his original expectation.

In Malevil, too, explanation is not justification. The reader is, however, predisposed to allow Emmanuel's excuse that he is acting in the interests of the community, for the reader's human sympathy is elicited by what is apparently the last group of human survivors on Earth. Merle is faced by the difficulty of ensuring that the reader's sympathy for Emmanuel is not automatic. To this end, he employs a method similar to that employed in La Mort Est Mon Métier: he involves the reader in the personality of the hero up to the point where the hero does something morally unacceptable. At this point, however, there emerges into full view the sub-theme of criticism of Emmanuel, which the reader has so far discounted. The sub-theme involves the introduction of a second narrator, Thomas.

Thomas' intrusions into the narrative before the death of Fulbert are discounted by the reader, who is convinced by Emmanuel's

reasoning, and influenced by Emmanuel's assessment of Thomas as well-intentioned but inexperienced, i.e., his inferior. For instance, when Emmanuel composes the letter purporting to prove the right of a master of Malevil to appoint his own priest, Thomas' footnote challenges Emmanuel's claim that he expected the others to find it amusing(379). His objection has the effect of increasing respect for Emmanuel, who has explained to the reader that he is Thomas' superior in knowledge of how to treat other people. Yet Thomas has also raised the question of, not whether it is expedient for Emmanuel to become abbé of Malevil, but whether it is in keeping with Emmanuel's own conscience, given his views on religion.(379) At this point, the reader is influenced by Emmanuel's concern to protect Malevil, and discounts Thomas' objections.

After Fulbert's death, the reader's alienation from Emmanuel is counterbalanced by Thomas' approval, and his final judgement: 'J'avais vingt-cinq ans lorsque ces événements survinrent, j'avais pour mes vingt-cinq ans peu d'expérience de la vie, et l'habileté d'Emmanuel me choquait. Je la trouvais cynique.

J'ai mûri. J'ai assumé depuis des responsabilités, et je ne pense plus ainsi. Je crois, au contraire, qu'une bonne dose de machiavélisme est nécessaire à quiconque entend diriger ses semblables même s'il les aime.'

(525)

The second narrator is thus used to indicate a moral standpoint.

The situation of the reader regarding the events of Malevil is neither wholly alongside Emmanuel nor completely with Thomas. The effect of two first-person narratives of disproportionate length is to involve the reader at an indefinite point somewhere between the two. In this connection, the theme of community is important. The reader is involved with neither the leader nor his most outspoken critic, but rather as an unseen member of the group.

The effect of first-person narration is to concentrate the reader's attention on one aspect of the action. He is aware that his knowledge of events is necessarily limited and, as has been seen, this

also limits the background of information and opinion necessary for judgement. The first-person narrative places the reader at one remove from events; whereas in a third-person narrative he accompanies an ubiquitous author, action narrated in the first person makes the reader aware of a definite character angling the narration. This is less obvious when the interior monologue is used. Here the reader has the impression that he has progressed beyond appearances into the thoughts of the participant. When the whole novel is in the first person, however, the personality of the narrator dominates reflection and commentary, as well as events, and the reader feels excluded from much that he would like to know, and does not feel so privileged to share the thoughts of the narrator. The sense of exclusion is reinforced, in La Mort Est Mon Métier and Malevil, by the concern of the central figures to explain or justify their actions. The reader's final impression is that he is privileged to know only one side of an intellectual argument. This is doubly exasperating, as the narrators are both convinced that they are right. The method of narration therefore produces in the reader a reaction against the main characters, rather than identification with, or judgement of them.

That Merle is capable of posing a moral problem, involving the reader, encouraging identification with a character, and leading the reader to form an opinion, is evidenced by L'Ile, which is narrated in the manner of the traditional adventure story. Moreover, the predominance of the moral problem in L'Ile is just as marked as in La Mort Est Mon Métier and Malevil. The main difference is that L'Ile describes the evolution of a moral attitude, whereas La Mort Est Mon Métier and, especially, Malevil describe the evaluation of such an attitude by means of its practical application. In the latter case, it is advantageous to delay the reader's judgement until a point late in the novel.

The reader of Malevil does not feel limited by the method of

narration when exciting action is being described. This is probably not due to the use of the Historic Present (cf. pp.262, 353, 463) so much as to his concentration on what is happening. In practice, the Historic Present is used throughout the novel to describe any event which Emmanuel regards as significant. Thus, anything related in the past forms part of the background, but anything related in the present tense is important either to Emmanuel or to the Malevil community.

The reader's sense of privileged participation is heightened in third person narratives, such as L'Ile or Week-end à Zuydcoote, because of the more diverse view of the central figure. Other characters are described from the same standpoint, where the reader is alongside the narrator. This allows the presentation of opinions conflicting with those of the central character, without the intrusion of his pre-judgement of the issue. In Week-end à Zuydcoote, for example, Maillat's discussion with Pierson about war (166) pinpoints the situation of both men, and the reader is in a position to understand both. In L'Ile, the hero's pacifist position is defined by reference to the opinions of other characters, which are presented directly to the reader, without the intervention of Purcell. The action of both novels is nevertheless angled to the viewpoint of the central figure, with the result that the reader knows the hero better than he does the other characters, simply because the hero is present at most of the major events of the novels. This also is true of the first-person novels: it is in the encouragement of judgement, rather than in the presentation of action, that the third-person narrative is most useful. The effect of the latter is to enable the reader to situate the hero's attitude in the context of the varied attitudes of the other characters.

Thus the reader of Week-end à Zuydcoote or of L'Ile is simultaneously involved in the action of the novel and enabled to maintain a position outside the story when his moral judgement is called for. In La Mort Est Mon Métier and Malevil, he is drawn into the experience of the narrators, but makes a conscious effort to withdraw to a position

outside this experience. In La Mort Est Mon Métier, this position is, again, outside the novel: in Malevil, it is more likely to be within it, the reader taking advantage of his privileged viewpoint. In the remaining two novels, Derrière La Vitre and Un Animal Doué de Raison, the method of narration is designed to encourage the reader to judge from within: the interior monologue is utilised for this purpose.

By means of the interior monologue, Merle builds up the background to a character or situation. Thus Sevilla's thoughts during the ride in Mrs. Ferguson's car (75-6) sum up a month of courtship and establish the exact point the relationship has reached, while indicating Mrs. Ferguson's personality. Similarly, Arlette's reminiscences in the blockhaus (246) explain how she became a member of the research team. From the recesses of Mrs. Jameson's memory arise souvenirs of her husband, and of the beautiful Dorian who implied so many promises when he was spending her money. In Derrière La Vitre, Delmont's thoughts before the concert sum up his whole career and its present uncertainties (359), Jacqueline's thoughts while waiting for the lift describe her home and parents (221), and Monica Gutkin's thoughts in the restaurant serve to fill in her financial background and establish her attitude to her friend (128). The reflections give depth to the characterisation.

The same technique is used for dream-sequences, which often explain character. For example, Mr.C. relives his marriage (43) and the deeper happiness stemming from a relationship with a fellow soldier during the Korean War (44-5): these details help to explain his antipathy for the bikini-clad Arlette and his friendly attitude to Bob (71) Maggie's sexual fantasies are also related in detail, and the reader infers much from the list of men who, she imagines, have fallen in love with her(88, 140). Day dreams in Derrière La Vitre also concern love. Denise's private dream is of the coming summer, which she hopes to spend in Scotland, touring in the car she has not yet bought, accompanied by Jaumet, whom she has not yet asked to come(127). Ménestrel is the best

example of an uninhibited dreamer: his fantasies vary from the experiences of a Roman centurion at the sack of a captured city (29) to those of Rousseau making love to Mme. d'Houdetot in her garden (79). His most lasting dream concerns Mrs. Russell, who has engaged him as a baby-sitter, but whom he has never met. He usually imagines her in a semi-transparent, mauve garment: she may be lying on a wide couch, like an Eastern princess, surrounded by naked slaves (128, 134). These escapist fantasies provide the reader with an insight into the subconscious of the characters concerned.

The monologues are also used for reflection and description during times of stress. Sevilla's thoughts while he sails the Caribée equate Fa and Bi with the two children 'lost' to him since his divorce (258-60), and the reader feels with him the strain of the effort to go on without the dolphins. The thoughts of President Smith convey his agony over what decision to take: whether to order an attack on China (290-92). On a more mundane level are the thoughts of Denise while she waits for Jaumet in the restaurant, but the problem she considers, of standards of sexual behaviour, is central to the novel (121). Similarly, Josette Lachaud's reminiscences about Frémincourt are representative of the lack of communication between generations, and act as an explanation of the occupation of the council-chamber, where she is sitting at the time (326). In such situations, Merle is successful in involving the reader, and in making him understand the issues.

A more difficult task is to convey the sense of unreality when a character under stress feels removed from what is actually happening. In Un Animal Doué de Raison, Sevilla is subjected to a long explanation by Maggie at a time when his main concern is to renew contact with Fa and Bi (323-5). The reader follows his thoughts about Maggie's weaknesses, and the world crisis, and hears the voice of Maggie break through with an accusation that Sevilla has done everything possible to separate her from her fiancé. The interview is

remarkable in that several levels of consciousness are maintained: Sevilla's worry about the crisis, his opinion of Maggie, Maggie's daydream about Sevilla, and her posthumous appropriation of Bob as her fiancé. The threads are interwoven so that one character's opinion of the other is confirmed by a statement the reader knows to be false. In Derrière La Vitre, David at the occupation is dismayed to find himself thinking of Brigitte, when he ought to be concentrating on the political discussion: he becomes aware that jealousy is his dominant emotion, and while he is realising this he is enabled to evaluate more dispassionately the workings of student politics(378-9).

It must be stressed at this point that the interior monologue is differently expressed in the two novels. In Derrière La Vitre, monologues are narrated in formal sentences, and often merge into third person reports of what is imagined, as if to remind the reader that what is narrated is not real. This is true especially of the dream sequences. In Un Animal Doué de Raison, however, the monologues form part of long stretches of continuous, unpunctuated narration. This difference in expression may be accounted for by the fact that, in Derrière La Vitre, the monologues reinforce simultanéisme, the use of which already gives the impression of a privileged interior viewpoint, whereas in Un Animal Doué de Raison the monologues are a feature contrasting with the formal reports and interviews which mark the inexorable advance of events on the level of official existence. The main purpose of the monologues in Derrière La Vitre is therefore explanatory; they provide the psychological background which accounts for the characters' attitudes, in situations already seen in perspective. The reader of Derrière La Vitre is outside Nanterre, looking into the university world, and the transition from third to first person, then back again, reinforces this impression: 'Par exemple, avant ce soir, elle n'avait jamais entendu parler du Snesup. Et à l'A.G., cet après-midi, certaines des interventions, je trouve, ça

faisait vachement progresser (326)...même si le fait d'y participer doit me coûter ma bourse. Sa main droite tremblait...elle pensa avec un frisson le long de l'échine...' (329).

The main purpose of the monologues in Un Animal Doué de Raison is to provide the personal perspective. The reader, although reminded of the historical perspective by the reports and documents, and especially by the world-picture, is emotionally involved in the action from the standpoint of Sevilla and his team.

The deeper involvement of the reader in the action of Un Animal Doué de Raison is accounted for by the context in which the monologues appear. They form part of the 'seas' of unpunctuated writing which are used for narration as well as for reflection. Important events, such as Goldstein's visit to the bungalow, Adams' request that Sevilla take back Fa and Bi, Sevilla's first attempt to re-establish communication with them, the scenes in the grotto and the final departure, are narrated in this way. The breathless speed of the unpunctuated passages - most of them several pages long, with only commas to indicate pauses - is well-suited to the last third of the novel, to give the impression that events are moving so quickly that the characters are unable to retain any sense of perspective. That the method of narration is well suited to reflection also, is shown by the five pages where Arlette looks back over the year since Michael's imprisonment (243-7). This passage serves to summarise relationships and problems of conscience which are to play an important part in the series of events following the removal of Fa and Bi. The passage is followed by the report of an interview in which Adams informs Sevilla that the dolphins are to be taken from him.

The unpunctuated passages are always about what happens to individuals, in contrast to the formal narration of world events, political commentary and confidential reports. They serve to concentrate

the reader's concern on reactions by the characters to situations beyond their control. They represent a successful attempt to allow the reader to view events from within.

When Un Animal Doué de Raison appeared, some critics were rather cutting about the lack of punctuation in these passages:

'L'écrivain donne plaisir à lire le romancier. Il n'était peut-être pas indispensable que le premier complaise au second en bousculant la ponctuation pour signifier les passages dits 'd'intériorité'. Broutilles' (*1);

'Quant à moi, j'aime la ponctuation, et Robert Merle n'a eu, visiblement, aucun goût pour elle. Victime de cet avant-gardisme universitaire qui est une des plaies de notre époque littéraire, il ponctue à coups de virgules, n'importe comment, ce qui ne contribue pas à rendre sa pensée plus claire'(*2).

It is amazing that any reader accustomed to the novels of the present day, or even to those of thirty or forty years ago, should find the lack of punctuation in such passages either surprising or confusing, particularly in view of the clear definition of the action by means of other kinds of narration. Each passage is firmly set in context, and the viewpoint from which the description is given hardly ever varies within it. The narration therefore rarely makes the intellectual demands of the reader that are the price of true involvement in, or even understanding of, writers such as Joyce or Virginia Woolf, where an image mentioned several pages previously may be the key to the passage under consideration. The expression of Un Animal Doué de Raison, when compared to that of Merle's contemporaries, notably Samuel Beckett, is very traditional.

Adverse criticism of Merle's use of continuous narration, or of the interior monologue, would be justified if it concentrated, not on

(*1) L.Estang: "Un Animal Doué de Raison"; Le Figaro Littéraire, 25.ii.'68, p.19.

(*2) A.Billy: Un Animal Doué de Raison, ce n'est pas l'homme"; Le Figaro, 18.xii.'67.

the supposed difficulties of comprehension, but on the complexity of viewpoint arising from their inclusion alongside others.(*1) The reliance on the interior monologue in Faulkner and Virginia Woolf, and the predominance of unpunctuated prose in Joyce, show that these techniques can provide the main means of communication in a successful novel. Merle's use of them does involve the reader at depth, but lacks the impact of works where the reader is reliant on them alone for his information. Merle does not rely solely on the techniques because, although he is concerned with the interior perspective, he is also concerned to retain the external perspective on the horizontal time-plane, without which he cannot be assured that the reader will form a judgement. He must be certain that he has done his duty as a moralist, as well as a novelist. Therefore, he is not satisfied with involving the reader in the fiction: he must ensure that the fable is also appreciated. Thus the relative uniformity of presentation of Derrière La Vitre is attributable to the author's lack of a definite opinion; he leaves judgement to the reader. The contrasting styles in Un Animal Doué de Raison are necessary because the personal dilemma must be presented in the wider context of political relationships if the reader is to be able to judge the issue.

The most successful of Merle's novels are those where the experience of the central character is most closely linked to the historical progress of the action, yet not so closely linked that the reader feels that the information available to him is limited to that provided by a first person narrator, and where the reader is not aware of stylistic devices designed to elicit his sympathy. In L'Ile and Week-end à Zuydcoote, where Merle has been content with traditional, third-person, normally-punctuated narration, the phasing of the action

(*1) A similar conclusion has already been arrived at regarding Merle's lack of commitment to simultanéisme in Derrière La Vitre; the sense of privilege is weakened by the clearly-defined time-scale.

coincides with the hero's experience, with the result that the reader appreciates the moral import through his involvement in the developing awareness of the central figure. It is in these novels that the fiction most naturally leads the reader to an awareness of the philosophical implications of the fable.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE METHOD OF NARRATION (2)

SETTING. CHARACTER AND STRUCTURE

Before attempting to isolate the main themes of the novels, it will be helpful to analyse Merle's choice and arrangement of the subject-matter which conveys his commentary. An examination of the novels reveals the author's control of setting and characterisation. This control is instrumental in describing various possible attitudes to the emerging theme, and, eventually, in concentrating the reader's attention on the central problem.

Setting

The choice of background for the novels is linked, as has been seen, with the author's experience. Thus they include Dunkirk, America, Germany, the Dordogne and Nanterre, all of which are places where Merle has been. Description of the settings is therefore facilitated, but this still does not account for Merle's choice, nor does it account for the eighteenth-century setting of L'Île. The choice is more easily explained by isolating the lowest common denominator: all depict places or ways of life which already have significance for the average, intelligent European, who has at least heard of Dunkirk, Auschwitz, the Bounty mutiny and Nanterre, and already has some idea of the life-style of people in Florida or the French countryside. It is noteworthy that Merle encourages the reader's expectation by stressing the traditional picture he may already have.

Many descriptions in Week-end à Zuydcoote therefore stress the confusion of defeat. The opening description of a road littered with abandoned vehicles, Alexandre's reminiscences of roads packed with fleeing refugees, the superfluous weapons scattered over the beaches, the enormous crowd of soldiers separated from units and without orders: all reinforce the impression of movement without specific purpose. The confusion is further heightened by speculation about the unknown enemy,

which ranges from the conviction that the whole French army will be run down by tanks or burnt up by flame-throwers (25) to the view that the Germans will prove to be a civilised people with respect for private property, and will need to recruit administrators at the local level (185). All these details reinforce the reader's expectation.

Again, in La Mort Est Mon Métier, the picture of German family life serves to justify the popular view of German character as efficient to the point of soullessness. Thus, the initial picture of harsh routine in the Lang household - the insistence on punctuality, on the performance of menial tasks to an exact timetable, on the daily round of meaningless ritual composed of mass, interminable family prayers and open confession, on absolute obedience of the dictator/father - combined with the emphasis on the exclusion of human emotion - Rudolf's mother feels guilty when she is discovered laughing during her brother's visit, and only the maidservant ever has the courage to show compassion for Rudolf's sufferings, and is sacked as a result - stresses the strictness of German character and deletes from the reader's mind any preconceived idea that Germans can be kindly, homely, generous or romantic.

The expectation which is reinforced by the treatment of the Bounty story is connected with naval discipline and the British class system. Details of the harsh life and cruel treatment of the average sailor on board the Blossom, and of the prejudice against the officer class built up over the years, are not unexpected. The extreme neatness in appearance and the overwhelming confidence in authority of Burt and Mason, the concern of the latter that British subjects should set an example by never quarrelling or betraying emotion in public, the exaltation of Mrs. Mason to the status of une lady, even though she is patently still Tahitian in emotion and behaviour, the choice of Purcell as the only possible godfather for Mason's expected child, the fact that Purcell, as befits an officer and a gentleman, is the only one of the crew to wish to marry before living with his mate: all these details

justify the expected link between superiority of character and superiority of class.

The way of life of people in Florida, as depicted in Un Animal Doué de Raison, is again predictable. Nerle depicts the country of the white American élite as a land where many people, especially women, live in luxury a life of utter boredom. The picture of Mrs. Jameson and the ladies' luncheon club emphasises the amount of leisure enjoyed by the dominant American female. Mrs. Jameson, for instance, regrets that she spent so little time with her husband, for when he got home from work, alas, she generally had some pressing social engagement. Mrs. Ferguson and her friend seem to Sevilla like expensive, useless ornaments who have lost the capacity for real emotion. The whole way of life in Florida is expensive and artificial, from the cushions of the Cadillac and the padded luxury of the club chair which embraces Sevilla, to the inescapable air-conditioning and windows which it is impossible to open. References to the glorious climate emphasise that it is well suited to the life of leisure: while agents in impeccable shirts and suits suffer from the heat, the moneyed classes picnic on the beaches and the research team work in bikinis. Money enables people to buy second homes: in the course of the novel, Sevilla acquires two isolated bungalows and a yacht. The whole setting has the extravagance of a holiday brochure. The extravagance which permeates American attitudes is seen most clearly in the reactions to the press conference given by Fa and Bi. A wave of idolatry sweeps the country. A famous baseball team changes its name to 'the Dolphins', Fa fan clubs and Bi clubs spring up, records of dolphin whistles and clicks are all the rage, and the 'dolphin roll' is performed in every dance hall. Fa and Bi influence every possible commercial promotion: there are dolphin drinks, hair-oils, toys, fashions and cartoons. Instead of regarding dolphins as a new species, Americans make them part of everyday life. The concept of the American dolphin, as opposed to the Russian or French dolphin, is not slow to follow. (208)

The picture of student life in Derrière La Vitre relies heavily on the popular image of a permissive society composed of unkempt revolutionaries and glamorous parasites. The number of sexual encounters, the concern of David or Bouchute to appear casually untidy, the frequent references to the way the girls dress, the constant preoccupation with appearance, or making an impression on others, and the endless speculation about possible sexual relationships: all these factors encourage the reader's initial view.

The reader of Malevil has his preconceptions verified by the account of the semi-feudal society which exists before and after l'événement. Malevil and l'Etang are well adapted to the primitive standard of living necessitated by the catastrophe, because of the simplicity of country life before it takes place. The very practical nature of country life, especially the obligation to till the soil and to care for the animals, comes over well. Pride in possession, whether of a castle, or a cow which gives birth to twin calves, is seen as a basic characteristic, along with a preoccupation with status and the awareness that respect is due to a superior. The complexities of village politics, and the long-standing feuds, between families or villages, are also clearly depicted, as are the outspoken opinions and unsolicited advice frankly exchanged by all who 'belong' to a country community.

Many aspects of setting are therefore selected so as to ensure recognition by the reader, so that he has some experience in common with the characters. It must be emphasised, however, that this applies only to the initial situation. The predictable background leaves scope for concentration on problems which emerge from the background as the novel progresses.

A factor which also typifies Merle's choice of setting is the limitation of his subject by utilising the microcosm:

'C'est pas la peine de faire de vastes ensembles; vous avez là quelque

chose qui est représentatif du monde entier avec tous les problèmes.'(*1)

All the novels except La Mort Est Mon Métier, in which the events are restricted to those of one person's life, are based on the experience of a selected group, which is in some way sheltered from the outside world.

In Week-end à Zuydcoote, the microcosm is the popote, the abandoned ambulance which provides the stability of a home. Although the four soldiers have been encamped in the hospital grounds for only a few days, already they have their favourite seats (32). The impression of a home is reinforced by Alexandre's organisation: he has a box for discarded corned beef tins, and he has manufactured drinking mugs and acquired a large tin can for collecting water; every utensil is neatly arranged so that when he is cooking he opens the doors of the ambulance and has everything within reach. Maillat, when he is about to embark for England, thinks with regret of the 'home' he is leaving:

'Les camarades, c'était normal d'y penser avec regret, mais le Sana, la roulotte! Comme on est prompt, pensa-t-il, à faire son trou n'importe où.'

(129)

The ambulance is merely the geographical focus of the group: Merle also describes the shifting relationships between its members. The four soldiers exchange confidences, discuss and disagree like a family, and, as the four differ widely in character and opinion, such a small number is adequate to reflect varying attitudes to the war.

In L'île, the microcosm consists of a much larger group - nine British sailors and eighteen Tahitians - which is geographically more isolated. The interplay of relationships is studied in four groups of characters: the English 'government' and 'opposition' under Mac Leod and Purcell, and the male and female Tahitians. According to the degree of harmony which prevails, the island is a refuge or a prison. At first it represents security, but there are indications that the security is threatened. To Purcell, it is 'une mince croûte de boue', and he imagines

(*1) See Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

that it could break away from its anchor and be blown off course (192).

At the first assembly, the situation is underlined:

'Cette trentaine d'êtres humains qui allaient vivre ensemble, jusqu'à leur mort, sur cet étroit rocher.'(147)

Towards the end of the novel, the island once more becomes the symbol of all that is precious in life, especially when Purcell is preparing to leave it:

'...même avec tous ces morts qu'elle portait, l'île était encore l'île: le seul endroit au monde, le seul moment de sa vie où il avait été vraiment heureux.'(468)

The microcosm on which Un Animal Doué de Raison is based is the research station with its group of eight scientists. This microcosm is shown to be very divided, partly because of the extremely varied mixture of characters within it, but mainly because the whole theme of the novel is its invasion by the macrocosm of American society and opinion. The original research team is seen to be divided early in the novel, and Sevilla's dream of research in a vacuum, without interference or the possibility of practical application, is nowhere depicted as likely to come true.

The microcosm of Derrière La Vitre is Nanterre itself:

'Derrière La Vitre est l'étude du groupe nanterrien divisé en sous-groupes: l'étude du bidonville, l'étude du ghetto universitaire, et à l'intérieur du ghetto universitaire, le ghetto des étudiants révolutionnaires en train de s'affirmer, le 22 mars, comme groupe organisé dominant.'(*1)

Relationships between characters are replaced by the interaction of groups. The emphasis on Nanterre itself as a microcosm is once more on isolation from real life. The opening contrast between the squalor of

(*1) R. Merle, in an interview with D. Lasagne, published in a special edition of Derrière La Vitre for Le Cercle Du Nouveau Livre.

Librairie Jules Tallendier/Gallimard, 1970.

the Algerian workers' camp and the centrally-heated student rooms is repeated at several points in the novel. Ménestrel looks out at the building-site and realises how lucky he is to be warm and dry (169). Brigitte, thinking along the same lines, realises that students are over-protected from the real world outside (180-1), while the view of the outsider is represented by Abdelaziz, who looks enviously at the student world behind the plate-glass (115).

The microcosm in Malevil is the whole of the Malevil community, who at first believe themselves to be the only people left alive. Once more there is the opportunity for study of the relationships within a group, but the emergence of a strong community spirit adds point to the group theme. They are at first bound together by their common suffering: 'La communauté après ses épreuves se reforme, se referme et se fortifie' (368), and from this negatively-inspired solidarity the group progresses to more positive thankfulness for the life together. During the Communion on the eve of the battle against Vilmain, Emmanuel thinks, '...je regarde mes compagnons assis sous la lampe. Ils sont si serrés qu'ils paraissent soudés l'un à l'autre. On dirait un seul corps. Les visages sont tendus et un peu angoissés, mais le bonheur que nous avons tous à être ensemble me frappe.....'(432)

Each of the microcosms represents life removed from the outside world: the small communities all give a sense of seclusion or escape. The popote of Week-end à Zuydcoote is a haven, contrasted with the war 'outside'; Pitcairn is a refuge from the law; the research laboratory provides an illusory escape from the political machinations of government; Nanterre is a place where real life hardly penetrates, and Malevil is a proven shelter from violence. Yet in each case the world intrudes into the privacy of the microcosm, and the problems kept at bay eventually have to be faced - the inhabitants of the microcosm cannot escape involvement for ever.

Character

When the manipulation of characters is considered, it may be seen that, although many characters are useful in establishing or reinforcing the atmosphere of the microcosm, many others are arranged so as to define the central problems of the novels.

Character as Background

The depth of characterisation varies according to the function of the character. There are some people, for example, who are glimpsed only fleetingly, and are merely aspects of the background. These serve to help build up the atmosphere of the novel.

In Week-end à Zuydcoote, Maillat notices a little old man in a mackintosh going for his evening stroll along the beach, which is crowded with soldiers (122). The introduction of this figure emphasises the fact that the war is being fought over and around the homes of civilians who are incapable of protecting themselves; all they can do is carry on normally, as if in defiance of the death around them. The old man walking so determinedly, thinks Maillat, probably fought in the First World War, 'la grande, la seule, la vraie', and in this way the incident is used to add to the commentary on the futility of war.

Characters who appear for only a few pages in La Mort Est Mon Métier are Rudolf's aunt and his two sisters, whom he visits on his demobilisation in 1918. The strained silences of his conversation with them, after a two-year absence, during which his mother has died, reveal Rudolf's lack of feeling. His speculations about his aunt's sense of virtue, and about how the three women will enjoy weeping over his mother's death as soon as he has left them, while accentuating their sentimentality, also bring out his lack of sensibility and contribute to the picture of a character in whom all human concern is gradually destroyed.

In L'Ile, Burt, the captain of the Blossom, is killed in the opening scene, but brief though his appearance in the novel is, he incarnates the whole tyrannical system of naval authority. His enormous size, his threatening air and his undoubted courage make his crew respect and fear him, and even when he lies dead on the deck the sailors cannot believe that his tyranny is over. The effect of introducing this character, who kills a man with one blow of his fist, is to explain the terrified slavery of the crew, which in turn explains their desire to escape from authority and their inability to exercise it themselves.

In Un Animal Doué de Raison, Mr.C.'s visit to Morley, who is carrying out experiments with a dolphin called Bill, is one of the short encounters used to add to the background of information available to the reader (49-52). Morley appears only on this occasion, but his evident affection for Bill and his explanation, 'C'est nous, maintenant, sa famille!', heighten the reader's awareness of an emotional link between the species, which has been forged as the academic research progressed.

In Derrière La Vitre, there are many characters who, though only fleetingly glimpsed, add to the atmosphere of the setting. One of them is an amusing figure clad in a bath-towel, or nothing at all, who shows off his penis to close friends and selected American photographers. (185) By means of this character, the preoccupation with sex of the majority of students is emphasised. Another character, Nunc, a Vietnamese student who is really a government informer, gives point to student speculation about how the authorities acquire inside information about student activists. Nunc appears only during the final scene of the occupation, where, it is pointed out, he applauds only the most extreme of the measures proposed. His presence adds a serious, almost sinister note to events which are almost ironically reported.

In Malevil, the introduction of Boudenot, the postman, is very effective. He appears for a few lines only, when Emmanuel goes to collect his post from the gate-house on the morning of the disastrous Sunday. The description of him taking his daily glass of wine reinforces the impression of peaceful routine, and the fact that he vanishes without trace a few hours later, although his yellow Post Office vehicle is still recognisable, expresses the devastating effect of the bomb. The information given later by Marcel Falvine,

'Le facteur a été carbonisé au moment où il allait retirer le courrier' (319), and the key left on top of the letter-box, remind the reader of his fate.

Minor characters in the novels, who are presented in more detail than those seen only once, also seem to emerge from the background. The implication is that there are probably many more like them, who happen not to have been included in the novel.

An example of this type of representative figure is the French soldier, Virrel, in Week-end à Zuydcote. A taxi-driver in civilian life, he describes to Maillat his drinking and his affairs with prostitutes. A better side of his nature is also shown, in the display of his son's photograph, in the revelation that he sends him to a Jesuit school, and in his concern that the skirt of the dead young woman on his barrow should cover as much of her legs as is decent. His cheerfulness, which conceals apprehension about the German conquerors, erupts into impertinence when he is confronted by a very young officer. He is also nostalgic for the life which he did not appreciate in time of peace:

'Remarque, ajouta-t-il, avant cette putain de guerre, on n'était pas malheureux non plus. On était même heureux, je trouve. On se rendait pas compte. C'est maintenant qu'on s'en aperçoit.' (23)

The typical soldier in La Mort Est Mon Métier is lieutenant Pick. He is efficient, interested in his work, concerned to do it well, ready with suggestions for improvements, and respectful towards his

superiors. Rudolf's reflection that 'il était un peu plus petit que moi'(271) provides the link in the chain of authority; Pick is the ideal subordinate.

Two minor characters in L'île are products of the background against which the novel takes place. The first is Smudge, the antipathetic little Cockney whose 'accent londonien' gives a touch of insolence to everything he says (173). He is physically unattractive; the oppression of a lifetime, both before and during his sailing days, has made him conscious of his insecurity, obsequious towards those in authority, and determined to have his share. Thus he supports Mac Leod out of pure self-interest, and hates the privileged Purcell. He represents the social misfits who composed the other ranks of the eighteenth century navy. He is despised by even the Tahitians, to whom he considers himself superior. In contrast to that of the basic Englishman, the basic Tahitian character is gentle and carefree. Itia is typical of the new setting into which British class-consciousness is transported. She is pretty and, like all women in Tahitian society, free of responsibility in weighty matters like war or government. Her function is to be a good servant or mate to the male. Her preoccupation with 'playing' arises from the life she has been brought up to lead - there is no need for a Tahitian to worry about crops or climate, and Tahitian women in particular are specialists in the art of passing time enjoyably. In Itia, the reader glimpses the paradise that Pitcairn might have been.

A figure who emerges from the background of Un Animal Doué de Raison is the Jewish businessman, Goldstein. He is enormous, dependable, completely frank with Sevilla and very astute in his dealings with other people in the business world. The speed with which he quadruples the advance on Sevilla's projected book (222) and the judgement he displays in the course of the telephoned negotiations give the impression that the fast-moving business world is intruding into that of the intellectual. Goldstein is also a man of sure judgement in the realm of politics: he has definite opinions about foreign affairs,

the President and the methods of the secret services. He is a man without illusions: he recognises that the world has to thank Jews for the development of atomic and hydrogen bombs, and he is not optimistic about the chances of avoiding a Third World War. Sensibly and frankly, he gives Sevilla a piece of advice: since he can afford it, he should build a fall-out shelter. Goldstein, in contrast with the hero, is admirably adapted to withstand the pressures of American life.

The background of Derrière La Vitre is brought to life in the figure of Monica Gutkin, who is an incarnation of the statistically average student at Nanterre. The average student is female - 80% of those at Nanterre are - and from a respectable middle-class background. She is serious about her studies, but takes care to cultivate the right acquaintances so as to make sure of a suitable social life. She is interested in sex, and annoyed by the expectation, in a supposedly egalitarian society, that the female rôle in forming liaisons should remain passive. She is not particularly interested in politics, and is one of the majority of uncommitted students.

Out of the setting of Malevil emerges the typical villager, Marcel Falvine, the blacksmith at La Roque. He is elderly, but muscular, and has moral strength also. He elects to stay in La Roque out of concern for the community, and his sense of justice and fair play makes him a leader. He has the honesty and frankness of the typical countryman, as well as his suspicion of new ways. This brings him into conflict with Fulbert, but such is his determination not to forfeit his rights as an individual that he stands firm against the tyranny of the incomer.

Thus characterisation is utilised to add to the background as a whole. In each novel, however, a group of characters is used to build up a setting against which the central figure stands out. The function of these more important characters is twofold: they are used to advance

the action, and, as they usually differ from the hero in some respects, they serve to accentuate his character.

For instance, many of these characters are the social inferiors of the hero. It is interesting in this connection to examine Merle's picture of the working man, in Week-end à Zuydcoote, and of the rustics, in Malevil.

Social Inferiors

Alexandre is the type of working man with whom the intellectual rarely has any real contact. He is a skilled factory worker, and has what Merle imagines to be the worker's purely physical attitude. He is basic man, the stuff of which all armies, ultimately, are composed. He is the practical one of the group - he does the cooking and builds the home. He lacks understanding of anything beyond the practical, and dislikes abstract terms. It is interesting that this dislike of the abstract is shared by Pinot and Virrel. Pinot's

'Mais non! Qu'est-ce que tu vas chercher là? Elle ne peut pas avoir d'enfants, voilà tout!'

in reply to Maillat's suggestion that his wife is sterile, is rather like Virrel's dismissal of 'l'amour' as a description of his relationship with his wife.

Alexandre would probably be surprised to learn that his contentment with ordinary life, symbolised by his beautiful wife, is envied by the more sophisticated members of the group (*1). His dreams are connected with basic materials: he imagines a wooden house where he could have room to potter and keep his tools. He is Original Man with a veneer of civilisation. The others comment on the thick covering of hair on his arms; he is 'poilu': as time goes on and he does not shave, he grows a luxuriant, curly beard, which Maillat fancifully likens to that of an

(*1) Merle admits to an envy of simple people: see Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

Assyrian emperor. Alexandre, typically, says that if he had any pearls he would not dream of sprinkling them in his beard! He is pictured throughout by the camp fire, like primitive man who has succeeded in subduing a new element: Pierson imagines him as a negre warrior dancing in worship (235). His worry about the others when they leave, and his relief when they return, are expressed without words: he offers them food and drink. Alexandre is all practical action; he is not articulate, and admires the fluency of the others. It is understandable that Merle should emphasise the practical side of his nature, in order to provide a contrast with the others in the group, but it would seem that Alexandre's lack of fluent expression is intended to convey a lack of thought. Here the difference in terminology, between Maillat and Pinot and Virrel, is significant: they share the same idea, but Maillat expresses it in a more sophisticated way. Alexandre's

'C'est marrant, comme çate ressemble, tout ça'(250)

hints at a philosophical view of personal fate which makes Maillat feel uncomfortable, as if it is not Alexandre's place to express ideas. The emphasis on the vagueness of Alexandre's expression is Merle's, not Maillat's. It does not seem that Merle is intentionally depicting Alexandre in this way so as to expose Maillat's unconsidered judgement, but rather that the depiction of the character reflects the author's simplified view of a man of this class.

A similar simplicity is evident in the characters who have been Emmanuel's friends since childhood: Peyssou, Meyssonnier and Colin. Peyssou in particular inherits Alexandre's simplicity and physical strength. He is the largest of the survivors, a powerfully-built man who threatens to become a problem because they may never find clothes to fit him. He is neither intelligent nor well-educated, and has difficulty in following the most basic intellectual discussion. During the common Bible-reading, it is Peyssou who pursues the problem of the lineage of the Jews, and comes to the conclusion that he too is descended from Adam:

'Alors, pourquoi les juifs, ils se croient plus juifs que nous?' (144)

His simple Christian faith is evident and it is he who, on the eve of Vilmain's attack, reminds Emmanuel that they should hold a Communion service. Because of his moral simplicity, he shows most embarrassment at Catie's coquettish behaviour, and this encourages her to make more advances to him. Although confused by the nuances of social behaviour, he is at home with any practical problem: when Emmanuel entrusts to him the construction of the defensive wall, he is in his element (346-7).

Meyssonnier inherits Alexandre's craftsmanship and common-sense, and has a certain practical military knowledge which is invaluable to Emmanuel. He is so reliable that he is often selected to perform unpleasant tasks. He is a carpenter, and his wife used often to complain that his Communist sympathies would lose him customers. He is the most likely to find his ideal in the new mode of life as a group, yet when the opportunity arises to have all things in common, including wives, he displays an unexpected streak of puritanism. As the community is threatened by war, Meyssonnier is the more appreciated for his practical advice on technical and military matters. Although he is slow to reach a decision, he is usually right, and during the discussion about battle plans, Emmanuel reflects what a good council chairman he would have made (449). It is in fact he who, under Emmanuel's supervision, is entrusted with the leadership of the La Roque community.

Colin has more in common with Virrel and Pinot than with Alexandre. He is small and quick, and has built up a thriving business as a plumber, for he has a shop in La Roque in addition to his premises in Malejac. He is sometimes over-confident and can arrive at decisions too quickly. His pride in his skill as an archer, for example, leads him to take an unwarrantable risk when he tries to kill Vilmain during the attack (466), and the ambition of the small man who must prove himself is revealed when he becomes the leader of Malevil after Emmanuel's death. He becomes a dictator, and constantly imagines that

the others are plotting his downfall. In his effort to win their admiration by his actions, during an attack by a small band of raiders, he is killed (534).

The condescension shown towards the three friends is Emmanuel's, and not the author's: it is skilfully used to bring out the nature of Emmanuel as a dictator over the lives of others.

The character of the peasant is represented by la Menou. At seventy-five, she is deceptively frail, for her courage is indomitable. She is reliably practical, and it is she who reacts with common-sense on occasions when other characters, including Emmanuel, are confused. In the cellar, she cuts the ham thinly, with thought for what they will eat in the future; when Nomo runs out naked from his bath, during the alarm over the attack on Peyssou, she has the forethought to take Emmanuel's bathrobe and a bottle of brandy; when a cow is calving, she takes charge. Like many country people, she will stick to an opinion once it is formed. We learn of a long-standing feud with the priest at Malejac, who had refused Nomo permission to communicate because of his inability to confess. Even her enjoyment of a wedding would not induce her to enter the church (340). Her antipathy to Pougès is ineradicable, and she serves the old man meanly with refreshment after he has cycled fifteen kilometres to bring them news. Her dislike may be traced back to the fact that Pougès had encouraged her husband, forty-seven years previously, to visit Adélaïde, the village prostitute. Since that time, a succession of sows has rejoiced in the name of Adélaïde. She has the peasant's suspicion of strangers, and even when she finds that la Falvine is a distant cousin, her welcome is grudging (200). She also avoids showing emotion, and apparently does not grieve after Nomo's death. A week after Emmanuel's death, however, she abandons her household activities and simply sits by the fire, resigned to her own death. It is emphasised at this point (532) that her practical efficiency was possible only when she was secure in the knowledge that someone else was there to take all

the important decisions. This comment, by Thomas, may seem to underestimate the value of the manual worker to society, but the novel as a whole demonstrates the weight of responsibility which rests on the leader of the community.

National Types

The life of the peasant, so dependent on environment, is only one example of a factor which emerges strongly in Merle's characterisation: the influence on character of the country of one's birth. Many different nationalities are represented in the novels. The depiction of national types is probably most successful when, as in the case of the French peasant, the national environment affects the main action of the story as well as the particular character under discussion.

In this connection, the vahinés of L'Ile are most convincing. From the first appearance of the Tahitians, the emphasis is on the unity of a close-knit society, where people act, and even think, together. Joy and grief are expressed by the community acting as one; thus the rain dance on board the Blossom (52-3) and the funeral celebrations on the island (302) involve all the Tahitians together. Communal life results in complete disregard of the concept of private possession: 'Ils vous donnent tout ce qu'ils ont et ils prennent tout ce qui leur fait envie: c'est leur idée de la fraternité'(35).

The Tahitians find the idea of living in separate houses hard to understand: Mehani, Tetahiti and their women build a communal dwelling, while the Tahitian women married to Britons live in the British way, with one family to a home. The Tahitian custom of cooking and eating all together is at first adopted by the whole of the island population. The gentleness of Tahitian life arises from the favourable environment where there is no need to worry about food, or the future; Tahitian improvidence over the bread-fruit is one of the contributory causes of the war.

The Tahitians are not always pacific, however, and customs connected with fighting are very bloodthirsty. War, though slow to begin, involves so much vengeance of honour that it is necessarily slow to end, as a war is not over until all the enemy have been killed. Single murders necessitate tahoo, the responsibility for vengeance falling on the brother of the victim. It becomes obvious that, if all the inhabitants of the island are to adopt this custom, only one of them will survive. The honour of a chief demands that the heads of his enemies be displayed on stakes. Tetahiti insists on this, in spite of the pleas of the women (405). Peace negotiations are also complicated, and concerned once more with honour, inasmuch as the ambassador who comes to the chief is received, not under his own identity, but as the manou-faité, or bird of peace, which confers the status of being tabou, so long as the ambassador is successful. That Purcell is not killed as a result of his unsuccessful peace-mission is due to the possibility that he may be tabou in his own right. His life depends on the speculation about whether a tabou may be transmitted from one race to another. With just such a contingency in mind, Mehani had given Purcell an earring which had belonged to his father, Otou, and encouraged his companions to believe that Purcell was moá, a saint. For the Tahitians are extremely superstitious. The cave where Purcell takes refuge is believed to be the home of toupapahous, spirits, and Itia and Omaata require considerable courage to enter it. They are not afraid for Purcell, since the spirits can harm only those who believe in them; also, Omaata makes certain that the voice which calls her into the cave is Purcell's, and not a ghost's, by asking him to call in English - the toupapahous speak only Tahitian.

Primitive thinking is not reflected in social behaviour. Etiquette demands the use of long, formal speeches, and it is considered ill-mannered to say anything unpleasant. Extremes of behaviour are frowned on. Thus Omaata reproaches the Tahitians for their noisy

behaviour in the scene where they learn to shoot (69). The warriors on this occasion are doubly ashamed, as it is a woman who reproaches them. (*1)

In contrast to the depiction of the Tahitian national characteristics, which have a bearing on the central problems of pacifism and communication, the introduction of the Welsh and Scots characters is valuable mainly as regards the characters themselves. Jones and Baker, the Welshmen, are small, squat men, and extremely reliable. There is considerable clan loyalty between them, as is seen when Baker tries to divert the attention of Burt away from Jones(13) and when Baker adopts the Tahitian custom of vengeance after Jones' death. The fact that they are Welsh is nevertheless of little importance: their inclusion may satisfy the author's desire to provide a crew representative of Great Britain, but their function in the novel could be equally well fulfilled by any two honest brothers-in-law. In the picture of the two Scots, Purcell and Mac Leod, however, nationality appears more important. Mac Leod, as the reader is reminded on several occasions, is 'un vrai paysan des Highlands'. He is suspicious of any kindness shown to him, and dislikes the idea of being under an obligation to the generous Tahitians (45). He comes from a family accustomed to struggle for survival, and is therefore a hoarder, as the padlocked cupboards in his house show. The importance of material possessions is also shown when he accepts money from Purcell as a recompense for giving up his claim to Avapouhi. Another dominant factor is his respect for the letter of the law: his concern to

(*1) The position of women in Tahitian society is a lowly one. There is an interesting similarity between their status and that of women in the 'medieval' society of Malevil. In each case, women are responsible for only domestic arrangements, and are not at first admitted to serious discussions: in Malevil and L'Ile, even matters affecting the women are arranged by a council of men, in the castle dining-room or under the banyan tree. In both novels, any contribution from the women denoting cunning, or an understanding of tactics, is greeted with surprise, as when Catie reminds Emmanuel that they can use horses to overtake the retreating raiders, (447) or when Omaata proposes the barter of fruit for water (547). In both societies, the women gradually achieve a stronger position, but their primary method of doing so is by exploiting their sexuality, and it is only later that they are seen to be capable of logical thought or decisive action.

maintain an appearance of justice is revealed in legalistic, and occasionally pious, phraseology:

'Non, fils, j'suis pas d'accord pour compter sa voix, vu qu'il n'a pas voté comme un chrétien avec la langue que le Seigneur lui a donnée pour parler...'(128).

Mac Leod enjoys power, and especially the power to subjugate Purcell, who represents the ruling class of his native land, and has had leisure to consider problems of a philosophical nature. Mac Leod's attitude to Mason is similar, as he is another representative of authority. It may therefore be seen that the characteristics of Mac Leod are those of the social and intellectual inferior, rather than peculiarly Scottish. The important factor in his character is class, not nationality. We find in Mac Leod the preoccupation with the practical and the distrust of authority which are seen in the soldiers of Dunkirk or the peasants of Malevil.

This is not to say that the picture of the Britons as a group is not important in the novel. On the contrary, their attitudes, including class attitudes, are utilised by Merle to bring to a head the confrontation between the races. Especially interesting are the comments by the Tahitians about British inhibitions and worry over unimportant matters. Thus Mehani is amused by Baker's embarrassment over Avapouhi's declaration of love(88), and Ivoa finds Purcell's anger difficult to understand(65). In the eyes of a Tahitian, the Britons are distinguished by a lack of repose and contentment, and by needless concern about personal possessions, privacy and security. In order to bring out this difference between primitive and civilised attitudes, however, it was not essential that the civilised characters should be British.

The contrast between the strength of innocence and the diverse factions of sophistication is achieved in a quite different setting in Un Animal Doué de Raison, where the dolphins are the species contaminated by American society. The choice of the British as the representatives of civilisation in L'Ile is apt only because this nationality provides

a link with the historical starting-point, and the class differences suitably emphasise the weakness of the supposedly superior race.

The nationality of the characters in Merle's novels, as in the case of the Tahitians and the British in L'Île, is often dictated by his choice of subject. The widely varying importance of nationality may be attributed to the theme developed in the novel. Thus, in La Mort Est Mon Métier, the main figure is obviously German, yet the emphasis is on the effect of conditioning (*1) rather than on his nationality. In Derrière La Vitre, the emphasis is on division and solitude, not on the characteristics of the French. In this novel, however, another 'primitive' race is depicted, and the theme of exploitation recurs. Life in the Algerian bidonville, where the workers are crowded together in insanitary conditions, contrasts strongly with that in the centrally-heated accommodation the students find unsatisfactory. Many of the Algerians are illiterate, and speak little French, but have come to France in order to earn money to send home to their families - two of Abdelaziz' companions have five and eight children respectively. The Algerians are subjected to discrimination, as is shown by Abdelaziz' memories of Marseilles (110), and are treated contemptuously by the other workers, as the scene where two out of three of them are sacked (157-160) testifies. There is irony in Abdelaziz' assertion that working in France makes him a rich man, 'Pas riche comme un Français....riche comme un Algérien'(99), and in his attempts to study in deplorable conditions, while students living in comparative luxury neglect their courses, but the main emphasis is on France as a false parent, claiming loyalty from her ex-colony, and exploiting and betraying the 'children' who trust her: 'Mais un ouvrier nord-africain! Victime numéro un du racisme en France, un sous-prolétaire, un exploité à la puissance deux, un sous-développé rançonné jusqu'au trognon là-bas et ici, par le pays sur-développé ex-colonialiste'(285).

(*1) This point is examined in the following chapter, under 'Inherited Values'

The Algerian worker is thus utilised to present a further aspect of paternalism.

The presence of English soldiers in Week-end à Zuydcoote is natural, given the subject of the novel. The presentation of the English is perceptive: Merle expresses well the attitude of the best officers, who consider an introduction necessary even in wartime, and will not deign to reply to a stranger. The adjutant and the orderly in the villa rose say coldly,

'Est-ce à moi que vous parlez?'(93).

A similar reserve is seen in Gabet, but it is broken down by Maillat's knowledge of Hamlet(82). The implication of this episode, and of the means by which Maillat obtains permission to board an English boat, is that Maillat's knowledge of English raises him above the level of the average Frenchman, and admits him to a superior race: the Englishman abroad looks favourably on anyone who speaks his language. Also well-depicted is the English tendency to understatement, seen in Captain Feery's comment that he was lucky to be out having tea when his headquarters were flattened by a bomb, and his statement that the loss of his orderly was a 'sacrée mauvaise chance pour moi'(120). Maillat understands this characteristic and is careful to give a suitably modest reply when Gabet compliments him on his good English(80).

Several of Maillat's encounters with the English are used to underline the lack of understanding between the French and the English, and emphasise the alien nature of the ally. Thus Gabet finds it incredible that Maillat, a mere sergeant, should be educated enough to know Hamlet (82), the orderly at the villa rose does not understand Maillat's pleasantry about Captain Feery taking a long time to drink his tea (94), and Gabet assumes that Maillat has not understood the English soldier's joke about the Victory (127). Maillat meets several soldiers whose attitudes are inexplicable: the soldier who asks Gabet for information speaks in a dialect that Maillat cannot follow (84) and the

silent, red-headed adjutant in the kitchen is too dignified to laugh at the pun on 'mess' and 'messy' or the orderly's catchphrase of 'C'est la guerre'(92-4). These are precursors of Atkins, who refuses to jump from the burning boat (146). Many of these episodes successfully convey English preoccupation with rank, and the behaviour judged correct for men of a certain class. The picture of the English is therefore varied, avoiding the depiction of one typical figure, which would have led to caricature. From the brief encounters of the novel emerges an impression that the English are no more homogenous than the French, and Maillat's inability to achieve real communication with the English, in spite of his fluency in the language, provides a subtle commentary on the lack of co-ordination at a higher, military level.

An examination of Merle's depiction of characters of different races reveals once more a link with, and subordination to, the subject of the novels. Class and racial characteristics are used to throw into relief the central themes.

Intellectuals and Idiots

Intellectual characters, apart from the heroes of the novels, are few: it is as if Merle is determined not to detract from the superiority of the central figure. There are, however, several clergymen in the novels, all of whom are depicted as either deluding the simple, or preventing the discovery of truth by the thinking man. The clergymen range from the gentle Pierson of Week-end à Zuydcoote to the unspeakable hypocrite, Fulbert, in Malevil, but they have in common that they are all mistaken in their beliefs.

Pierson is the most sympathetic of the clerics. He is shown through the eyes of Maillat, who alternately despises and envies him. Maillat's envy is inspired by Pierson's calm acceptance of their situation: he is the most experienced in warfare of the group, a

re-enlisted man, and outwardly serene about the dangers they face. He is interested in people and spends much time gossiping in the camp - he is the group's source of news - and is always available for private conversation. Pinot confides to him his fears about his wife's infidelity. He has chosen to accept the situation: in spite of memories of the German he killed, he will continue to do his duty as a soldier. Maillat's envy of Pierson's stable attitude encourages him to find fault with the priest. Thus there is much emphasis on Pierson's lack of knowledge of real life: his pink cheeks, long eyelashes, and 'air de jeune fille' are frequently mentioned, although he is considerably older than Maillat. His concern to fit in with men who do not understand priests leads him to talk as they do, with rather incongruous results, which serve only to remind his companions that he is not really like them.

Maillat feels that Christianity represents an escapist solution to the problem of responsibility; he assumes that following a creed is a simplistic answer, and discounts Pierson's assertion that 'il a y des catholiques angoissés'(173). Maillat nevertheless holds to his opinion that Catholicism offers a comfortable state of mind which protects the believer from questioning the significance of his actions. After their conversation, Maillat's impression of blind faith is reiterated, as if to prove to himself that belief is an unquestioning acceptance: the picture of the inexperienced child trusting in an omniscient father is recalled, in an attempt to despise Pierson's faith:

Et maintenant, il est couché sur le côté droit, il a abaissé ses longs cils sur ses joues roses, et il prie. Il prie son Papa qui est dans les Cieux de le délivrer du Mal.'(177)

The fact that Maillat is not successful in disillusioning Pierson is in keeping with the theme of the novel, which questions values but provides no answer.

A much less sympathetic view of religion is found in La Mort Est Mon Métier. Dr. Vogel, Rudolf's guardian, makes little impression on him by recalling his 'voeu sacré'. It is useless for him to remind

Rudolf that

'La Providenceelle te désigne ta voie...' (101),

when Rudolf has already noticed how much more prosperous is Dr. Vogel since he has taken over administration of the family business, which apparently no longer provides enough money to keep the family. The picture of Dr. Vogel is a caricature of hypocrisy, but this biased view is in keeping with Rudolf's revolt against the hypocrisy of his father. The picture also fits the method of narration well, as the caricature reflects Rudolf's growing prejudice against religion. His declaration of atheism has already taken place before the visit by the prison chaplain (145). It is not surprising that Rudolf's Bible-reading serves to accentuate his hatred of the Jews, rather than to explain Christianity. Dr. Vogel's letter to Rudolf in prison, offering to intercede on his behalf, is received with contempt, as the price of freedom is committal to the religious life. The way in which religion is presented in the novel may therefore be seen as a contributory factor in the explanation of the central figure's development; once more the 'hero' is thrown into relief.

A semi-humorous picture of religious people is found in Un Animal Doué de Raison, in the description of American reactions to the press conference given by Fa and Bi. (205) The conference inspires discussion among theologians about whether dolphins may be said to have souls. The prevalent opinion is that, as they have demonstrated an awareness of a world outside their own and a willingness to sacrifice themselves in order to attain paradise, and seem to understand the concept of adoration of the divine, dolphins must necessarily be evangelised without delay. A flood of offers to come and explain Christianity to Fa and Bi reaches Lorrimer's office. The latter refuses entry to the evangelists, but the risk to security is only the ostensible reason for his refusal. His real reason is the fear that Fa and Bi might be converted to Christianity, and apply its precepts. He and Adams, devout Christians that they are, can see the path of duty. What would happen if

Fa and Bi were less realistic in their practice of the Christian faith? 'Vous les voyez témoins de Jéhovah et objecteurs de conscience?'(208).

This represents the same criticism of Christianity as in the earlier novels. Theoretical standards of behaviour are not seen to be practised. The ideal is discarded as unrealistic. This implication of hypocrisy is further developed in the character of Fulbert, in Malevil. He is punctilious in his observance of religious forms: he says mass beautifully and his view of confession is orthodox, although he will use information gained in the course of confession for his own ends. He emphasises his humility, by talking in priestly fashion about how his bodily needs are few, how 'une botte de foin dans l'étable' will suffice as lodging for the night, and intersperses his description of conditions at La Roque with the word, 'douloureux'(227). His hypocrisy is underlined by the description of his contradictory physique: his ascetic face is placed on a healthy, muscular body which gives no sign of the incurable illness from which he claims to suffer. His claim to sanctity is also somewhat marred by the alacrity with which he spends the night with Miette. His importance to the novel as a whole, however, lies, not in his hypocrisy, but in his use of evil methods, which he may in his own mind justify as necessary means to the end of survival. It occurs to Emmanuel that Fulbert's encouragement of Vilmain to attack Malevil could represent concern to protect La Roque. The parallel with Emmanuel's own position is clear: Emmanuel also is obliged to utilise doubtful methods in order to achieve his end, which is the survival of Malevil.

It may therefore be argued that Fulbert, like the Christians in other novels, is used to highlight the problems of the hero. Most of the novels are so constructed that the central figure becomes aware of the contradiction between Christian belief and practice. The reader's awareness of the contradiction is utilised to focus his attention on the degree of sincerity of the hero himself.

The scarcity of intellectual characters has been attributed to a desire on the part of Merle not to detract from the superiority of his heroes. This does not explain why, when the majority of other characters are the heroes' social and intellectual inferiors, Merle should find it necessary to introduce characters without any intellect at all (*1). It is likely that they represent an attempt to discover the irreducible minimum qualification which makes a being human.

Hunt, in L'Ile, is a punch-drunk boxer, who is left with hardly any mind at all, and is hardly able to speak, apart from grunts and growls. Almost every time he is described, it is emphasised that he does not really understand what is happening. He is purely physical, and his enormous, muscular body attracts the attention of Omaata, the giantess. This physique which lacks thought is significant as far as the theme of the novel is concerned. Firstly, Hunt may be an idiot, but he is nevertheless a member of the race which assumes itself superior to the gentle, sensitive Tahitians. Secondly, he is one of the group voting with Mac Leod, and thus the examination of the application of democratic principles is given an ironic twist, since in practice the unthinking Hunt, because of the closeness of the vote, exercises more power than either Purcell or Mac Leod. Also, the presence of a character represented in purely physical terms accentuates the dilemma over the use of force.

In the character of Momo, in Malevil, even more is lacking. He has neither intellectual capacity nor physical strength. At fifty-three, he has the mind of a child of five, but his speech is that of a toddler. He is physically repulsive, carrying with him an odour redolent of the stable, and although Miette accomplishes by charm what has hitherto only been achieved by force, and persuades him to bathe, his

(*1) The inclusion of idiot characters is extremely unusual in the French novel, as Merle himself points out: see Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

table-manners remain disgusting to the end. His significance in the novel lies in his lack of intellect and social awareness; for him, problems do not exist. He therefore serves to accentuate the seriousness of the problems for those who are able to worry about them.

Both Momo and Hunt, for all their shortcomings, remain undeniably human. Besides their contribution to the novels because of what they lack, they also make a more positive one. Although intellect is absent, as well as physical strength in the case of Momo, they are both capable of emotion, and their emotions reflect those of the group. Thus Hunt's pursuit of Omaata on board the Blossom is indicative of the attitude of the other sailors towards the Tahitian women, just as his murder of Boswell represents the mutinous spirit of the crew during the opening scene. Momo also reflects feelings which the other characters are too civilised to express openly. His fear in the service during the first thunderstorm, his admiration of Malabar and Miette, and his anger at the starving creatures devouring the corn-shoots are extensions of group feeling. The idiots are used to show primitive and natural emotions, which gives added significance to their presence in novels where the nature of primitive and civilised life is important.

It is also significant that both Hunt and Momo have an innate sense of right and wrong. Both can be ordered about by the others, but it is noteworthy that they cannot be persuaded to do anything which conflicts with a mysterious inner sense of justice. Thus although Hunt of his own volition kills Boswell, he will not consent to the hanging of Mason. Here, however, coincidence plays a part: he remembers seeing a shipmate hanged. Yet this incident shows Hunt's dislike of premeditated violence: it is doubtful whether he could be influenced to kill any of the sailors on the island without provocation. Similarly, although Momo attacks the group of intruders, he is carried away by emotion: it is extremely unlikely that he could be induced to kill in cold blood. These two characters are susceptible to love, as well as having an unexplained sense of honour. Their commitment is unreasoned,

but it is to the good of the group. They are not necessary to the novels in order to highlight the hero's point of view, but their unthinking security represents one end of a scale of complexity, opposite to the organised reasoning of the hero. This is useful in establishing the degree of commitment or sincerity of the other characters.

Aural and Visual Presentation

The success of Merle's characterisation owes much to his depiction of the characters' mode of speech. The reader can distinguish various characters by ear, and this helps to make them convincing. An analysis of how this is achieved reveals a strong reliance on vocabulary as a means of differentiation, or of establishing a background of relationship or communication.

The language spoken is important. Thus, in Malevil, the use of patois underlines the cohesion of the group. At first it seems that Thomas will never be accepted by the community because he does not understand the local dialect. Whereas French is the language of official business, dialect is the language of privacy. In the neighbouring community of La Roque, the latter is used to express any sentiment of which those in power may not approve:

'Ah, vai, dit tout d'un coup le vieux Pougès en s'adressant à Lanouaille en patois (et aussitôt, j'ai la certitude que Fabrelâtre ne comprend pas le patois), partage, petit, que j'ai déjà l'eau à la bouche, de cette tourte'' (286).

The fact that la Falvine speaks patois produces a grudging welcome from la Menou, after her first disparaging outburst when the strangers from l'Etang arrive at Malevil.

Merle merely indicates the patois, with little direct quotation, and is content to point out that people are using it, when this is significant. Nevertheless, an impression is gained of direct and factual speech, free of abstractions. In the discussion of Fulbert's

offer, for instance, the contrast between Thomas' reasoned, abstract argument and Emmanuel's concrete terms comes over clearly:

'Je n'ai pas dit autre chose que Thomas, quelques instants plus tôt. Mais je l'ai dit dans le concret. Les mêmes fleurs, mais pas le même bouquet'(239).

The use of dialect, with its emphasis on practicalities, brings out the down-to-earth nature of the peasant, as well as emphasising Emmanuel's relationship with both simple and sophisticated characters.

Language is used in L'Ile to show the similar relationship of Purcell with both Tahitians and British. He is invaluable as an interpreter, but more significant is that his fluency in both languages represents an understanding of both points of view, and is used to emphasise the ambiguity of his position. The difficulty of introducing two foreign languages into the novel is avoided by using English very rarely indeed, usually only words with naval connections, and simply stating that a character has spoken in English. Only on very tense occasions are the actual English words given, such as Ivoa's 'You kill Adamo. Me kill you'(322), and Purcell's 'I am very angry'(294).

Racial differences are nevertheless accentuated by means of language: the account of names given to paths on the island (96-7) explains how paths known to the Britons by the names of winds, in English, are at first known to the Tahitians by names describing the sailors who live near them, then, later, by the names of the sailors' Tahitian wives.

The use of Tahitian vocabulary, especially for words with no exact French equivalent, builds up the impression of the Tahitians as a separate group. Words such as Péritani, tané, pareu and Pa, indicating respectively, the foreigner, the man a woman chooses as her sexual partner, the garment worn by the Tahitians, and a form of stockade, remind the reader of an unfamiliar civilisation. The use of

these words only by the Tahitians and Purcell gives the illusion of another language incomprehensible to the other Britons.

Lack of understanding by the listener, in spite of comprehension of what is said, is conveyed in the account of Frémincourt's lecture in Derrière La Vitre. (198-206) The lecture recedes into the background as the thoughts of the listeners take over, and Frémincourt's words break into the rêveries of the audience, or inspire reactions which are described in more detail than the lecture itself. The fact that Frémincourt speaks in English further differentiates what he is saying from what the students are thinking, and therefore accentuates the differences between lecturer and student on the personal level.

The use of a foreign language to express communication with a different race is found in Week-end à Zuydcoote and Un Animal Doué de Raison. In the former, English words and phrases are used to explain Maillat's contact with the English troops. Again, it is the central figure who is bilingual. The possibility that Maillat may establish a common understanding with the English is seen when he finishes Gabet's quotation from Hamlet but, as has been seen above, knowledge of the language does not guarantee understanding of the nation. The description of Englishmen speaking French (94), like that of Tahitians speaking English (253), further emphasises that the desire for communication does not guarantee its achievement: the reproduction of the speech only accentuates the nationality of the speaker. In Un Animal Doué de Raison, the dolphins progress beyond the stage of pidgin English and speak colloquially. It is noticeable that the author mentions their nasal accent less and less frequently, as interest in how they speak gives way to interest in the opinions they express. Once more, however, a foreign vocabulary is used to establish the impression of a foreign race, at the stage leading up to the achievement of communication, after which the author simply states that the dolphins spoke in English. The procedure is repeated when Sevilla learns the language of the dolphins. As his conversation with

Daisy progresses (293-6), the emphasis on 'whistling' decreases as the importance of what is said increases. This happens again in Sevilla's conversation with Fa and Bi when they are returned to him (321-2): it is emphasised at first that they are 'whistling', then the mode of communication is not mentioned, until the climax of Bi's 'L'homme n'est pas bon', which is said in English, as if to underline her effort to make her meaning clear.

Words and phrases are often selected to distinguish a character socially or politically. Goldstein's 'Bruder' is an example: it shows that he is an American citizen speaking with a foreign accent. In La Mort Est Mon Métier, the most noticeable foreign words are those denoting army ranks or categories of concentration camp, which occur frequently and contribute to the atmosphere of service life. Other expressions in German are mainly short exclamations or oaths. The German words have in common that they reflect the concern of the central character, or express the attitudes of other characters towards him, such as von Jeseritz' impatience (179) or Gunther's affection (81).

Specialised vocabulary in French is useful in situating a character. For example, Sevilla's comments to Michael about the cancellation of his passport express Sevilla's attitude to officialdom:

Bien que mes relations avec des personnes politiquement suspectes soient critiquées, je ne suis pas un risque de sécurité, et j'ai toujours été loyal envers mon pays. Cependant, si je devais me rendre à l'étranger, on ne pourrait pas m'assurer une protection adéquate.' (262)

A similar use of recognisable quotation is to be found in the account of the press conference:

'J.- Fa, que pensez-vous des Etats-Unis d'Amérique?

FA.- C'est le pays le plus riche et le plus puissant du monde. Il défend la liberté et la démocratie. Le mode de vie américain est supérieur à tous les autres.

J.- Que pensez-vous du président Johnson?

FA.- C'est un homme bon qui veut la paix.

J.- Que pensez-vous du Vietnam?

FA.- On ne peut pas se retirer. Ce serait donner une prime à l'agression.

(194)

The tone of Adams' report on the interrogation of Sevilla (172-4) conveys the impression of bureaucracy without emotion, inexorably investigating 'le sujet', and commenting on his attitude to security measures and his developing political awareness. The report encourages the reader to form a judgement of Sevilla. Similarly, in Derrière La Vitre, the use of 'camarade' or 'cette petite stal' shows the attitude of the speaker as well as the affiliation of the subject. The clichés of revolutionary language add to the irony:

'Comme bassesse petit-bourgeoise, on ne fait pas mieux'(378);

'Mais, bien sûr, sur les reportages des journalistes occidentaux, cu les témoignages préfabriqués made in U.S.A. du genre J'ai été ouvrier en U.R.S.S. ou J'ai choisi la liberté, bref, on emprunte à l'ennemi de classe ses calomnies favorites et on les retourne contre le socialisme soviétique'(404).

Slang, oaths and colloquialisms all contribute to character; the use of the spoken word is instrumental in situating the characters socially. One of the best examples of this is the way the sailors talk in L'Ile, which contrasts with the more educated speech of Purcell and Mason:

'On ne peut pas les priver de leur part de terre, ce n'est pas possible.

-Ils ont calé pendant l'grain!...Et ça, j'l'oublierai jamais! Tout seuls, on a dû monter dans l'gréement! Ils ont rien dans l'ventre, ces salauds! A eux six, ils ont pas plus de tripes qu'un poulet!

- J'vois pas que ce soye à toi d'parler de tripes, dit Baker.'(230)

A similar difference is to be found in Derrière La Vitre, between the language employed by different generations. The abbreviations used by David and Cohn-Bendit,

'..qu'est-ce que c'était encore que ce type, un flic en civil? Un prof? Un journaliste de la stra?... le mec n'avait pas la gueule d'un flic, la presse pourrie ne vous expédiant pas des barbons...'(300),

'Moi, je dis, parce que c'est mon opinion, et c'est mon droit de l'exprimer que monter au huitième étage, c'est tomber dans un P.A.C.'(301),

contrast with the longer, more abstract expressions used by Frémincourt talking to the other lecturers:

'La solidarité mandarinale, mais mon cher, elle n'existe pas! Voyons, un peu de franchise! On s'est toujours beaucoup haï dans l'enseignement supérieur. C'est un milieu où les vanités sont démesurées, les blessures d'amour-propre inguérissables, et les haines démentes.'(252).

Slang and swearing are frequent in Week-end à Zuydcoote, especially in scenes involving ordinary soldiers (*1), and coarseness of speech varies from lack of taste to gros mots (*2). There is mounting interest in how far Pierson is prepared to subject his principles to those of the group in this respect. No doubt this contributed to the condemnation of the novel by the parish priest of Zuydcoote (*3). One quotation suffices: it occurs when Maillat returns to the camp and is welcomed by Alexandre, who believed he had been killed. All Alexandre's concern is expressed in:

'Ah, tu es là, fils de garce! Tu es là, sacré Nom de Dieu de fils de garce! Tu es là, sacré Nom de Dieu de bordel à cul de fils de garce!'(242)

This contains a high proportion of monosyllabic concrete terms, reminding the reader that the ordinary soldier, as has been seen, has difficulty in expressing abstract ideas.

(*1) Merle comments on the expression of the 'rank and file': see Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

(*2) '..car aujourd'hui encore beaucoup de gens me reprochent mes mots trop crus,' says Merle. See J. Delpech: "Confrontation: Roland Dorgelès et Robert Merle"; Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 8.xii.'49.

(*3) R. Kemp points out that the language of Merle's soldiers is much less obscene than that of 'les biffins de M. Sartre'. Les Nouvelles Littéraires, no.1162, p.2. The priest, presumably, had not read Les Chemins de la Liberté.

Merle's visual presentation of characters is, on the whole, less subtle. The connection implied between physical attributes and psychology is predictable. Well-built characters are usually good, but slow-witted. Peyssou, in Malevil, is very reliable and, like Alexandre in Week-end à Zuydcoote, when he does think he is concerned with practical matters. The gigantic Hunt, in L'Ile, also belongs to this category. The solidity of Omaata, in L'Ile, and of Goldstein, in Un Animal Doué de Raison, implies reliability and security. Omaata, a gigantic mother-figure, is Purcell's protectress, and Goldstein gives an illusion of safety to Sevilla when he takes over the management of his financial affairs. All the large-sized characters who survive are trustworthy: those who are evil, such as Burt, in L'Ile, and le Wahrwoorde, in Malevil, either die soon after their first appearance or, like Armand, in Malevil, are quickly mastered by the hero.

Small people, on the other hand, are depicted as less predictable, but not necessarily weak. Smudge, in L'Ile, for example, is despised by most of the others, but his sense of inferiority makes him dangerous. It is he who almost kills Purcell (321). Colin, in Malevil, shows the same unreliability; in his determination to justify himself, he is capable of risking the entire action against Vilmain (466). A similar inferiority complex is examined in more detail in the case of Lang, in La Mort Est Non Métier. From his schooldays, when he was ordered to walk in step with his father, he has been conscious of the size of any companion. He feels superior when Hans Werner makes an effort to limp along beside him (45), and when he notices that Pick is slightly shorter than he is (271). When Himmler visits the installations, however,

'Il marchait si vite que son état-major fut distancé, et que j'avais moi-même quelque peine à le suivre' (292).

Small stature is linked to personality which cannot be ignored, because characters conscious of their size are determined to be noticed in spite

of it. Thus Jones, in L'Ile, who is short and stocky, is proud of his muscles, and makes them stand out whenever anyone is likely to notice. A similar determination not to be ignored, though as regards opinion rather than physique, is seen in la Menou, in Malevil, whose dominion in the kitchen is threatened by the arrival of la Falvine, and whose desire to maintain her influence over Emmanuel leads frequently to scenes where she is offended because he does not accept, or seek, her advice (cf. 206, 237, 248, 241).

Physically or sexually unattractive characters are often aware of their shortcomings. Johnson and White, in L'Ile, are despised by the other sailors and continue as subordinates even after all the inhabitants of the island are supposedly equal. Johnson, who is old, believes that his survival depends on agreeing with Mac Leod, the strongest character. White continues in the rôle of messenger and general factotum because he has been conditioned to inferiority by years of service at sea. It is Purcell who tries to give these sailors some sense of importance, by explaining to Johnson his right to abstain during a vote, and by assuring White that he does not assume him to be inferior because of his colour - White is the product of an affair between an English sailor and a Chinese girl.

White and Johnson, in L'Ile, la Menou, in Malevil, and Denise Fargeot, in Derrière La Vitre, are exceptions to the general assumption in characterisation that external appearance reflects personal worth. Usually, appearance provides a convenient guide to reliability. People like Bouchute, in Derrière La Vitre, and la Falvine, in Malevil, prove unworthy of confidence; the heroes do not build up close relationships with them. Bouchute, who is too lazy to work, or to wash, is seen as typical of student trouble-makers; demonstrations to him are a diversion. Significantly, it is Bouchute, who attends the demonstration for amusement and not out of committal to any cause, who proposes the move to occupy the council-chamber. It is suggested that many of the occupying students, including Cohn-Bendit, are also greasy and unwashed. The

reader notices that David Schultz is careful not to appear too well-groomed as if cleanliness is associated with middle-class standards - he therefore conforms to the student ideal. La Falvine, who, like Bouchute, is fat, greasy and lazy, is seen as an obligation necessarily undertaken along with the more useful cow and stallion, and the more decorative Miette. La Falvine talks unceasingly, is completely selfish, and devoid of any commitment to the group. Her presence in the Malevil group, however, is useful because it makes the mixture of characters more likely. The implication that one such character is 'carried' by the rest of the community helps to explain the state of affairs at La Roque, where the majority of villagers are weak.

Sexually attractive characters are usually sensitive, ingenious, or at least reliable. All the heroes except Lang, who is 'peu porté sur le sexe' (*1), are sexually attractive, especially Sevilla, in Un Animal Doué de Raison, David and Ménéstrel, in Derrière La Vitre, and Purcell, in L'Ile, who is very attractive to the Tahitians because of his fair skin (*2). All the novels from L'Ile onwards contain alluring female characters sympathetic to the hero. These include all the Tahitian women, whose innocent enjoyment of making love reflects a carefree attitude to life in general. Arlette, in Un Animal Doué de Raison, is described as a curvaceous figure in a bikini, and makes a favourable impression at the press conference. Jacqueline and Brigitte, in Derrière La Vitre, are both shapely young women, as are Catie, Miette and Agnès, in Malevil. All these female characters are used to emphasise the virility and physical presence of the heroes, for whom sex, although necessary, is subordinate to more important philosophical

(*1) The phrase is that of J.H.Roy: "La Mort Est Mon Métier"; Les Temps Modernes, t.8, p.1838.

(*2) For the same reason, Abdelaziz finds Brigitte very attractive, in Derrière La Vitre. Merle has pointed out that Arabs are fascinated by blond women. See Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

concerns. They also establish the superiority of the heroes: frequently, women are a distraction or a temptation to neglect more serious issues. Thus Purcell is tempted by Itia and Omaata, David and Ménestrel by Brigitte and Jacqueline respectively, Sevilla by Grace and a succession of rich American females, and Emmanuel by Catie and Agnès.

Occasionally, the correlation between sexual attractiveness and ideological correctness is too high to be convincing. This is especially true of Un Animal Doué de Raison, where, as has been pointed out,

'..ideological confusion is measured in degrees of sexual adequacy'(*1). It is stretching credibility too far to suppose that Sevilla, in spite of strict security checks, could have managed to assemble a team of six assistants, including Michael, who is opposed to intervention in Vietnam, Maggie, who feels so inferior on the sexual plane, and fantasises so much, that she is no longer capable of distinguishing between the real world and that of her dreams, and one male and one female homosexual, as well as two normal persons, Peter and Suzy. The latter pair remain with Sevilla to the end, and Michael, who is normally attracted by Suzy, also keeps faith. It is because of his political views that he leaves the research team. Maggie also is devoted to her work, but is so unpredictable that she becomes an embarrassment. No one has time to listen to her ramblings after Bob's death, and in the dangerous situation at the end of the novel she has to be sent home. The two traitors, Bob and Liz, are both homosexuals, although this aspect of character seems to escape the other researchers, as it must have escaped those responsible for security, until it is too late. That Bob is a very likely contact, however, is immediately obvious to Mr.C., who is himself a homosexual. Liz, on the other hand, is in love with Arlette, and her jealousy of Sevilla inspires her to betray details of his work to the Russians.

(*1) Salvat Etchart: "Science and Suspense"; Times Literary Supplement, 8.2.'68.

The visual description of all the members of the team differentiates them one from another, which is important when so many scenes near the beginning of the novel involve all eight researchers. That physical characteristics are predictable is relatively unimportant when the intention of the description is to make them instantly recognisable to the reader. Bob's immaculate creases and lavender perfume, Liz' broad shoulders and short hair, Maggie's unfortunate nose and mouth, and Suzy's regular features and dainty figure, although not unexpected, are useful in classifying the characters. Visual description for purposes of recognition is again used to good effect in Derrière La Vitre, where there are ten or twelve central characters and Merle of necessity relies heavily on characteristic speech, gestures and details of appearance, enabling the reader to become aware of their general 'presence' and allowing Merle to 'quote' a character in later pages, who will be immediately recognisable. The reader becomes accustomed to the curly hair and lips of the handsome David, to the large, dark eyes of Jacqueline, and her habit of twisting a strand of her long hair between her fingers, to the square fingers of Jaumet prodding the tobacco in his pipe, and to the curtains of black hair on each side of Josette's face. He also recognises Denise by her mustard-coloured, corduroy trousers, Beaujeu by his protuberant eyes, and Frémincourt by his horn-rimmed spectacles. When Jaume⁺ watches two girls leaving the cafeteria,

'...une jolie, mince, sexy, les yeux effrontés, et une petite blonde sûre d'elle, un imperméable peau de porc jeté sur les épaules, des souliers de daim, un sac feuille morte au bout du bras,' (138), the reader has little difficulty in recognising Marie-José Lanouaille and Monica Gutkin. When an unknown student urges the others forward during the demonstration, his air of being half asleep, with eyelids falling down over the pupils, distinguishes Bouchute.

In Malevil, Merle attempts a purely visual characterisation when he introduces Miette, who is dumb. He had already used a character almost devoid of speech - Hunt, in L'Ile - but Hunt was conveniently able to speak in circumstances where this was necessary, and in any case had little thought to express. Momo, in Malevil, has a language of his own necessitating translation, but again, what he says can be quoted when needful. In his presentation of Miette, Merle progresses from the translation of audible language to the translation of mime:

'Quand elle a accompagné Fulbert, après le repas, dans sa chambre, il lui a demandé de venir l'y retrouver quand tout le monde serait endormi (un doigt pointé circulairement pour dire "tout le monde" et les mains à plat sous sa joue penchée pour dire "dormir"). Elle se doute bien que c'est pour faire l'amour (ici un geste d'une crudité indescriptible Ayant vu de la lumière chez moi (le petit doigt de la main droite levé et l'autre main dessinant une auréole à l'extrémité du petit doigt pour désigner la flamme), elle est montée me demander si j'étais d'accord'(243).

Miette's inability to speak has the effect of throwing into relief the garrulity of all the other women in the novel, and also emphasising her appearance. She is well-built, beautiful and graceful; she is barefoot and wears no underclothes: all this adds to the impression of a primitive Eve, which is what Merle had in mind when he introduced her(*1). Her physical presence is emphasised by the awareness of all the men in the community, and this helps to show her as a person who participates in relationships. The strength of her influence for good is conveyed by this means, because the other characters are aware of mute reproach, and her influence is therefore depicted, not by what she says, but by its effect. The lack of speech enables Merle to portray a completely simple character, in keeping with the primitive life-style of the community. Thus it seems quite natural that, each evening, she

(*1) See Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

should take by the hand the man with whom she chooses to spend the night, or that when she intervenes in a domestic dispute between Catic and la Falvine, she should first slap the protagonists hard, then kiss them.

The characterisation of Miette is successful, because the reader is aware of her, not only as a physical presence, but as a personality influencing the other characters in the novel. The purely visual presentation therefore represents a considerable achievement by the author.

Merle's depiction of character may be seen always to have a purpose beyond the mere acceptance of the character by the reader. The characters may seem to arise from the setting, or they may reinforce the setting, which is in itself related to subject and theme. However one categorises the people in the novels, their function is similar. Class attitudes, racial characteristics, degrees of sincerity and reliability, all serve to illustrate the theme of the novel and to emphasise the attitude of the hero.

Structure

In each novel, characters are arranged so as to emphasise that the central figure stands alone: he is different from any of them, and his viewpoint is individual. The other characters contrast, sometimes individually, sometimes in groups, and both types of contrast make the character and position of the hero more important.

Week-end à Zuydcoote is constructed round the microcosm of four soldiers. All are different in character and occupation: the factory worker, the businessman, the priest, the schoolteacher. The construction is fairly simple. There is little attempt to establish differences between the attitudes of Alexandre, Dhéry and Pierson, since they are all contrasted with that of Maillat. His agnostic, intellectual approach

is seen in relation to two practical viewpoints, and a religious one. The minor characters, too, provide a contrast with the hero, as they all differ from him in attitude to, or in interpretation of, their common situation. The majority of the characters adopt a purely practical view: there is nothing which can be done to ameliorate their position. Pierson and, fleetingly, Gabet, counterbalance this view: they are concerned to find a philosophical explanation of the position, as is Maillat himself. The hero is exposed to the attitudes of both sides; his equilibrium is disturbed by both, but finally destroyed by the force of his own experience.

The construction of La Mort Est Mon Métier is also fairly straightforward. Lang is presented as a person fully-formed by his early experience, and the novel is a series of encounters, none of which has any influence on him unless it reinforces an impression made during his formative years. The other characters fall into two categories: those who, like his father, dominate him; and those whom, like his mother, he dominates. The former group, which includes Gunther, von Jeseritz and Himmler, influences him so strongly that it is with difficulty that the reader distinguishes the presence of the latter, which consists of 'softer' figures such as Elsie and Setzler, who commits suicide rather than continue in the camp service. Lang is not so much in equilibrium between two opposing forces as so subjected to the authority of duty that he disregards any temptation to doubt that he is correct in his obedience.

L'Ile is more complex in construction. All the characters differ from the hero in at least one respect, be it class, religion or nationality. Purcell is constantly caught between two opposing characters or factions. On board the Blossom, he is one of the officers but feels sympathy for the crew; on the island he becomes Mason's representative vis-à-vis the other sailors. He is one of the Britons, but feels more sympathy for the Tahitians. During the stay with Otou,

for example, he is more at home with the Tahitians than with his fellow-sailors. On the island, he becomes the intermediary between the two racial groups. He is also aware of varying levels of sympathy for the Tahitian men, who want to fight, and the women, who want peace. As a result he is abandoned by Mason, the Mac Leod group, and the Tahitian men. The women, who still support him, do not understand him: they think he is being clever, not sincere. The various groups are strongly opposed to each other: here we may see a clear development in structure compared with the first two novels, where confrontation occurs only through the medium of the hero. The Britons, who are divided, are in conflict with the Tahitians, who are also divided, yet Britons of both camps continue harmonious relationships with the Tahitian women, who are therefore placed in an inviable position which reflects that of Purcell. The conflicts on various levels have in common that they tend to isolate the hero. He is pulled in three directions: he feels sympathy for the British sailors, who would rule by force; for Tetahiti and the Tahitian men, who will not endure degradation; for the Tahitian women, who do not fight. Purcell's own experience leads him, too late, to make a final choice.

Un Animal Doué de Raison is even more complicated in conception, because the tangle of personal relationships and belief against which the hero is seen in profile is itself presented against the larger-scale background of United States society, which is seen in turn in the context of world politics. Firstly, two groups of characters are presented as likely to come into conflict over the dolphins. These are the researchers and the security network. The researchers, as has been seen, are neatly paired: Sevilla and Arlette, Suzy and Peter, Maggie and Michael - both dedicated but, for reasons unconnected with their work, suspect - and Bob and Liz, who are both traitors. Further complexity is introduced by Sevilla's love for Arlette, Michael's feelings about Suzy, Maggie's feelings for Bob and Sevilla, Liz' infatuation with Arlette,

and Suzy's love for Peter. The tangle of relationships is reflected in the projected mating of the dolphins, their progression from the word to the sentence, their removal from Sevilla and their return. The group of security agents is also divided into two sections working against each other, one of which recruits Bob and one of which supposedly protects Sevilla, but both of which are seen by the end of the novel to be working together.

The confusion of both groups is seen as symptomatic of American society, which abounds in personal and sexual problems, and political and racial inconsistencies. The dilemma of Sevilla is reflected in that of the President himself, who is presented as a figurehead denied access to the relevant information which would enable him to reach an honest decision. There are also direct links with world politics, provided by Liz' defection to Russia, Michael's preoccupation with Vietnam, the dolphins' sinking of the Little Rock, and Sevilla's final escape to Cuba. Sevilla is torn between two courses of action: to ignore the implications of his research and enjoy life with Arlette in peace, or to assume a more definite position. Dislike of the artificiality of the American way of life, represented by several minor characters, as well as by Adams, encourages him to take the first course: Michael and, ultimately, the dolphins, lead him to choose the second. The whole complex structure of the novel is designed to pinpoint Sevilla's choice.

The construction of Derrière La Vitre is less clear, because there is not one central figure, but several. The many contrasting groupings of character have as their focal point two incidents. The number of sexual relationships described, the many remembered homes and families, and the ordinary social contacts made in various parts of the campus, combine to establish a personal theme. The accounts of action taken by student groups, details of the composition of tracts and

the distribution of leaflets, and the description of the occupation give a picture of political action. Details of study, assignments, seminars and lectures give an intellectual background. Ten or twelve central characters are involved, some of them on all three levels, and their various encounters take place in more than a dozen different rooms. The effect of confusion is intentional, as it fits the theme of solitude amidst the crowd. The theme of revolt against established ideas is represented, on the personal and intellectual levels, by Frémincourt's lecture, attended by many of the central figures, and on the political level, by the occupation. Neither the lecture nor the occupation does more than clarify the nature of the problem: there is no clear conclusion. Indeed, it is implied that personal and political motives are so interdependent that no answer is to be found.

The structure of Malevil is very like that of L'Île, and Emmanuel's position in relation to the other characters is similar to Purcell's. Before the bomb, he is neither aristocrat nor worker; after the bomb, he has the responsibility of uniting a group of characters ranging from the unlettered Jacquot to the learned Thomas. The Malevil community has as its counterpart the group of survivors at La Roque, where a dictatorship has been established. A third group emerges with the arrival of Vilmain's forces. Emmanuel's character is highlighted by the Malevil group, who are all on the side of justice but uncertain how to achieve it. Two characters, one connected with each main group, contrast in different ways with Emmanuel. Thomas criticises his methods of government, whereas Fulbert is an example of how benevolent despotism can develop into dictatorship. The contrast is emphasised by the fact that Thomas is an agnostic, and Fulbert claims to be a devout Christian. Emmanuel, himself an agnostic, finds it necessary to pay lip-service to Christianity in order to ensure united support. Emmanuel's choice is not so simple as that which confronts Purcell, although both must sacrifice the ideal to the feasible. By means of characters and

groupings of characters, Emmanuel is shown to have three problems: under what conditions the use of force is justifiable; how far a leader is justified in deceiving his followers, if only as a means to an end, and to what extent a man should ignore his conscience if he is acting for the good of the community.

The balanced arrangement of characters within all the novels except Derrière La Vitre may therefore be seen to emphasise the situation of one main figure. Before examining the reactions of this figure to the problems posed by his situation, it is proposed to define his nature. Only in Derrière La Vitre is there no one hero: here David-Ménestrel-Jaumet form a composite student.

The Central Figure

The dominant characteristic of the Merle hero is intellectual superiority. The central figures are highly intelligent, well-educated and sensitive. There is a possible class connection here: all have benefited from an education which may not have been available to other characters, yet in spite of this their attitudes towards less intellectually biased people tend to be condescending. Merle himself hotly denies this and was rather upset to think that anyone could draw this conclusion(*1). Yet, like his heroes, he is aware of the existence of a type of life and contentment which is not for him. A certain envy of 'les gens qui sont beaucoup plus simples et pour qui la vie est beaucoup plus facile'(*1) is seen in the heroes. Maillat tries hard to understand Alexandre; Lang finds life on the land, even with horses, insufficient(*2); Purcell cannot accept physical security unless it is ethically justifiable;

(*1) See Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

(*2) It is only when he is confronted by some setback in his occupation that he thinks with longing of the less complicated life on a farm.

Sevilla looks to the simple life for escape, but only to equip himself for greater advances in his work; David, although willing to make the effort to get to know Aziz, does not understand his insecurity; Emmanuel could be said to exploit his less intelligent compatriots.

The heroes have an almost puritanical contempt for the physical, which is accompanied by an intense regard for the mind: this is well expressed in the devoted logic of Lang in La Mort Est Mon Métier, the depiction of American consumer society in Un Animal Doué de Raison, and the contempt expressed for Fulbert's physical indulgences in Malevil. Disgust at the physical nature of others - at the soldiers attempting to rape the girl in Week-end à Zuydcoote, at the 'little rat' in L'Ile, or at Brigitte's pursuit of sexual fulfilment in Derrière La Vitre - becomes a kind of detachment when it concerns the physical nature of the hero himself. Thus Maillat is horrified to find that his body is influenced by Jeanne's advances, and he describes his hands as if they are not his own when he rapes her. Purcell suffers constantly because his body will not perform all he requires of it: he burns easily in the sun, and he cannot run fast enough. Sevilla is preoccupied by his ageing body, and this concern is possibly developed in the death of Emmanuel in Malevil: his plans for the community are not complete when he dies.

The hero is able to detach himself from his own body and think of himself in terms of spirit or personality, but he views other people more objectively. Others are, to him, inseparable from their physical attributes. He views them condescendingly, as if they are nearer to the animal kingdom than he is himself: the frequency of animal imagery in the novels is one way in which this condescension is demonstrated.

In spite of this sense of the superiority of mind over flesh in his own case, the Merle hero is particularly susceptible to sound and smell. It is as if he uses these senses to analyse the experience of other people. Sound is important in the description of the burning boat in Week-end à Zuydcoote, and in the variations in the rustling of

grass skirts in L'Ile. Absence of sound is equally effective in Malevil, when the desolation following the bomb is described. Smell is important to describe the burning bodies in La Mort Est Mon Métier, and this is evoked in the scene in Un Animal Doué de Raison where the bodies of the two dolphins are burnt. The offensive odour accompanying Bouchute, in Derrière La Vitre, and that emanating from the pillagers in Malevil emphasise the significance of this sense. It will be noticed that these examples all place the hero in a superior position, as onlooker or judge.

A connected factor is the hero's attitude to dead bodies. Respect for bodies is shown in Maillat's anxiety for decent covering of the dead girl on the handcart, and of the heaps of victims outside the hospital. This respect is continued in Malevil, for Emmanuel arranges that someone shall keep watch over Fulbert's body, and is persuaded to inter the remains of his friends' families with ceremony. Lang's objective view of the Jews' bodies as units is contradicted in La Mort Est Mon Métier by the description of the grotesque postures and distortions of the bodies in the gas-chambers, which shows the same awareness of personality as Purcell feels when he is alone in the cave with the body of Timi. We are told that Purcell found himself unable to avoid the gaze of the dead eyes. Both respect for and awareness of dead bodies, however, assume that the whole personality is contained in the body: there is no question of a continuation of intelligence, or a soul, elsewhere. The idea of continued existence after death is seen in L'Ile, where it is linked with the extra-sensory perception of primitive man. A similar kind of thought-transference is practised instinctively by the dolphins, who have a primitive concept of life after death. It is noticeable also, that in Malevil it is the least sophisticated characters - the women - who develop the cult of Emmanuel - worship after his death. When such ideas or experiences are mentioned in connection with characters other than the hero, they are seen as typical of the less-civilised; when the hero participates, this is seen

as proof of his affinity with simple goodness, or of his extreme sensitivity. Yet because the hero is of superior intellect, participation is also assumed to depict, in his case, the superiority of the mind over the body.

The Merle hero is highly sensitive to atmosphere, which is often created by his imagination or heightened by his analysis of his emotions. The most striking of the emotions he experiences is fear, which is inseparable from a sense of anticipation: the tension of the imagined happening is worse than the actual event. Fear is experienced in periods of inactivity, when the hero dreads behaving in a way which is not in keeping with his own standards. Maillat suffers tortures while waiting for an arbitrary death to continue its random selection of victims; Purcell in the cave agonises, in the helpless inactivity of the trapped man waiting for the attacker to appear; Sevilla, in the wait for the final attack in Un Animal Doué de Raison, experiences the same kind of tension. Significantly, Emmanuel does not undergo this feeling of isolation: he is waiting with the group before Vilmain's attack, and the communal experience of fear is its own solace. Emmanuel's worst experiences occur when he has to prove himself in confrontation with the group. At the peak of self-doubt and anticipation, the hero feels his legs tremble, and he starts to sweat. This is a reminder to him that he is bound to his body, and that he too is a physical entity. The reminder of his weakness could not occur at a worse time than when a trial of personality is imminent.

Thus the central figure of the novel is an intellectual, an idealist, a man of conviction who is tortured by the fear that he may not live up to the standards he has set himself. His responsibility is primarily to his ideals, and this involves the situation in which he is placed. He is preoccupied with his integrity, and sometimes passes judgement on the integrity of others. His presumption in judging others is a further sign of his conviction of superiority.

An examination of the structure of the novels makes the reader aware of Merle as arranger of subject-matter and character, as well as director of the plot. This arrangement shows his desire to arouse the interest of the reader, which is directed always towards the moral questions raised by the story. The structure focuses attention on the dilemma of the hero.

It has been established so far that the treatment of subject and setting, the arrangement of character, and the method of narration in the novels, all are subordinated to two factors: the hero, and the theme, which is expressed largely through the hero's experience. Although the focusing of the reader's attention on the hero is largely instrumental in encouraging enjoyment of the novels on the level of fictional stories, the same concentration on the hero utilises the reader's involvement to communicate a significant system of values. In fact, Merle's choice of expression and the arrangement of his subject-matter are determined by what he is trying to say.

It is now proposed to move on from an examination of style and structure to an assessment of Merle's philosophical position as represented in the themes of the novels.

CHAPTER FIVE

RECURRING THEMES

The central message of the novels concerns man as a social animal. Problems of individual conscience are presented in the context of the particular group of which the individual is a part; there is some comment on inter-group relationships, but the main emphasis is on the position and responsibility of the individual. With the exception of the examination of the pacifist position in L'Île, the themes are presented in a twentieth-century setting. None of the problems is especially modern, but they are all relevant to the present day.

War

The extent to which people are involved in war in the novels varies from commentary by complete outsiders to decisive intervention by politicians with power to annihilate the entire world population. It is between these two extremes that the positions of most interest to Merle are to be found. These concern the average citizen, who may have to decide to fight for the protection of home and family, or who may be an ordinary soldier caught up in the official machinery of war.

Disapproving comments about war are very easy to make for those who are safely on the other side of the globe. Such comments form part of the general attitude of politically motivated students in Derrière La Vitre. The occupation of the administration block is motivated by a desire to protest against the arrest of members of the Comité Vietnam National for taking part in an attack on the American Express office in Paris. The situation is utilised by Merle to point out the students' lack of real concern for Vietnam: it is emphasised that they are using an excuse to further personal grievances, and that they are incapable of appreciating the reality of war:

'Pour vivre le drame du Vietnam, les groupusses le transposaient à l'échelle de leur vie d'étudiant à Nanterre: Grappin devenait le président Johnson, le conseil des profs, le Pentagone, les C.R.S. devenaient les marines et la tour de Nanterre, l'ambassade U.S. à Saigon. Un mois plus tard, on revivait à Nanterre l'offensive du Têt, on marchait sur les traces du commando qui avait occupé l'ambassade américaine, comme lui on se saisissait de la tour par surprise, on l'occupait, on se faisait tuer sur place. Bien sûr, c'était une façon de parler. Il n'y avait pas ici de balle qui tue. Ni tank, ni bombes à billes, ni prisonniers exécutés. On ne reproduisait pas tout à fait l'action du commando-suicide: on la mimait.'(307)

War is one of the realities of life from which, along with penury and suffering, the students are separated by the plate glass surrounding their sheltered world. They feel strongly about war, as they do about any social injustice such as the exploitation of factory workers, but their involvement is theoretical, not practical.

The war in Vietnam is discussed in theoretical terms in Un Animal Doué de Raison also. Here Michael, who is not a conscientious objector, states his willingness to fight in, and to use dolphins to carry weapons in, 'une guerre juste'(148). He believes, however, that the intervention of the United States in the affairs of underdeveloped countries is a form of aggression, whether financial or military. His position is very close to that of the students of Nanterre and to that of Merle himself (*1). Although he is under no illusion as to the consequences of his action - his research career will be ended, and the war in Vietnam unaffected - he has decided to give notice to Sevilla,

(*1) Merle's analysis of the series of American-supported puppet dictators in Cuba, in Moncada, Premier Combat de Fidel Castro, gives details of the effect of American financial intervention only hinted at in Michael's 'Regarde ce qui se passe dans les pays de l'Amérique latine'(150).

Merle's signature appeared in Appel Aux Intellectuels, notice of a day of protest against the war in Vietnam, to be held on March 22nd., 1968.

Europe, no. 467 (mars '68) pp. 269-72.

thus abandoning the protection afforded by the nature of his employment, and refuse the draft. He will therefore risk a five-year prison sentence and a fine of 10,000 dollars. By doing this,

'Je témoigne que la guerre du Vietnam est injuste'(150).

All he can hope to achieve by his action is to make other Americans aware of his point of view, and perhaps make Sevilla recognise the implications of his research. For Michael, as for the students of Nanterre, any demonstration of opinions on war has a symbolic value only. Because the war is distant, it may be viewed objectively, and an ideological position reached.

The students and Michael are in the privileged position of observers: they can decide from afar what action ought to be taken, and they can assume that resistance is justified. They automatically reject the pacifist position, without being involved in war. But what of the man faced by the classic choice of killing or being killed, of killing or allowing all that he holds dear to be destroyed? Merle had already examined this dilemma in L'Ile.

Purcell is a pacifist, on the religious grounds that no man has the right to take another's life. His opinion is based on the assumption that justice is to be administered by God alone. In the course of the novel, it becomes clear that this neat solution is valid only in an ordered society composed of people with similar views, and eventually Purcell concludes that he was mistaken. Before he reaches this conclusion, however, he tries alternative methods of influencing the island society, some of which entail behaviour which falls short of his ideal. The opening paragraph of the novel indicates his unease: he is miserably aware of the privileges conferred by his rank. Before the mutiny takes place, it is established that he is the one officer on board the Blossom who regards the crew as human beings. The brutal treatment of the crew, and the hatred this inspires, form a background of tension against which Purcell's objection to Burt's order that Jimmy's body be

thrown overboard stands out as that of a man with the courage of his convictions. The astonishment of the crew at his intervention (21) makes clear that this is the first time that Purcell has openly admitted the implications of his religious belief. The sailors, we are told, knew that he was religious, but did not expect him to have the courage to stand up to Burt. For Purcell, the position is clear: to allow Jimmy's body to be thrown overboard without any form of religious service would be a denial of his faith. He states his priorities clearly: 'Certainement, Capitaine, vous êtes le seul maître à bord...après Dieu'(21). It is significant that Purcell intervenes only at this point, for this implies that, had there not been a religious principle at stake, he would probably not have objected. For example, although he is aware of the way the crew are treated, there is no evidence that he has tried to ameliorate their condition, nor that there is anything he could do to remedy the situation, apart from being careful to be fair in his dealings with the crew and punctilious in his duty to his superiors. It is established that Purcell's conscience dictates his own behaviour but does not lead him to interfere in the behaviour of others unless a definite principle is at stake. His intervention is not on behalf of the others: rather is it inspired by the challenge to his convictions. In any case, it is Mason's practical step, not Purcell's theoretical objection, which precipitates the mutiny.

It is easier for Purcell to maintain this almost selfish position against a background of established naval tradition and rigid discipline, than in the island society, which is unstable. On the first occasion when he tries to impose his principles on others, when Mason is teaching the Tahitians to shoot (66), his objection that rifles are tabou is overruled by Mehani. The Tahitians are ready to adapt to the customs of the British navy. The question of how Purcell, who as a naval officer was part of the society on board the Blossom, would have behaved in battle - a sailor in 1787 could hardly expect a

lifetime of peaceful service - is conveniently overlooked. Also omitted is any consideration of the problem of conscience raised by service on board a vessel whose objective was the transportation of bread-fruit to the Antilles as a cheap source of food for slaves. It is assumed that Purcell accepts all the implications of being a naval officer, and this increases the impact of his realisation of the ambiguity of his position.

The ambiguity arises from Purcell's situation as one of a group. When the group is on board ship, the views of one individual, especially one who sympathises with both extremes of rank, are unlikely to affect its organisation. Thus after the death of Burt, Purcell accords to Mason the rights of Captain because he can see that, if he does not do so, all stability will be lost. The situation changes when the composition of the group alters, with the addition of the Tahitians, and when the group itself is under stress. When the party is about to disembark, Purcell, who would presumably have obeyed his captain's order in wartime, refuses to use a weapon against possible inhabitants of the island, or to defend himself against attack. Mason's comment, 'Les Blancs, poursuivit-il, sont au nombre de neuf - de huit, sans vous compter, monsieur Purcell - ce qui fait, en tout, quatorze fusils'(71), underlines that Purcell's decision not to fight weakens the group as a whole. This does not influence Purcell, who is convinced that it would be wrong to take possession of the island by force, and seems more concerned about the fate of possible inhabitants than about that of the group. Already Purcell's non-violence appears as a kind of isolationism, impossible in the circumstances. Having refused to fight for the island, Purcell does not refuse to live there. He is thus in the position of profiting from the commitment of others, without sullyng his conscience.

The second crisis occurs when a ship approaches the island (109). Purcell, who has decided that he will not fire, nevertheless derives comfort from the gun he is holding. He does not attempt to dissuade the others from fighting, but he takes advantage of their awareness that,

should they fire, they would probably be annihilated. He persuades them that it will be better if only the Tahitians show themselves, should the crew of the approaching frigate land. He is obliged to lie in order to prevent bloodshed - he invents an Admiralty order forbidding a captain to land on an island inhabited by hostile savages. His concern for the group thus leads him to compromise his conscience>(*1)

Purcell is still unable to countenance killing when Mac Leod raises the question of whether it is not better to kill a trouble-maker at the outset, in order to protect the rest of the community. Mac Leod's impassioned speech (124) argues that there should be law as a basis of their communal life. Purcell's exposition of principle sounds hollow in comparison:

'Personne n'a le droit de tuer son frère'(129).

For the first time, Purcell experiences the desire to kill when Smudge objects to his choice of Ivoa during the distribution of wives. He automatically grasps Baker's knife, but is overcome by a sense of shame (174). Although the matter is settled by Omaata's intervention, it is significant that Purcell is willing to split the island in two in order to retain his right to Ivoa. He threatens to withdraw from the 'parliament', and it is clear that Baker, Jones and all the Tahitians will follow him.

(*1) 'En effet, Purcell se présente à nous d'emblée comme un homme qui tente de préserver sa neutralité dans une situation où une telle attitude est impossible: il se définit constamment dans son effort pour concilier l'inconciliable. Le livre est l'illustration de l'échec d'une telle tentative et de l'obligation pour un individu intégré à une situation donnée de prendre parti. D'autre part, aussi bien que l'histoire d'un échec, le roman est celle d'une initiation; l'initiation de Purcell à la violence, comme attitude humaine, composante nécessaire d'une manière d'être politique et sociale'.

C.Godel: "L'Ile ou la Tentation de l'Innocence"; Etudes de Lettres (janvier-mars, 1973) p. 95-115.

The author connects Purcell's idealism with an illusory view of the Tahitians as completely innocent, and draws a parallel between his mistaken analysis and his protection by the women. His realisation of his mistake is symbolised as a rebirth, an escape from the womb of illusion represented by the dark female bodies surrounding him. Making love to Omaata in the cave represents both his abandoning of the illusion of innocence and the acceptance of the ending of pacifism.

Purcell compromises once more when he buys Avapouhi from Mac Leod for Baker. The crux of his argument is that Mac Leod will be able to use the gold should he return to England: he lies over the matter of prescription for mutiny.

Purcell's inaction continues. He resorts to the formula that to kill is wrong, when Baker warns him that the community will suffer because Mac Leod has not been silenced. His solution to the unjust distribution of land is again peaceful: He, Jones and Baker will share their portions with the Tahitians. Tetahiti points out the weakness of Purcell's position:

'...il ne veut pas l'injustice...Cependant, Adamo ne veut pas agir pour empêcher l'injustice'(241).

His passivity continues when Kori and Mehani are killed, but their deaths inspire his first serious doubt. Would it not have been better to sacrifice one trouble-maker for the sake of peace, as Baker suggested? While he is demonstrating his scruples by refusing to sleep with Itia, the afternoon passes, and with it, the possibility of saving four lives.

At first, the implications of Purcell's position are revealed through his individual experience; it is not until late in the novel that concern for the community influences his beliefs. As he has been tempted to violence by personal rather than social considerations, it is fitting that it is on the personal level that he finally comes to terms with his position. When he hears Timi approaching the cave, he searches for a weapon. He kills Timi, but, having taken the first step towards commitment, he still does not fully accept what he has done. His doubt is renewed: what if Tetahiti's accusations were true? What if he were being clever, rather than scrupulous?

'Qui sait si je ne me suis pas menti à moi-même avec de nobles raisons? Après tout, j'ai poignardé Timi. Quand il a été question de ma peau, j'ai su verser du sang.'(392)

Ironically, it is because Purcell has an advantage that he survives at

all. Ivoa refuses to give up the gun with which she is guarding him. He realises the futility of words when he tries to argue with her. He also realises that he is no longer sure of his belief in pacifism as an ideal. When Tetahiti blames him for many of the deaths, Purcell wonders if he is right:

'S'il s'était trompé dès le début' (460),
and when, three weeks later, Ivoa asks if he would do the same again, he realises that his doubt has become an opinion (469). Eventually, he admits to Tetahiti that he regrets not taking sides, and asserts that, should a British ship come to the island, he would be willing to fight.

Purcell's experiences are used to explore the arguments against pacifism. The conclusion reached by the end of the novel is that assumed by the central figures of all the other novels: it is right, and necessary, to fight in a just cause. In Malevil, the practical application of this view is explored. The first killing, of le Wahrwoorde, is in self-defence, but Emmanuel, when he sets out to recover the stolen mare, is under no illusion about what may be necessary:

'Si nous ne voulions pas rester passifs, nous devons commencer par jouer dans le jeu de l'agresseur' (159).

In this case, and in that of the pillagers eating the new corn shoots (357), however, Emmanuel hesitates before firing. He does not find it easy to put into practice what he believes in theory to be right. On both occasions an attack by the enemy is necessary to stimulate action. It is after the second of these incidents that a formal decision is taken that it will be necessary to kill anyone who threatens the food supply. The rather immature attitude of Purcell is represented in Malevil by Evelyne, who is most upset by the bloodshed and has to be convinced of the necessity for killing. Even after the assault on the castle by Vilmain, at the point where they are setting up the ambush, she begs Emmanuel not to kill the survivors, and once more he explains that he is not willing to risk the life of anyone from Malevil. Six of Vilmain's men are killed in the ambush. The effect of fighting for survival in a primitive society is

brutalising, and Emmanuel is aware of this. The novel emphasises the unwillingness with which the characters perform the actions necessary for the survival of the community.

Few people, however, are likely to find themselves in such a clear-cut situation as Purcell or the Malevil community. Few participants experience such a personal war, and few can choose whether or not to fight: most are involved in a war begun and directed by other people.

War is seen through the eyes of the average soldier in Week-end à Zuydcoote. The most striking factor is that the soldier does not understand what is happening. He is without orders, he may have been separated from his unit, and he has no idea what is being achieved by his presence. From a confusion of random encounters (*1), he may glean snippets of information about what is going on, much as Pierson does during his visits to other popotes in the hospital grounds. He may well form the opinion that making war is more a matter of moving from place to place, or of killing time, than of actually fighting. He may not have seen the enemy for days, if at all. Alexandre's most memorable impression of the retreat through Belgium is of the destruction of people's homes(51), and Pierson is the only one of the four main characters who has actually killed a German. War is like a rest period between the real events of life: Maillat calls it 'une parenthèse'(170). It is a passing phase to be survived, and the soldiers provide themselves with something to look forward to: Dhéry plans to build up a thriving business, and has made arrangements to pass himself off as a civilian and stay near Dunkirk; Pierson takes careful note, using a tape-measure, of where he has buried his revolver, so that he can collect a

(*1) The archetype of this is in La Chartreuse de Parme. The central characters of Week-end à Zuydcoote, however, are older and wiser than Fabrice del Dongo, and at the beginning of the novel are already disillusioned.

souvenir after the war; Alexandre imagines the home he will build one day. Maillat's nearest approach to anticipation occurs when he looks across the Channel and thinks with longing of the ordered life in a country comparatively untouched by war (93).

The soldier's impression is that war is proceeding in spite of him. It is a distant event, happening alongside him without actually involving him, so that he becomes a spectator of the action. Thus, to Maillat, the attacking 'planes perform a graceful, delicate dance:

'Cela ressemblait aux figures bien réglées d'un ballet à 2,000 mètres d'altitude, une sorte de danse sacrée avant l'attaque'(97).

Similarly, for the soldiers on the shore, the burning ship becomes a spectacle. Maillat talks to one of the spectators, who is as excited as if he were at a football match. When Maillat replies to his exclamations by saying that he should have been on board in order to appreciate the drama fully, the soldier is rather offended:

'Après tout, il n'avait rien à voir là-dedans, lui. Il regardait. Il regardait simplement. Fallait quand même pas confondre'(149).

One result of this impression that war is happening at a distance is that the soldiers are surprised when death comes near them. When Maillat cannot find the villa rose again, he assumes that he has mistaken its position: it does not occur to him that it may have been bombed (119). Associating the popote with safety, he asks casually on his return how Dr. Cirilli is getting on, only to be told that he has been killed (160). A similar element of surprise is present when Alexandre is killed. An entirely arbitrary force selects its victims, and no one can guarantee his safety against an enemy far less predictable than the Germans. The result is an unwillingness to take any action at all. Inaction is justified by the conviction, referred to above, that the war will in any case proceed without the soldiers' participation. The individual soldier therefore becomes a cypher: his actions are completely lacking in significance. It is possible that this is why the soldiers

did not jump from the burning ship (*1). It would also explain why Maillat stays in bed, at the end of the novel, instead of seeking the comparative safety of the cellar.

When the average soldier becomes a cypher, and is aware of it, what he believes about the justice of the cause in which he is fighting is without significance (*2). The danger is that for himself, as well as on the scale of significant contribution to the war, he will become merely a physical entity. Since he has no influence over his fate, he may well give up his attempts to act rationally. Abandoned by, rather than liberated from, authority, it is on the physical level that he finds the only means of justifying his existence. He lives on the rations remaining to him, or on whatever he can loot. The members of the popote are lucky, as they not only have Alexandre to apportion the rations, but have Dhéry to provide extras, like a case of English whisky. The soldier becomes concerned to satisfy every whim on the physical plane. Surrounded as he is by death - at the Sana, in the streets, on the body-wagon which collects those who have died - he underestimates the value of other people. This combines with the anarchy of defeat to produce scenes of violence and rape. Maillat, raping Jeanne, is directed by his body; his mind is apart from what he is doing (237). Many of the soldiers behave in a way which would be repugnant to them in peacetime. Those sheltering in the flimsy dug-out on the beach are an example of this (189). More than a dozen soldiers, completely demoralised, are reduced to a

(*1) Merle says, however, that he cannot account for the soldiers' refusal to jump, or climb down the ropes. See Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

(*2) This is indicated particularly in Maillat's comments about the lack of significance of war (169), but nowhere is it stated as clearly as in Sartre:

'Une grande interrogation nous cerne: c'est une farce. On nous pose la question comme à des hommes; on veut nous faire croire que nous sommes encore des hommes. Mais non. Non. Non. Quelle farce, cette ombre de question posée par une ombre de guerre à des apparences d'hommes.
- A quoi ça te sert-il d'avoir un avis? Ce n'est pas toi qui vas décider'

J.P.Sartre: Les Chemins de la Liberté, III: La Mort Dans l'Ame, p.61 Editions Folio, Gallimard, 1972 (1949).

swearing, sweating mass>(*1)

The effect on Maillat of being discounted as a thinking being is all the greater because he is an intellectual. His resultant sense of unreality is emphasised.(*2) He feels that the whole incident with Captain Feery is unreal, and that the small piece of paper in his hand cannot possibly signify the difference between life and death. The sight of an old man taking his afternoon walk makes him feel as if he has stepped into an old newsreel interview (122). When it is clear that the ship is about to be bombed, he observes the men about him, waiting to die, as if he is not one of them (136). After the fight with the large soldier, he decides to go out for some fresh air, and finds himself going up the stairs again (198). He cannot believe that what has happened has really happened to him:

'Moi, Maillat, je viens de tuer deux types. Il répéta la phrase plusieurs fois de suite, mais ça ne l'avancait pas'(202).

The choice confronting the average soldier is threefold: acceptance, desertion or suicide. Acceptance entails degradation: the soldier acts like an animal and, if he is intelligent, he is aware of his degeneration.

The individual may nevertheless be effectively utilised in wartime if his acceptance is complete. That he can be trained to commit atrocities is adequately demonstrated by La Mort Est Non Métier. It is interesting to note here that the reactions of an average man against an ordered background remain predictable: Himmler can rely on Lang's

(*1) Merle's honesty in depicting the defeated French army resulted in a threat, by a French officer, to kill him. See Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

(*2) 'Je ne vois pas pourquoi je rejetterais ce qu'il peut y avoir d'irréel dans le vrai, mais il me semble que le monde, justement, est assez irréel tel qu'il est...'
Merle, in an interview with P. Loiselet about Week-end à Zuydcoote, Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 10.xi.'49.

ambition for promotion, his conscientious attention to detail and his desire to justify his appointment, much as an employer relies on a willing worker. Horrifying though Lang's story may be, it furnishes an example of positive achievement by a very ordinary man. Ordinary people are shown in the novels to be capable of perpetrating atrocities. They may do so because of a desire to impress, like Mr.C.'s friend, Johnny, in Un Animal Doué de Raison, who tossed a coin to decide the fate of an old man, near Saigon, who 'mourut comme une puce qu'on écrase'(84). Atrocities can also be committed out of regard for long-established custom: the gentle Tahitians gut Amoureaia, and expose the heads of their enemies on stakes. Mass hysteria leads the ordinary villagers of La Roque to beat Fulbert to death in the church.

Un Animal Doué de Raison describes the political machinations of those who use war as a weapon in the international struggle for power. Off Haiphong, on January 4th., 1973, the American cruiser Little Rock is blown up by an American nuclear weapon, placed on its keel by American-trained dolphins. Hundreds of sailors are killed, and in the Chinese town of Pak-Hoi fifty thousand inhabitants suffer the effects of radioactive fall-out. Albert Monroe Smith, the American President, addressing the nation on 6th. January, declares that America has always been peace-loving. American campaigns in South-East Asia are designed to establish the freedom of the peoples concerned, and not to gain power, riches or territory for America. He asserts that the weapon which destroyed the Little Rock was launched by the Vietnamese, but made in Communist China. Predictably, he compares the treachery of the attack to the Japanese seizure of Pearl Harbour in 1941. If, by January 13th., China has not dismantled her nuclear weapon factories and submitted to international inspection, America will be obliged to take measures to assure her security. On January 8th., a communiqué issued by the State Department in Washington confirms that no atomic weapon was on board the Little Rock or any other ship in the Seventh fleet. An accident was

therefore impossible. The communiqué repeats the earlier accusation against China, and ends by reminding China that the American ultimatum will expire on January 13th. During the night of January 9th.-10th., Sevilla and Arlette, with the two dolphins responsible for mining the Little Rock, travel to Cuba with the intention of making public the information that the attack was American-organised. It is assumed that they will be successful, and that a world-wide nuclear war will be averted.

The risk of war is seen to be very real. America and China could well be committed to an exchange of nuclear weapons. In spite of the fact that America is capable of annihilating China's launching-pads and factories within two hours, there is always the risk that the Chinese could penetrate the American defence network and place bombs in retaliation. The Russian reaction to the situation is predictable: there is the possibility of her intervention on a nuclear scale. Thus Arlette's comment,

'Si nous réussissons, ce sera grâce à nous que la terre....'(369), is justified.

The information afforded to the reader is designed to undermine his confidence in the politicians who are responsible for international relations. It is obvious that the most powerful man in the world, the American President, is being deceived by his subordinates. No one has told him that America herself is responsible for the loss of the Little Rock. It is also obvious that some faction in the State Department is determined that the war shall take place: this is indicated by the introduction into the State Department communiqué of the word, 'ultimatum', which the President carefully avoided during his television statement. The President himself is aware that he may be a tool in the hands of warmongers. During a sleepless night in the White House, (287-292), he remembers the trap set for President Kennedy, who was assured that the American landing in the Bay of Pigs in 1961 would meet with no resistance, as Castro's forces had been wiped out, but would,

on the contrary, find immediate support from Castro's opponents.

President Smith is convinced that the C.I.A. knew that the Bay of Pigs landing would be a failure, and hoped that this would inspire Kennedy to mount a full-scale attack on Cuba. The President is aware of the connection with his own situation: he is faced by provocation, and it will take courage to allow America to appear weak. Kennedy showed the requisite courage when, in spite of the humiliation of the Bay of Pigs incident, he refused to declare war (*1).

The novel's explanation of the warmongers' possible motives is far from reassuring. There are two possibilities. The first is that explained to the President during his conference with the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary: if America declares war, the risk of Chinese retaliation will be removed within two hours, Russia will not intervene, and the world will be at peace for a century. The President is not certain

'...s'ils se trompent ou s'ils me trompent'(291).

If his advisers are themselves deceived about the stage reached by Chinese nuclear technology, and erroneously believe that Chinese retaliation is impossible, they are likely to spark off a war on a world scale. If they are sure of their information about China's powers, they presumably wish to put their faith in the information available to them, and destroy China's missile system before she can develop a weapon sensitive enough to penetrate American defences. In this case their motives could be what they say: intervention by America could reduce China to impotence on the nuclear level for a very long time, and considerably lessen the chances of war.

The second possibility is that the President's advisers are

(*1) A. Billy points out that this is a typically left-wing interpretation of the reason for Kennedy's assassination.

"Un Animal Doué de Raison, ce n'est pas l'Homme"; Le Figaro, 18.xii.'67.

deceiving him, either so as to encourage him to declare war, or in order to put him in the position of having to make a weak retraction. The result of the first of these alternatives will again be world war or a period of peace, depending on the accuracy of their information. The second alternative implies that American political groups have realised that Albert Monroe Smith is not the puppet they had expected, and that they now want to put him in a position where he will lose the support of the American people and have to resign. Details of the frenzied patriotism inspired by the Little Rock incident establish that a refusal to declare war on China would make him extremely unpopular. The implication is that party politicians are willing to risk world war in order to dispose of a President they do not like.

The most likely explanation is that Smith has been carefully guided towards the Presidency because he is thought to be a puppet suitable for manipulation by those who have the real power. These faceless individuals wish to provoke a situation in which China's nuclear installations are wiped out. The motivation may not be entirely unselfish: a prolonged peace would extend American power in the world.

The people who cause war are not clearly identifiable. To the average person, the President of the United States appears all-powerful, but the novel reveals that his power is illusory. His opinions have as little weight as those of the average soldier: both are manipulated by faceless powers whose motives are mysterious. The President is no more able to achieve his peace ideal than the ordinary man who does not want to fight: both are unavoidably subject to the prevailing mood of society. The President's actions may achieve no more than those of a student protesting about events on the other side of the globe.

The impression of war as a force which no one can control is emphasised in the novels by stressing its terrifying scale. Thus one ordinary man, in La Mort Est Mon Métier, is instrumental in the

annihilation of millions of Jews. A comparison is drawn, ironically, by Lang, with the annihilation of a city by the action of one pilot (319). The risk of a Third World War is underlined by Un Animal Doué de Raison, and the devastation such a war would cause, by Malevil. In the latter, the war may have been accidental (64): the most distressing aspect is that, as soon as man has recovered from one war, he finds it necessary to begin preparations for another. A second annihilation is possible, as soon as technology is sufficiently far advanced to develop a suitable means of destruction.

Inherited Values.

War is the most prevalent example in the novels of a situation where people are subjected to stress. Merle investigates what happens to people in such a situation, and concludes that, in the majority of cases, a desire for security or comfort leads to the reproduction of psychological or social patterns established during past experience. Character development is therefore rare: except for the superior central figures, Purcell, Sevilla and Emmanuel, the protagonists behave in accordance with the upbringing and background which have already formed their mental processes.

Recurring psychological patterns are important in Derrière La Vitre and La Mort Est Mon Métier. The significance of the Oedipus theme in the former has already been discussed (*1), and it has been noted how the student characters react to the stress of the University situation by substituting the University itself, the lecturers, or each other, for the previous dominant influence in their lives. In La Mort Est Mon Métier also, behaviour patterns established during youth are repeated by the adult. The investigation of how far Lang's psychology accounts for his

(*1) See above: Chapter 3: The Method of Narration, under Imagery, p.83.

actions is all the more interesting because of the nature of the actions: how could 'un petit fonctionnaire' behave like 'une brute que rien n'arrête' (324)? What was there about Lang's early upbringing which made him a monster?

'On ne sait trop qui contribua le plus à faire de Lang un monstre: de l'hitlérisme ou des années qui l'ont précédé.'(*1)

It is possible to trace a hardening process which makes Lang insensitive and callous. He was brought up in an environment lacking in love, but full of rules and regulations. In the Lang household, no hot water is allowed for washing, it is forbidden to look out of windows while cleaning them, and family life moves to a strict timetable. The military impression is reinforced by the ruling that Lang must keep in step with his father when they walk together, and that he must ask permission to speak, like a soldier before his superior officer. Thus in later life, Rudolf finds comfort in the harsh routine of the barracks, and comments that the orderly way of life is pleasant (65). When he is in prison, he suffers no ill-effect: he has been accustomed to strict timetables from his earliest years. The discipline of the Party is reassuring at a time when he is uncertain about obtaining employment or even adequate food.

Rudolf's early existence is a series of challenges connected with mastering the reactions of his body, especially when he is cold or frightened. The icy coldness of his father's study, and his insistence that Rudolf should pray 'à genoux sur le carrelage glacé' (35) prepare for later trials of strength, where Rudolf's concentration on overcoming the cold diminishes the seriousness of his task. Thus he is able to dive into the icy water of the pool on von Jeseritz' farm, which has to be dammed (170); he concentrates on the details of Himmler's 'tâche historique' (215) in another cold study; he deals competently with Setzler's suicide

(*1) R. Bergeron: "Le monstre et 'l'idée nécessaire'"; Europe, 31e année, no. 89, mai '53.

on a freezing Christmas Eve(325). When he is afraid, his legs begin to tremble, but from his boyhood he has been determined that his father shall not see that he is frightened: he concentrates on overcoming the physical manifestation of emotion and, by this means, he represses the emotion. The trembling recurs in situations when he is under stress: when his father informs him that he is to become a priest(14), when he has spent an exhausting morning shovelling sand into a cement-mixer and feels he has reached the limit of his strength, when he is called before the prison governor, and when von Jeseritz threatens to sack him if he does not marry Elsie. All these occasions subject him to mental, rather than physical stress: his self-confidence is threatened. He is afraid of failure. When Setzler points out a flaw in his calculations for Birkenau - they may be able to gas 5,000 people a day, but they can bury only 500 -

'Je m'aperçus que mes mains tremblaient. Je les cachai derrière mon dos.'

Rudolf grows up against a background where all emotion is (250) repressed. He is deprived of love. The only person with whom he has a normal, trusting relationship, like that between Hans Werner and his father, which Rudolf cannot understand, is the maid, Marie. It is for her that he asks when he finally regains consciousness after his illness. Significantly, she has been dismissed - she did not appear to believe his father's assertion that Rudolf had received nothing but love from his parents (36). A boy deprived of love easily gives allegiance to anyone who does not reject him. Thus Rudolf hero-worships Gunther, who dislikes appearing sentimental: Rudolf therefore thinks of the expression of emotion as a weakness. He is unfortunate in that the two other adults outside the family circle whom he meets during his formative years also appear biased against him. Doctor Vogel, his guardian, is just as intransigent as Rudolf's father over the matter of Rudolf's dedication to the priesthood. Père Thaler, Rudolf's confessor, appears to have betrayed his confidence. Rudolf therefore makes a conscious effort not

to commit himself in any relationship, and is accused of coldness by everyone with whom he comes into close contact. By the time he has grown up, he has acquired a hard shell of indifference which avoids the need to be concerned about what people think of him. He realises early in his army career that his men hate him (86), but this affects him no more than Elsie's hatred when she finds out about the gas-chambers (309).

Rudolf finds solace in routine, and establishes personal habits which he finds comforting. The two main ones are cleaning windows and polishing boots, both of which date back to his secure, if strictly-supervised, childhood. When he cleans boots, he is always alone, in a room where he has escaped from the family: this may represent a desire for achievement on the personal level. When the boots shine, he is contented, as if he has resolved his problems (64, 247). He connects cleaning windows with the possibility of making the wrong decision. When he is making up his mind about Himmler's offer of a post in the concentration camp service, Rudolf is irritated by a smeared window, then, when he has almost decided, he mechanically polishes it. His confusion towards the end of the novel is symbolised when he notices that the windows of the room where he is interrogated by the Americans are 'dépolies et je ne pus rien voir'(317).

Cleanliness is connected with self-respect. Thus Rudolf's concern at conditions in the camp is subjective: it is an affront to his efficiency. He must ensure that he is above reproach, and he inflicts punishments on himself if his behaviour does not reach the required standard. Even as a child, he has a system of counting steps in the playground to which he must conform: if he does not, he punishes himself by saying more prayers. It is neglect of duty which makes him feel guilty. After the scene with Elsie about killing the Jews, he is ashamed, because he has betrayed a state secret to his wife. He is also ashamed after the revolt by Jewish prisoners has been mercilessly suppressed, because he has risked his life unnecessarily. His sense of

duty precludes any feeling of guilt: it is left to von Ritterbach and Setzler to commit suicide because duty involves killing the innocent.

Two factors emerge in explanation of how Lang becomes a monster: destruction of emotion, by means of domination, and justification of action as routine or duty. Added to this, there is a lifetime's habit of subjugation to authority (*1).

It has been objected that the novel is a clever explanation of the psychology of a killer, but that the use of the first-person narrative implies that the reader is expected to appreciate the conscience of the executioner from the inside.

'Les juges qui condamnent Rudolf ne peuvent pas nous être antipathiques et nous n'avons pas plus d'eux la clef du personnage. Car il ne suffit pas de nous dire qu'un enfant a été élevé par un père trop autoritaire, qu'il est peu porté sur le sexe, et qu'il a un culte de l'obéissance passive, pour démontrer le mécanisme des robots criminels du IIIe Reich. (la tentative) perd malheureusement toute vraisemblance psychologique sur le plan de la première personne.'(*2)

As regards the effectiveness of the use of first-person narration, the conclusion has already been reached that to expect this to encourage complete identification with Lang on the part of the reader would be to expect the impossible.(*3) The criticism that the picture of Rudolf's early life does not account for his adult actions is more acceptable, but seems to assume that Rudolf emerged from childhood an executioner, and to discount the toughening effect of his experiences

(*1) This has already been discussed in chapter 3: The Method of Narration, under Imagery, p.86.

(*2) J.H.Roy: "La Mort Est Mon Métier"; Les Temps Modernes, vol.8,p.1838.

(*3) See above: chapter 3: The Method of Narration, under First Person Narration, p.100.

J.H.Roy is demanding that reading a novel, which depends on interest and cooperation on the part of the reader, should achieve what hypnotism cannot. A novel may encourage a reader to imagine himself achieving feats beyond his normal capacity, and hypnotism may help him actually to do so, but neither can overcome his previously determined moral scruples.

between leaving school, and entering the concentration camp service in 1934.

Lang is a product of the historical period which produced Fascism. His enlistment at the end of the First World War, his experiences in the corps francs, and in the Middle East campaign, the time spent as an under-paid worker at a time of high unemployment, his imprisonment for the murder of a Communist, and the period of hard manual labour on von Jeseritz' farm, all mean that he developed as part of the social and economic system without which Nazism would never have become powerful.

Another critic (*1) asserts that the details of Rudolf's early life personalise a character which is already credible historically: '...ce qui fait qu'il arrive que Lang n'apparaît plus comme un type, le type du bourreau à tête froide que seul le fascisme est capable d'engendrer, mais comme un cas.'

Although the brutalising process continues after he leaves home, the foundations are laid in childhood: the lack of emotion, the ambition and the habit of obedience. The attitude remains the same as the novel progresses, but its implications increase as the three factors work together to place him in a more important position.

It has been seen that one reason for Lang's reproduction of the situation of his childhood is a desire for security and order. For the same reason, characters in Week-end à Zuydcoote, Derrière La Vitre and L'Ile seek reassurance in the familiar. The way in which Alexandre organises the popote, with utensils within reach when he is cooking, and the way in which the four soldiers have their favourite places at meals, as if at home, give the illusion of permanence to their camp:

'Et voilà, c'était presque prêt. Et maintenant, Pierson allait arriver. Et Dhéry, un peu en retard, comme d'habitude. Et Maillat s'assiérait à

(*1) R. Bergeron: "Le monstre et 'l'idée nécessaire'"; Europe, 31e année, no. 89, mai '53.

côté de lui, Alexandre, comme d'habitude,....et tout serait dans l'ordre, une fois de plus'(32-3).

Maillat destroys Alexandre's contentment a few minutes later by pointing out that domesticity offers only an illusion of protection against reality. The Germans are still advancing, and the piece of land where the popote is situated 'se rétrécit tous les jours'(36). Even Maillat, however, when on the point of embarking for England, regrets the 'home' he is leaving behind (129).

Several of the main characters of Derrière La Vitre, removed from the restrictions of home life, attempt to establish their own rule of behaviour. Jacqueline and Ménestrel both set out lists of the course of action they are to follow: Ménestrel's is a list of work (31-2), and Jacqueline's lists the series of events on which her suicide is conditional (381). The well-integrated Denise has her own method of establishing a comforting sense of security:

'Tous ces objets n'étaient pas disposés n'importe comment....ils devaient, sinon toucher tous la soucoupe, au moins se toucher tous entre eux, sans faille ni solution de continuité, comme si un même courant devait les traverser pour aboutir jusqu'à sa tasse'(241).

It is implied that the desire for security influences, not only the arrangement of possessions, but also the formation of relationships and affiliation to political parties. Denise's satisfaction at being a member of the Communist Party lies partly in the comforting sense of belonging to a large family where she will be told what to do, and Jaumet also is aware of the support of 'un très grand parti, avec ses millions d'électeurs'(142). The implication that many politically committed students are simply replacing one authority by another, to which they become slaves, is clear from David's comment that there is no point in destroying one religion if it is immediately replaced by another: whether one is tyrannised in the name of God or in the name of the people, one is still a slave (289). The connection between the security provided by a rule

and the desire for authority is established when Jacqueline adopts Ménestrel as her mentor: we are told that she cannot wait for the next day to arrive, when she will pin up the rule releasing her from all previous rules, and proclaiming her his slave for ever (390).

The effect of these tendencies is to emphasise the basic insecurity of the student population, which may well lead them to make hasty decisions about the formation of personal and political attachments. They are likely to give up the freedom of their new life in order to regain restrictions which remind them of the security of their old life.

L'Ile establishes that man does not live in a vacuum: faced with the opportunity of establishing a new society on an uninhabited island, he brings with him the value-systems which result from his previous experience. Britons and Tahitians alike have preconceived ideas: if the Briton cannot escape his class-system, the Tahitian cannot abandon an outlook complicated by tabous and family ties. The situation is well described by Purcell, explaining to Itia why he does not want a second wife:

'Pour un Péritani, les choses sont différentes....Où qu'il aille, ses tabous le suivent'(133).

Both Britons and Tahitians have difficulty in controlling their new freedom and responsibility. The Tahitians miss the guidance of Otou, and soon Tetahiti emerges as their new chief. The Britons become confused once they decide to abandon the rigid structure of naval rank, and it becomes clear that the average man is at a loss without direction. Several look upon Mac Leod as leader, even though he declares that he is not willing to assume the responsibility of which they have deprived their officers(114). Two factions emerge, in a parody of the British system of constitutional government: Mac Leod leads the party in power, Purcell the opposition. The council votes on every question: always the vote is a foregone conclusion. That such a system does not take into account the wishes of the underprivileged Tahitians, who have no vote, reflects the attitude of the British ruling class in the

eighteenth century. In accordance with the historical setting, no one for a moment considers that women should have a vote. The expatriates succeed in setting up a system of government which closely resembles what they left behind in Britain, and which reproduces the imperfections of the existing system.

Merle contrasts the houses built by Tahitians and Britons. The Tahitians live communally; their dwelling has no door, and nothing is locked away. On the other hand, the Britons each have a house, with a door which is secured in some way, and an enclosed patch of land. Inside the houses, is a multiplicity of cupboards and chests for hoarding possessions. Mason's house reproduces the captain's cabin on board the Blossom: he is anxious to retain a symbol of his past status.

An almost conscious clinging to life as it was before l'événement is seen in Malevil, especially in the unease of the first few days of the new system, before there has been time to establish a new life-pattern. It is la Menou who is largely responsible for reassuring the others. For example, when Peyssou declares his intention of returning to find his family immediately after the explosion, the problem arises of how to prevent his departure until he has time to realise what he is likely to find. La Menou successfully delays him by insisting that he must eat something before he leaves, and Peyssou, caught in the web of country politenesses, must stay long enough to avoid giving offence. La Menou also organises the others into continuing the bottling of the wine while Thomas and Emmanuel are outside with the Geiger counter. Before their first breakfast together, she polishes the floor and lays a clean tablecloth as usual (118). The reassurance of the first days is of a domestic nature: the popote of Week-end à Zuydcoote becomes the dining-room of Malevil.

Relationships between Emmanuel and his three friends are already established before the story begins: the pattern of the Cercle, their boyhood society, is repeated in new circumstances. This group

differs from that in Week-end à Zuydcoote, where the group have been together for only a short time, and from that in L'Ile, where the group wish to break with previous authority patterns. The Cercle, being long-established, provides an emotional refuge when circumstances remove family ties. From the opening chapter, in which Emmanuel describes how he organised the others to provide him with food when he ran away from home, it is clear that he is the leader. The carefree days of childhood are recalled in less happy circumstances, such as when Meyssonier and Emmanuel are reconnoitring the route from La Roque during preparations for the fight with Vilmain (422), and when Colin's bird-imitation is used, not as the signal to begin some childish game, but as a warning that Vilmain is about to attack (455). The harmonious atmosphere of the Malevil community may be traced back to the intimate group who have so many memories in common. Over Miette, for instance, although they disagree, they are aware that they are judging by common standards. When Emmanuel argues that it is taking money, rather than having several partners, which makes prostitution immoral, he comments that no one despises a woman who sleeps with everyone, and is aware that the others are thinking, as he is himself, of the beautiful and generous Adélaïde (208). In spite of their initial disagreement over Miette, the group react as one man:

'Ils sont furieux et outragés comme des maris trompés. C'est un sentiment paradoxal et peut-être même un peu comique, car enfin nous ne sommes pas jaloux les uns des autres. Probablement parce que tout se passe à l'intérieur du groupe, au vu et au su de tous.' (243)

The survivors repeat the way of life they remember, but they are also seen to be repeating the whole of human experience. There are many references to the primitive nature of their life. One of these occurs at the moment of the 'birth' of the community, in the cellar. It seems to Emmanuel that they have much in common with primitive man: they are naked, bent forward with fatigue, and have their eyes fixed on meat. When they are eating, each of them remains a little apart

from the rest, and seems distrustful, as if the others are likely to snatch his food from him(88). Also typical of primitive times are the common possession of Malevil and its land (122), the sharing of women and children - Agnès' daughter looks on all the people at Malevil as parents - and the acquisition of women for the propagation of the race. The first woman they meet is Miette, whose father, significantly, looks like a cave-man (172). When Emmanuel first sees Miette, he thinks: 'C'est un magnifique animal humain, cette future mère des hommes'(212) (*1). Her primitive nature is revealed on the occasion of the first rain, when she throws off her clothes and dances (269), much as the Tahitians did in L'Ile (52-3).

The removal of Miette from l'Etang is an allegory of the progress of man, as life at Malevil is more advanced than that of the cave-dweller. The Bible-readings round the fire begin with Genesis, and by the time of the rainstorm, the experience of the community has advanced as far as Noah. Emmanuel compares the castle to the Ark (267). Both contain the germ of civilisation which will survive for the future. The people of Malevil have learnt to cultivate, and they experience a certain awe of the life-giving earth when their crops pierce the soil. This nature-worship is reminiscent of Old Testament life, and Emmanuel remarks on the importance of crops, flocks and propagation (212). At the time of the first harvest, he feels that they have lived through the experience which inspired the Biblical comment about bread and sweat (380).

The most exact parallel is with life during the Middle Ages, and this is linked with the age of the castle. After playing the part during his youth - in the days of the Cercle, the boys reenacted history, with Emmanuel and Meyssonnier leading rival groups of 'Protestants' and

(*1) Merle comments: 'J'étais dans la position de Dieu-Père créant Eve. J'avais à créer Eve! Et à ce moment-là, j'ai trouvé attirant au point de vue dramatique et au point de vue psychologique, de la créer la plus primitive possible....C'est l'ébauche d'une Eve primitive.'

See Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

'Catholics', and at first, living in the castle seemed like a game to Emmanuel - Emmanuel feels that he is now really lord of the manor. This is implied when la Falvine gives up her attempt to conceal Miette:

'...je suis en train de renoncer à mon droit seigneurial'(186).

On his return from l'Etang, Emmanuel feels like a lord of the Middle Ages, returning victorious from a campaign, bringing booty and captives (193), and this is echoed by Evelyne as she rides with Emmanuel from La Roque. She declares that she is the lord's fiancée whom he is carrying off to his castle (323). The pace of life is that of a previous era: they all practise shooting with bow and arrows, and learn to ride. Their values, too, are medieval: when Fulbert demands a cow, the Malevil group feel more than the horror of the twentieth-century peasant, whose standards, in any case, reflect those of former times:

'Il a osé toucher à la vache. Après Dieu (et peut-être même avant) notre valeur la plus sacrée'(234).

Gold is no longer of any value, and a system of barter prevails: half of the butchered calf is taken to La Roque in exchange for sugar and soap (282). Mentally, too, the community reverts to medieval attitudes. This is especially true where religion is concerned. The solidarity of the group is expressed and strengthened through the Communion service. Like knights preparing to fight in the Crusades, the characters make their confession and take Communion before going into battle against the forces of evil, in this case, Vilmain's troops. The concentration of spiritual and temporal power in one head - Emmanuel is both lord and bishop - is also typical of medieval times, as is the cult of the saint. The inhabitants of La Roque make an annual pilgrimage to Emmanuel's grave: (531) and some of the women at Malevil pray to his portrait (536).

The personal and temporal perspective in Malevil is instrumental in establishing that certain characteristics of people and of society are recurring factors. It is as if the group of survivors

experience the whole of man's development in compressed form, and relive history from the beginning. The survivors themselves are aware that they are living a mixture of primitive, Biblical, medieval and twentieth-century lives:

'Comme si l'or, deux mois après l'événement, avait de la valeur! On n'en est plus là, ou si l'on préfère, on n'en est pas encore là'(322).

By means of the sense of perspective, Merle is pointing out that, whereas it is usually assumed that life following a nuclear catastrophe would be lived on a primitive level, the people would not be primitive, and would be aware of the artificial evolution of their society.

The insistence on the power of inherited values in the novels demonstrates the weakness of the average person who, faced with the possibility of creating his own life-style, denies this freedom and seeks refuge in what he already knows. The desire for the security of order is typical more of the minor characters than of the hero, who usually tries to reason out his own system of values. The average person is shown to be willing to accept any authority which will relieve him of the responsibility of creating his own.

An examination of the type of ordered society most frequently reproduced reveals what is important to the people in the novels. Religion and patriotism are important only as an expression of group feeling, or as a means of ensuring cohesion, and it is significant that the most religious or patriotic characters are often the weakest. The main influence comes from a person's home, family and friends; this accounts for the setting of most of the novels in a small community, and accounts positively for Merle's choice of the microcosm. A small community is not only more convenient for the author because it includes fewer characters, who may be depicted in depth, but it contains all that is important to people. All their attitudes and beliefs - political, economic, religious, - are seen to stem from everyday experiences and relationships.

A further implication of Merle's insistence on man's inheritance is that, although some characters may be more willing than others to try to escape it, complete freedom of choice is available to no one. Strong and weak characters alike have a past which has formed them. There is little character development in the novels because, for Merle, people retain the character which has been built up during their formative years. Childhood and youth produce an adult ready to draw on his experience: the most limited example is Lang, in La Mort Est Non Métier. In Malevil, the early years provide a series of references, as if in explanation of the main actions and attitudes of the protagonists. In L'Ile, the definite change in attitude of the hero is seen to be a form of self-discovery, as Purcell gradually realises his true character. For Merle, the adult is formed: he may add to his experience, but experience is unlikely to change his basic nature.

There appears, nevertheless, to be definite progression from one novel to the next. From the assumption in Week-end à Zuydcoote that a man thinks according to his occupation, and the emphasis in La Mort Est Mon Métier on the influence of family and class on character formation, the rule of inherited characteristics appears unbroken. Then, in L'Ile, which underlines the failure to create a new society by imitating the old, a break occurs at the end of the novel when Purcell rejects his inherited taboos. His true nature, as has been indicated in the course of the novel, lies somewhere between British and Tahitian, and he devotes himself to the new society which is to be a combination of the two. Malevil is a continuation of L'Ile: the new society may reproduce the experience of previous civilisations, but it develops its own unique character (*1). It is suggested, however, that by the end of Malevil society has almost reached the stage of today: the inference is that nuclear catastrophe will begin man's experience, and the novel, all over again.

(*1) See the concluding section of the present chapter: the Organisation of Society.

Responsibility

The disruption of everyday life which creates the situation of the novels places the characters under stress, and they must strive to regain a sense of purpose. It has been seen that a common reaction is the semi-conscious clinging to, or recreation of, familiar life-patterns, in an attempt to regain security. Such a reaction is a denial of freedom. Other characters may see in this freedom an opportunity to gratify desires previously restricted by the force of custom, or to satisfy their personal ambition, whether on the physical or the ideological level. This reaction represents an exploitation of freedom, usually at the expense of other people. It is in the reactions of the heroes of the novels that the full implications of freedom are explored. These characters, who are often intellectuals, realise that their new situation demands a re-examination of values; as thinking men, they must explain the situation in terms which will satisfy their mental need for order, and evolve a philosophy of life which will account for their behaviour.

The hero of Week-end à Zuydcoote abdicates this responsibility, because he becomes convinced of the absurdity of his situation and of the futility of any action. Maillat is aware that the physical disruption of his life encourages in him a disproportionately physical reaction. He is so concerned with staying alive that consideration of the quality of the life preserved is minimal. Of the characters, he is normally the one to think most deeply, but practical considerations, such as food, shelter and escape, make him realise that he is the least able to come to terms with life in wartime. Of the group, the simplest character, Alexandre, proves most adaptable to life as a soldier. Maillat is at a disadvantage: his search for an explanation of his situation is subjugated to his need for survival.

The novel depicts action on two scales, the national and the personal. On both levels, Maillat experiences the threat of events

which advance inexorably, with or without his conscious participation. He is caught up in the pattern of events and cannot escape the inevitable. A sense of futility, which is established early in the novel by means of experiences Maillat shares with other people, is gradually concentrated on Maillat alone. The girl on the cart has a skirt which keeps slipping up, and Virrel, inevitably, keeps replacing it. The men on the burning boat are convinced of the futility of trying to escape. The boat is equipped with two small machine-guns, which have afforded no protection against attack, and continue firing as the boat burns, with the same lack of effect as Pinot firing his gun, or impregnating his wife. Even Gabet, the self-sufficient Englishman, comments on 'the utter futility of all this'. To Maillat, war is a game without rules in which chance decides which lives to risk: 'Pour moi, la guerre est absurde. Et pas telle ou telle guerre. Toutes les guerres. Dans l'Absolu. Sans exception. Sans régime de faveur. Autrement dit, il n'y a pas de guerre juste, ou de guerre sacrée, ou de guerre pour la bonne cause. Une guerre, par définition, c'est absurde'. (169)

On the personal level also, Maillat is convinced of the futility of action. The choice offered by war is impossible: acceptance, desertion, or suicide. He cannot justify any one of these. Pierson points out that, as Maillat is still with the French army, he would seem to have chosen the first alternative (168), but Maillat rejects this supposition. He cannot accept that the accident of history which has placed him in his present situation necessitates his acceptance of it. He points out that most soldiers at first find war pointless, then accept it because they are involved in it. He finds it impossible to believe in anything, although he can see that some kind of belief would give meaning to life. He envies the others their sense of purpose: Pierson has this from religion, Alexandre, from domesticity, and Dhéry, from the anticipation of profit. Maillat is too honest to accept a belief simply in order to have a ready-made

explanation of life.

Maillat therefore finds himself in an impossible situation. The conditions of life as a soldier encourage him to fight for survival, but he fails to find any purpose in existence. His abandonment of responsibility occurs when his sense of futility causes him to cease the fight for survival.

At first, Maillat does not accept the inevitable, and say with Alexandre, 'Ça s'est passé comme ça.' Three events, all demonstrating the inevitability of human action, serve to illustrate the change in his attitude. The first occurs at the point where Maillat, having been thrown downstairs by one of the soldiers attempting to rape Jeanne, decides to leave the house, and realises that he is going back up the stairs to face the giant again (198). Here the inevitability is a result of Maillat's character: he could not leave the house and retain his self-respect. At this point he can still see a purpose in action, even though it is likely that his attempt to rescue Jeanne will prove useless. When Maillat recounts his experiences to Alexandre, he declares that it would be madness to return to Jeanne's house(247). Alexandre's comforting comment annoys Maillat, who cannot simply accept and forget:

'-N'y pense plus. Ça s'est passé comme ça.

-Mais nom de Dieu! dit Maillat en se levant, c'est justement ça que je n'arrive pas à comprendre!'

At this point, Maillat is still concerned to explain his actions in terms of the sort of person he is. Thus in spite of his appreciation of the inevitability of events on the national scale, he retains a sense of purpose on the personal level. This sense of purpose is lost in the final scene, when Maillat seems to lose the ability to act. The similarity between the struggle to make Jeanne leave the house and the struggle earlier in the day, when he raped her, produces in him an overwhelming sense of futility and repetition, to which he succumbs.

Maillat's final conviction of futility is connected with the death of Alexandre. A sense of inevitability is connected with

Alexandre's behaviour, especially in,

'Pauvre vieux, pensait-il, il l'a sec, avec ses deux types. Et le pire, c'est que ça lui ressemble, en un sens. Je ne lui dirai pas, mais ça lui ressemble.

- C'est marrant, dit-il tout haut, comme ça te ressemble, tout ça'(250).

The idea of an inescapable Fate is underlined by Maillat's 'tu devrais', immediately before Alexandre is killed, which connects the incident referred to above, when Maillat decides not to return to Jeanne's house, with the final scene, when Maillat thinks, 'Il faut se lever et descendre', and does nothing.(*1)

Maillat's behaviour is understandable, but his failure to act in the final scene is wrong. Because his actions do not have any appreciable effect, in the context of defeat and death, he assumes that the actions are without significance. Maillat, who is too honest to accept a belief because it would give a sense of purpose to life, allows life's lack of meaning to obliterate his personal standards of behaviour.

La Mort Est Mon Métier also depicts the abdication of responsibility. Lang, having rebelled against one form of authority in his childhood, is shown to obey a succession of father-figures, culminating in Himmler. The early habit of obedience is so strong as to preclude any questioning of authority. Lang's wife, Elsie, puts forward arguments against complete submission at several points in his career, but her objections are always disregarded. For instance, when Lang hears that he has been admitted to the S.S., Elsie reminds him that the S.S. is not the army and that, in any case, there is no guarantee that Hitler's party will continue in power. Lang's comment here is significant:

(*1) The novel has been described as a struggle between Maillat and Fate, which dictates his death: '..que Maillat soit marqué dès le début par un destin funeste, on n'en doute pas; une sorte de pressentiment lui dit qu'il n'en réchappera pas, mais tant qu'il lutte, il esquive le trépas...'

C. Delaunay: "Week-end à Zuydcoote"; Revue de la Méditerranée, janvier-février, 1950, p. 110.

'Mais là-dessus, je la fis taire sévèrement, ne pouvant tolérer qu'elle pût mettre en doute, un seul instant, le succès du Mouvement'(195).

Once more, Elsie is instrumental in voicing her husband's objections, when they discuss whether he should accept a post in the concentration camp service(201-5). She elicits from him the admission that he does not want to work in a prison, even as an officer, and points out that he should therefore refuse the offer. She also enquires whether any of the prisoners is ill-treated, but is assured that 'les KL ont un but éducatif'. The only argument which she does not counter is that Himmler considers that Lang will be of most use to the Party as a camp officer, and it is this argument which finally persuades Lang to accept the post. His decision marks the point at which he sacrifices his personal standards and individual ambitions to the security offered by obedience.

Lang's entry into the prison camp service is seen as a further step in a series of unpleasant and unexpected duties imposed by the Nazi Party, such as draining land on the farm, and marrying Elsie. With each step, Lang is both daunted by the difficulties of the proposed task and conscious of the honour of being the one selected to accomplish it. The task appears as a challenge which Lang feels bound to accept in order to justify himself in the eyes of his superiors. His hesitation over accepting the post in the prison service shows that he is still concerned to justify his actions according to his own standards of behaviour - this concern recurs fleetingly with his subsequent applications to be released for service with the regular army - but his acceptance of the post shows that he is prepared to sacrifice his conscience in order to gain the approval of other people. It is not surprising, therefore, that once he is working in the prison camps Lang does his best to justify further promotion.

The novel may therefore be seen to posit an explanation of Lang's actions. It is also a condemnation, and raises the whole

question of how far a soldier's individual conscience must be subordinated to his obedience to the commands of his superiors. (*1)

Apart from the obvious condemnation of Lang by the results of his actions - the death of at least two and a half million Jews - the novel makes clear that the orders he obeyed were suspect. The various forms of authority which successively replace Lang's father are all as corrupt as the father's diseased body. The reader suspects the corruption of the Nazi régime because of the stress on secrecy, both during the interview with Himmler and in Himmler's letter, which is couched in terms so general as to be understood by only few people. The emphasis on secrecy shows that Himmler is aware that not everyone would approve of what he is doing, that in the event of defeat or enquiry he is determined to save his own skin, and that Lang has been selected as the scapegoat. Lang does not fully appreciate Himmler's duplicity until he hears of his suicide. That Lang is determined not to face the implications of his position is evident from his countering of Elsie's arguments when she finds out the exact nature of his work in the camps (209-304). She points out that there is no need to exterminate the Jews, since they will represent no threat to a victorious Germany, that Lang's insistence on obedience to his superiors could be interpreted as an

(*1) R. Bergeron's review of the novel concentrates on this problem, and protests against the liberal treatment of Nazi perpetrators of atrocities.

("Le Monstre et 'l'idée nécessaire"; Europe, 31e année, no. 89, mai 1953, p. 115-120.)

M. Bergeron quotes from A. de Vigny's Servitude et Grandeur Militaires (II.i. Sur la Responsabilité):

'Il faudra bien que l'on en vienne à régler les circonstances où la délibération sera permise à l'homme armé, et jusqu'à quel rang sera laissée libre l'intelligence, et avec elle l'exercice de la conscience et de la justice.... Il faudra bien un jour sortir de là.'

M. Bergeron's main point is that La Mort Est Mon Métier reveals the weakness of the argument that a soldier cannot be blamed for obeying orders, even orders to commit an atrocity.

'L'idée nécessaire' of his title is also quoted from de Vigny, and refers to the hope expressed by the latter that one day people will realise that war is neither pre-ordained by God, nor a natural occupation of man.

attempt to lay the blame for his actions on them, thus avoiding punishment himself, and that presumably he would obey Himmler if he ordered him to execute their child.

Himmler's suicide shows Lang that he has been deceived. His previous affirmation of faith,

'En ce qui me concernait, j'étais prêt à affronter de nouveau n'importe quelle épreuve pour une cause juste...'(193),

was mistaken. Lang nevertheless insists that, even though the authority to which he was subject has been proved corrupt, his duty was to obey, no matter what his personal opinions were:

'Je n'ai pas à m'occuper de ce que je pense. Mon devoir est d'obéir'(319).

He compares his obedience to that of a pilot bombing a town. It is ironic that his American interrogator insists that this is a false parallel, by saying that an airman does not have the choice of whether or not to wipe out a nation (*1). Lang also insists that, even if the extermination of the Jews was a mistake, he need feel no remorse, as he did not give the order for it to be carried out. That this is not the view of every man ordered to commit an atrocity is emphasised by the suicide of von Ritterbach, when he finds out that he has rased to the ground the wrong Arab village (87), and by that of Setzler, who can no longer bear the burden of being an executioner (285). Lang's position is untenable, not because what he did was wrong, but because he obeyed orders to do what he knew to be wrong, and assumed that his obedience transferred his guilt to his superiors. The situation is clarified by Elsie's comment, when Lang explains that, even if he had refused to exterminate the Jews, the task would still have been accomplished by someone else. To Lang, it seems that nothing would have been gained by refusing to participate. Elsie can see that, on the contrary, such a

(*1) The irony is intentional. Merle was thinking of Hiroshima. See Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

refusal would have been honourable,

'Oui, mais toi, dit-elle, toi, tu ne l'aurais pas fait!' (302).

Lang's weakness lies in the submission of his conscience to the judgement of others, and the abandonment of his personal standards of behaviour.

The hero of L'Ile accepts his responsibility from the beginning, but he is blind to its implications. His acceptance finally entails abandoning the pacifist ideal, and the stages by which this occurs have already been examined in some detail (*1). Two aspects of Purcell's situation, however, develop the theme of responsibility beyond the position of the first two novels.

The first is that living by one's personal standards, and retaining self-respect, do not always constitute a full acceptance of responsibility. Purcell is the first of Merle's heroes to be both sincere and fully committed. So strong is his belief in his ideal, however, that he becomes isolated by his determination not to compromise. Much of the action of the novel takes place apart from him: he is either an impotent onlooker or a moral commentator.

He has no difficulty in perceiving the responsibility of others. For example, he warns Mason that he must choose between sulking in his house, which will mean the loss of control of events on the island, and taking definite action (141). - Purcell is not aware that he could benefit from his own advice - and he reproaches Mason for teaching the Tahitians to shoot, and for hiding the guns in the cave. Purcell is so concerned with principles that he is left behind by events. When the Britons attack the Tahitian house, for example, he runs to the scene but cannot do anything when he arrives; he is not even prepared to declare his loyalty. He does not consider dying for a just cause: the concept of self-sacrifice is Baker's, not Purcell's (315). When

(*1) See the first section of this chapter, under War, p.164

Purcell begins to be conscious of guilt, as is shown by the dream in which Mehani reproaches him, '...tu n'aurais pas dû..' (296), he has reached the stage where any action seems futile. Thus Purcell's initial reason for choosing life on the island - a tribunal would condemn him for not taking appropriate action after the death of Burt - is only the prelude to a series of events in which the reader reproaches him for further inaction.

Purcell's moral confidence is finally destroyed after the war. At first, when Tetahiti claims that all the deaths are 'à cause de toi' (459), Purcell maintains his 'idées de moá', and again asserts that it is wrong to shed blood under any circumstances. He realises that this position is untenable when he faces the terrifying thought that his inaction has contributed to what has happened. The effect of his self-righteous aloofness may even have been to aggravate the situation. The results of participation from the beginning could certainly not have been worse than those of non-involvement.

The second step in the development of the theme of responsibility involves the nature of participation. For Maillat and Lang, it would have been enough to act in accordance with the dictates of their own conscience, but Purcell has been doing this from the outset, and found that it is not enough. Purcell finds that he has a responsibility to other people, as well as to his personal ideal. The former may well entail a position of compromise with regard to the latter. Purcell has his own system of values, and has no difficulty in applying them in clear-cut situations. Unfortunately, he finds himself in more complex situations which do not correspond to his simple code of behaviour. At first, he clings to the ready-made answer, like Lang in La Mort Est Mon Métier, but there is development, in L'Ile, away from a hero in the blessedly simple situation where only his own interests are involved. It is not often that the thinking individual can deny his responsibility to society, a society frequently composed of people who are less than

his equals, and who are in need of guidance or direction. The hero becomes aware that, although he does not want to choose for others, he is expected to do so, and his reaction may be to withdraw completely from so complicated a commitment. Acceptance of responsibility as a member of society entails compromise, involving the surrender of his freedom to make decisions which completely satisfy his personal ideal. The message of L'Ile is that man cannot live for himself alone.

The attitude of the hero of Un Animal Doué de Raison towards responsibility combines those found in the earlier novels. Sevilla's abnegation arises from his determination to blind himself to the implications of his research. His declaration, during the lecture with which the novel opens, that it is not his business to know how dolphins could be utilised by man, and his assertion that the kindly dolphin has nothing to do with weapons, are true expressions of his belief, and not evasions of awkward questions from his audience (31-2). His answers in fact reflect his determination not to ask himself questions. It is because of his political innocence and his complete lack of interest in the utilisation of dolphins as carriers of weapons that he has the confidence of the security services(61).

Sevilla declares that it is the President's business to worry about Vietnam; he himself is not interested in politics, preferring to concentrate on his dolphins. In spite of the fact that his research is financed by the State, and that it is of sufficient importance to merit the closest scrutiny by the security services, Sevilla does not, or will not, realise the reason for the State's interest in his results. His attitude is contrasted with Michael's intense political awareness. Michael lives up to his principles: he gives up a secure job where he is exempt from the draft, and makes a stand on the Vietnam issue. The only satisfaction that he can gain from doing this is that he is bearing witness to his opinion - one more protest is unlikely to influence American foreign policy. His sacrifice nevertheless has the effect of

increasing Sevilla's political awareness. In a conversation with Goldstein, Sevilla comments on the irony of Oppenheimer's development of the atom bomb for use against the Germans, and refers slightly to Teller's development of the hydrogen bomb. Goldstein disapproves of the latter, because the work was carried out in peacetime. Neither of them draws a parallel with Sevilla's research, even though another international race is clearly in progress: news of Sevilla's research has been publicised with the express intention of eliciting a statement from Russian scientists on their progress in communicating with dolphins.

Meanwhile, Sevilla seeks isolation as a protection against the demands of responsibility: he locks himself away from the world in his bungalow, and, later, on his private island. His recurring dream of hovering over the world like a bird (124) is symbolic of his desire to escape involvement. The reader is reminded of Sevilla when Michael compares the average American to an ostrich (122). The protection of American society against unpleasantness - even commentators calling for reprisals against China after the Little Rock disaster demanded attacks on centres vitaux, not mentioning towns, which would give too concrete a picture - reflects the protection against the truth which Sevilla provides for himself. Sevilla goes on avoiding commitment: having explained to Arlette Michael's views about the likelihood of world involvement in Vietnam, he ends with, 'Comment le saurais-je?' (228).

Like Purcell, in L'Ile, Sevilla finally reaches the point where he realises that his denial of responsibility has brought about a situation which could possibly have been ameliorated by his intervention. A third world war is likely, and, on the personal level, he has lost Fa and Bi, and has become a prisoner of the State, without freedom to travel or speak out. Also like Purcell, he comes to a decision when it is almost too late to do any good, but his choice is not made so freely as Purcell's. His decision is blurred by emotion, and influenced by the

dolphins' good opinion of him. The turning-point occurs during his wait for the attackers on the night the Caribée is blown up:

'...l'important, ce n'est pas de vivre à tout prix, c'est de savoir pourquoi on meurt..' (335),

and it is not until the last page of the novel that he reflects,

'...il ne l'avait jamais formulé en termes aussi clairs...' (368).

The position which he has never before formulated so clearly is that one individual may well be in a position to help society as a whole.

In Un Animal Doué de Raison, Merle does not develop the theme of responsibility beyond the point reached by the end of L'Ile. In each novel, the hero's determination to cling to his ideal, religious or scientific, shows him to be selfishly isolated from the community in which he has a definite rôle to play. A point is reached where the hero compromises, even though this necessitates an adaptation of his ideal to fit the complex situation of the real world, and it is at this point that he assumes his responsibility.

Derrière La Vitre depicts the ideal in the process of formation. The responsibility of the average student is to find a philosophy of life. He is not yet at the stage where he can put it to the test, but is still experimenting, confronted by a confusion of ideologies. Like Lang and the other older heroes, the students are hampered by the influence of their inherited regard for authority, although largely on the level of the subconscious. They are therefore in danger of venerating a ready-made political answer:

'..la doctrine de la chapelle devient sacrée...' (132):

'Que ce soit Marx, Trotsky ou Mao: toujours le Bon Dieu, toujours la Bible....que dit le LIVRE?' (288).

Whatever action they may take appears futile. They are unable to influence the disinterested mass of students and, in any case, their demonstrations appear totally ineffective in comparison with the size and strength of the objects of their derision. They could well conclude, with Maillat, that their actions are without significance.

In addition, the students are hampered by the awareness of isolation, and the sense of being negligible as persons, which are typical of youth preoccupied with achieving a defined identity in society.

In spite of the complexity of the students' personal lives and their lack of political perspective, the novel presents a tiny minority as sincerely, if confusedly, concerned. Motivated by a vague desire to do something to improve society, they take what action they can. As David says, quite early in the novel, 'Si personne ne sait exactement ce qui se passe ni où on va, cela témoigne tout simplement d'un certain retard de la théorie sur la pratique'(47).

Unlike Purcell and Sevilla, the students do not wait to perfect their philosophy before putting it into practice. If their actions appear ill-considered and accidental, they are at least motivated by concern for others and willingness to become involved. The activists may be said to be willing to accept responsibility, though their method of finding where it lies is experimental. In their youth, they experience a need for involvement which comes late to Sevilla and Purcell, but their pragmatism could deprive them of ever knowing that they have acted according to conscience.

In Malevil, hesitation and experiment are past: from the outset, the hero assumes his responsibility to direct and protect the group under his leadership. He is fully aware of the implications of his position, and faces up to them honestly.

After the holocaust, Emmanuel chooses to retain his position as leader, but he does not do this from any desire for personal glory. Rather does his leadership impose sacrifice on him, for before the bomb he was completely free, without family ties or financial worries. As time goes on, he acquires both a family - the group of survivors - and the concern for its survival on the material and spiritual levels. Also, Emmanuel has an added responsibility which comes from the faith of the others that he will know what to do. This imposes on him actions which

otherwise he might not have chosen. He is no longer a free agent, but must put the group first. Emmanuel begins in this position, whereas Purcell only discovers the importance of the community at the end of L'Île, and Sevilla, at the end of Un Animal Doué de Raison.

Individual personal relationships are a temptation to self-indulgence, as Emmanuel must live for and through the group. This makes self-sacrifice necessary on both the physical and the emotional level. Emmanuel could have married Miette, but he was aware that this would encourage envy within the community. Miette therefore belongs to no one particular man. A similar problem arises when Emmanuel meets Agnès again: he and Colin had been rivals for her favours during their youth, but to allow the rivalry to recommence would divide the community. Emmanuel is therefore very circumspect in phrasing his request that Agnès should come and live at Malevil, making clear that he is not asking her to come and live with him, or with him and Colin, but with all the group. When Agnès accepts, he is aware that she too is renouncing the ideal of marriage (521). Emmanuel's need to find love and security in an emotional relationship is further represented by Evelyne, who accepts him as her protector from their first meeting(292), and soon becomes jealous of his relationships with other women (393). The others find Emmanuel's relationship with Evelyne difficult to classify because of its spiritual bias. It threatens to become a weakness, as Emmanuel realises when Evelyne refuses to be separated from him when he runs out at the alarms over the pillagers. He therefore takes care to ensure her absolute obedience, and this endangers their relationship as it means that they are no longer equals. With Evelyne also, Emmanuel becomes the master.

The most difficult sacrifice which becomes necessary for Emmanuel occurs on the philosophical or moral level. He is the acknowledged leader and could, like Vilmain, have ruled by brute force and intimidation, or, like Fulbert, by physical and psychological oppression. Although Emmanuel does not descend thus far, he is obliged

to be less than honest so as to ensure that the community of Malevil retains some kind of order. He must direct and influence decisions taken by the community, while maintaining the illusion that the community is acting in complete freedom. The acceptance of responsibility, which begins with the sacrifice of the individual ideal, thus entails some adaptation of the communal ideal. The problem of ensuring that right survives entails Emmanuel's cunning manipulation of his companions. Emmanuel makes thorough preparation for a meeting: this is seen at the beginning, when he knows how the political discussion with M. Paulat will go, and has already drafted a letter for the approval of the committee (55). At the end of the novel, Emmanuel so successfully approaches individuals and primes them for the meeting at La Roque, that he does not even need to attend to make sure that the council and mayor of his choice will be elected. This direction is largely a matter of understanding the psychology of others and being able to predict their reactions. For instance, he realises when his companions are likely to be overcome by grief, or boredom, and is always ready with some suggestion or problem which will keep them occupied and assure them of their value to the community (118-20, 346). Again, his display of horsemanship at La Roque (316) achieves several ends: he amuses and encourages the people; he gains their admiration and makes Fulbert less sure of his mastery; he passes the time while Evelyne and Catie make their escape. In discussion during the meetings, he unobtrusively controls and influences the others so as to achieve the result he feels to be necessary. Good examples of his cleverness are the discussion of Fulbert's proposals (239,241) and the election of Emmanuel as abbé of Malevil (277). He resorts to bribery (315) and subterfuge (290, 319), as well as blackmail (245), but he always has the well-being of the community at heart.

Emmanuel therefore employs methods which conflict with his conscience in order to bring about what he considers to be the ideal

solution. The ostensible freedom and equality in the community are maintained by his deception of those he knows to be his inferiors. His methods represent a sacrifice of his integrity for the good of the community, and Emmanuel is the more aware of his duplicity because the group continue to trust him.

Towards the end of the novel, Emmanuel begins to take decisions alone, without consulting the group. This is after they have agreed that in time of war it is necessary to have a leader whose orders will be obeyed without question in a crisis. When he is keeping watch with Meyssonnier, on the night before their projected attack on La Roque, Emmanuel suddenly changes the orders which have been agreed, and kills one of Vilmain's advance party and takes the other prisoner. It is also Emmanuel's sole decision to let the prisoner go free, with his rifle (409). He is solely responsible for arranging Fulbert's mock trial, which culminates in his murder (506). Here Emmanuel exploits the sensibilities of the group and, having predicted their likely reactions, does nothing to discourage their brutality, since he believes that acting together will strengthen the community spirit of La Roque.

Emmanuel also exploits the religious beliefs of most of the Malevil community. Even though he is himself an unbeliever, he becomes a priest, then a bishop. He assumes these responsibilities gradually, from the point where he agrees to act as priest at the burial of the remains of his friends' families (110). He later celebrates the sacrament of marriage, and the Eucharist, and hears confessions. He is quite open about his rôle as priest, explaining to Thomas that it is the intention of the marriage partners which makes the bond (325), and, to Peyssou, that it is the motivation of the penitent which gives value to his confession (430). In spite of his frankness, Emmanuel is seen to be exploiting the strength with which a sense of religious communion can endow a community. If he had not believed religion to be useful,

he would no doubt have found some way of discouraging it. He encourages religion, not because it is important to the others, nor because it is so unimportant to him that it is not worth risking a disagreement about, but because he can see that it will be useful in binding the community together. His priesthood involves him in no more hypocrisy than his leadership on the secular level: both entail a sacrifice of his personal ideal for the benefit of the community as a whole.

Merle admits that the choice of name for his hero is deliberate, and that there is 'une petite ambiguïté', even though Emmanuel is proved to be, in a sense, the saviour of Malevil. Merle would also agree that there is a link between Emmanuel's self-sacrifice and the phrase, 'un saint qui se dépouille', which occurs in Merle's preface to the memoirs of 'Ché' Guevara (*1). It is tempting to pursue the analogy between Emmanuel and Guevara, particularly because of the veneration of both figures after their deaths. In the character of Emmanuel, Merle describes the saint who sacrifices his integrity - or his salvation - for the good of others. The saintliness of Emmanuel derives from his subjugation of his own interests to those of the group. Merle's approval of his character is based on the fact that he is a good leader, not simply a good man, especially as the novel makes clear that the responsibility of leadership demands so much of the man who accepts it.

The Organisation of Society

The novels show the weakness of the average components of society, whose concern is for survival in as comfortable a situation as possible. The weakness is highlighted by the stress of a new

(*1) See Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

situation which, in all the novels except Derrière La Vitre, where the environment is changed for a different reason, is connected with war. The new situation shows up the real nature of the individual. He may feel liberated from taboos, and break away from the standards of civilised behaviour he previously observed. Thus he may act more brutally, like the soldiers in Week-end à Zuydcoote, or he may take advantage of the absence of class and rank, like the sailors in L'Île. He may revel in sexual freedom, like the students in Derrière La Vitre, or seize the opportunity to fulfil his ambition for power, like Fulbert and Vilmain in Malevil. If such positive reactions to stress are depressing, the negative reactions are even more discouraging. Most people, according to the novels, are horrified by freedom from the routine, and seek to establish any kind of order which will give the illusion of security. This order usually emerges as a repetition of their previous life-style, and is represented by the ponate of Week-end à Zuydcoote, the easy acceptance of authority in La Mort Est Mon Métier, the construction of the village in L'Île, the 'Americanisation' of the dolphin in Un Animal Doué de Raison, and the reversion to the Cercle situation in Malevil. The results of stress are therefore equally discouraging as far as the average person is concerned: a tendency to anarchy, and a desire to cling to familiar standards, no matter what their value. A society composed of average people will thus need some means of controlling destructive forces and of inspiring the negative elements.

Four of the novels, Week-end à Zuydcoote, La Mort Est Mon Métier, Un Animal Doué de Raison and Derrière La Vitre, give the impression that what the average person does is unlikely to have any effect on society. It has been seen that Maillat is overcome by a sense of futility. Lang's argument that, if he had not exterminated two and a half million Jews, someone else would have done, is false from the point of view of his personal responsibility but is probably

true as far as history is concerned: his refusal to obey would not have affected Himmler's policy. Again, Sevilla's argument that wars are a matter for the politicians is quite true, and his sense of impotence is reinforced by the picture of a society where even the President is ill-informed and powerless. The students of Nanterre are themselves aware that they are only 'miming' meaningful activity. It would therefore appear that, even if the average person is well-intentioned, he is unlikely to have any power to affect the running of society.

The weakness or powerlessness of the average citizen throws into relief the responsibility of the person who is above average in some way. Maillat is a potential leader; Lang is an ordinary man who by chance finds himself in a leadership situation and is shown to be subordinated to the demands of his position; Sevilla is a potential leader who does not wish to acknowledge his responsibilities. Mac Leod and Cohn-Bendit are accomplished leaders who do not subordinate their pursuit of personal power to the needs of the group; Purcell, belatedly, and Emmanuel are prepared to sacrifice their ideals for the advancement of society. Three of the heroes have enough influence to achieve something for others. Purcell, Sevilla and Emmanuel have the necessary knowledge. L'Île and Un Animal Doué de Raison examine the assumption of leadership, but Malevil analyses its implications. In the latter, it is the leader himself who is the means of controlling and inspiring the average citizen. Emmanuel contends with the threat of violence and lawlessness, and with the awareness of simply repeating the frustrations of preceding generations. This awareness is strengthened by the emphasis on the historical perspective, and is especially discouraging because of the indications that man will probably once more be the cause of his own destruction. Yet a more positive hope is also indicated: the leader, walking the tight-rope between self-respect and community progress, is compensated for his sacrifice by the realisation that the direction of a communicating group, albeit composed of imperfect individuals, is in itself an achievement. Malevil gives the impression

that it is just possible that the survivors may break the ordained chain of events, and widen the continuous circle of history, because of the coincidence of a cohesive group with the right leader:

'Enfin, je voudrais dire ceci: je ne crois pas du tout qu'à petite ou à grande échelle, un groupe secrète toujours le grand homme dont elle a besoin. Bien au contraire, il est des moments de l'Histoire où l'on sent un creux terrible: le chef nécessaire n'est pas apparu et tout échoue lamentablement'(525).

What Merle says of Fidel Castro may equally well be applied to his fictional analysis of leadership:

'Si les grands hommes ne font pas l'Histoire, elle ne se fait pas non plus sans eux. La création d'un grand mouvement politique s'accomplit à partir des aspirations et des besoins d'un peuple, mais elle exige, comme la création artistique, l'effort d'un homme inventif, qui comprend mieux qu'aucun autre ces aspirations, et crée les moyens de les faire triompher'(*1).

The true leader knows instinctively how to channel the energies of the individuals who are the components of society. He sees that forces which prevent cohesion and progress, such as brutality or the longing for past security, are inspired by the instinct for self-preservation and the need for some form of community life. If, as in Malevil, a sense of community can be established, this will lessen the fear of destruction, and the resultant security will generate a sense of purpose. Each member of a close-knit community will be capable of achieving more as a member of the group than he could achieve alone. The strength of a group acting together is greater than the total strength of its members acting as individuals. A good leader is able to inspire this group effort, perhaps by encouraging each person to feel

(*1) R.Merle: Moncada, Premier Combat de Fidel Castro, p.335

conscious of the value of his contribution: this is what Emmanuel achieves by maintaining the illusion of equality within the group, while in reality directing its operations.

The emphasis in the novels on the importance of communication is connected with the formation of a united group. Maillat and the English captain discover they have something in common when Maillat completes the captain's quotation from Shakespeare, Lang cannot understand the attitude of his American interrogator, Purcell is invaluable to the island community because of his knowledge of Tahitian, Sevilla is instrumental in the establishment of inter-species communication, Frémincourt understands the student viewpoint, and Emmanuel speaks patois. One of the central figures appears as a potential link between opposing or differing factions. The potential is not always fully developed, as in some of the novels lack of understanding is a more important theme. Thus Maillat's brief friendship with Gabet, like his relationship with Alexandre, is destroyed by the viciousness and confusion of war, Lang's lack of understanding of the American's viewpoint reflects his lack of appreciation of his responsibility as a human being, and Frémincourt's influence is shown to be very slight in the context of rebellion against the authority of the older generation. For Purcell and Sevilla, their understanding of an alien race or species is one of the factors which mark them as the only people who can achieve anything worthwhile in their particular situation. Emmanuel is the only person who has an established relationship with each of the other members of the Malevil group from the start. In L'Ile, Un Animal Doué de Raison, and Malevil, the effect of the emphasis on communication is to bring out the importance of the central figure as the means by which the group is united. It is therefore through the leader that the group becomes a cooperative body capable of achievement.

The close communion of the Malevil group is established in

significantly primitive conditions, and resembles the rediscovery of a human power dating from the days when, because thoughts were simpler and people had so much experience in common, it was possible to share the experience of one's neighbour. Communion of this kind is foreshadowed in L'Ile, where there are examples of what may be regarded as an extension of communication, a common experience of events at a distance which amounts to a kind of extra-sensory perception. It is as if Merle is depicting the strength of communication possible if people are willing to participate. Thus, during the attack on the Tahitians' house, Purcell feels that Mehani and Tetahiti are able to consult about their reply to Mac Leod's defiance, without a word being spoken (263). Purcell, Itia, Omaata and Ivoa 'see' from Purcell's house the attack on the water-party and the deaths of Jones, Hunt, White and Johnson (300). Later, Purcell has a sudden vision of Baker (336). Then, after the war is over, Purcell 'sees' what must be beyond the fence constructed by Tetahiti: the heads on stakes, and the stake awaiting his own head. It is significant that Purcell and the Tahitians, ie. those characters to whom life as a group is important, are the only ones to have experiences of this type. Their common experience may contain a clue as to where the strength of a group originates.

The examination of the working of people in groups is really an exploration of the working of democracy. This is most clear in L'Ile and Malevil, where Merle uses imaginary situations to examine what happens when a truly democratic situation, with no set rules to follow, is established. The results are disappointing, for both societies eventually produce some kind of dictator.

The opportunity to establish an ideal democratic society occurs in L'Ile. Here the breakdown of the 'parliament' is shown to be attributable to the franchise system. Only the British vote: the Tahitians are excluded. Each Briton has an equal voice, including Johnson, who does not understand what an abstention is, and Hunt, who does not understand anything. The system is improved in Malevil, where

Momo has no vote, but it is not until late in the novel that the 'assembly' admits all the adults, including the women, to its deliberations.

It becomes clear that a democratic society is potentially as weak as its weakest member. The average member of society will allow his vote to be influenced by arguments entirely unconnected with the matter under discussion. White, for instance, always votes against Purcell, and Johnson supports Mac Leod because he thinks he is strongest. In Un Animal Doué de Raison, emphasis is placed on the photogenic qualities of Jim Crooner, a candidate for the Presidency who is likely to be elected because of his fame as a film star. Leadership may therefore fall into the hands of anyone who has an attractive personality, like Cohn-Bendit, or who acts decisively, like Mac Leod, or Fulbert, for unfortunately the average citizen is only too glad to obey someone who will relieve him of the responsibility of having to make decisions. The worst result of this mass weakness occurs when the leader is selected because of the need for a spokesman or figurehead. In these circumstances, a puppet leader emerges. Such a leader may find himself the scapegoat for mistakes the majority direct him to make. Mason and Albert Monroe Smith are both in this position. The clear implication is that people have the leader they deserve: if their lack of concern allows a dictator to take control, or if their lack of confidence allows their leader only limited freedom to lead, they have themselves to blame. The novels also point out that nothing will be achieved by criticising such a leader unless the critic is prepared to act to ameliorate the system which has produced him. It is all very well for Purcell and Sevilla to sneer at the shortcomings of Mason and Albert Monroe Smith, but it is because people like Purcell and Sevilla have avoided involvement that well-intentioned but ineffective people are in positions of power.

Some concern is shown about whether an established democracy

is ever fair to the minority, and whether, when governments are too distant or powerful to be influenced in any way, the opinions of the individual have any significance. Most people do not find themselves in the influential position of a Sevilla, a Purcell, or an Emmanuel, but have more in common with Maillat, to whom government decisions are distant and arbitrary, but nevertheless capable of changing his whole way of life. The novels remind anyone in such a situation that in a democracy he has the right to voice his objections to the opinions of the majority: like Jaumet, Thomas and Michael, he can speak out. The reader of today, knowing what has happened in Vietnam since 1967, and what happened in Paris in May, 1968, may well be encouraged by the effect of protest by individuals or small groups.

The contrast between the real systems of government described in Un Animal Doué de Raison and Derrière La Vitre, and the idealised, fictitious societies of L'Ile and Malevil reflects actual stages reached in democratic development in the world of today, for alongside the established democracies of France and America exist those still emerging in underdeveloped countries. L'Ile and Malevil, far from representing an abdication of concern for world politics, are about these new democracies.

When L'Ile appeared, a critic expressed amazement at Merle's departure from twentieth-century preoccupations:

'...mais alors le réalisme, le néo-réalisme, les problèmes du monde moderne qui semblaient être sa préoccupation dominante, qu'est-ce que tout cela est devenu?>(*1)

It is true that the story of Pitcairn in the eighteenth century appears to contradict Merle's preoccupation with trends and problems of national

(*1) A. Billy: "Robert Merle, Romancier de l'Aventure"; Le Figaro, 14.ii.'62.

or international import in the twentieth century. The other novels are concerned with war and the individual soldier, atrocities, the nuclear possibilities, revolution and protest. But if L'Ile is seen in the context of Merle's work as a whole, its significance is clear. Merle tells us that he first considered a treatment of the Fitcainr story in 1952, i.e., immediately after the publication of La Mort Est Mon Métier. Between 1952 and 1962, when L'Ile appeared, he published three plays, Justice à Miramar, Nouveau Sisyphe and L'Assemblée des Femmes, in 1957, and two works on Oscar Wilde, in 1955 and 1957. All these works are concerned with themes important in L'Ile: the evolution of a personal code of values, and individual responsibility, as it affects internal and external policy. In particular, Oscar Wilde's vacillation between cruelty to others and cruelty to himself may be traced in the character of another high-born Celt, Purcell. The individual who has the chance to direct the future course of civilisation, Sisyphus, and the women who take over the organisation of their country's politics also have their counterparts in L'Ile. Immediately after L'Ile, Merle turned his attention to events in Central America, and to those in North Africa. Here, in real life, were the problems of L'Ile: how to ensure justice in politics where a new system is being evolved; how to give equal power to unequally-suited companions; whether the principle of democracy can ever work among imperfect human beings, and whether the use of force to ensure that the principles which seem right to the leader are put into practice is not a denial of the principles themselves.

L'Ile therefore appeared at a point when Merle was thinking about the creation of a new society, and his choice of subject shows that he had in mind the system established by a revolution:

'...il est frappant de constater à quel point les mobiles qui inspirèrent la rébellion maritime et le sursaut révolutionnaire français sont similaires'(*1).

(*1) R. Merle: Preface to La Vérité sur la Mutinerie du Bounty; A.McKee. p.11.

The setting of the novel at the time of the French Revolution does not invalidate its significance for the twentieth century, when revolutions are still taking place. The plight of the sailors after their rebellion and the isolation provided by Pitcairn clearly indicate the problems confronting those without experience of government and without foreign aid, who have to find a practicable method of organising the society for which they have become responsible. That the novel represents the evolution of a workable political system was perceived by R.Jean, who saw in it an allegory of the Algerian situation (*1). Indeed the imposition of foreign values by the Britons on the unfranchised Tahitians, the unequal distribution of property and the determination to fight to the point of extermination, especially on the part of the Tahitians, all support this view. But the same aspects of the story could represent a country such as Cuba, where inhabitants rebel against foreign influence, and both the Bounty mutiny and the Tahitians' revolt, which spring from injustice and underprivilege, have much in common with popular revolutions such as those in France or Russia.

The central problem in L'Ile, that of whether violence is ever justifiable, is also allied to the revolutionary situation. It is clear from his depiction of war and death in the novels that Merle does not consider the use of force to be the ideal method of acting. Purcell's shame when he resorts to violence is caused by the realisation that he could have avoided the necessity for bloodshed by more prudent action, earlier: the real-life leader is rarely in a position to reproach himself, for he is not responsible for the status quo. Constitutional methods of protest are out of the question for the underprivileged, who may be denied the vote, or suspect that elections are rigged (*2). The decision to resort to force is not usually a

(*1) R.Jean: "L'Ile"; Cahiers du Sud, 1962, p.460

(*2) In 1945, ten million Algerians elected one-third of the municipal councillors; one million Europeans elected the other two-thirds.

matter of choice for the leader of a real-life revolution.

It has been seen that Malevil depicts the problems confronting a successful leader, and these too are representative of real-life dilemmas. The leader inherits the very problems which have led to revolt, such as unemployment or a failing economy, but does not inherit the machinery of administration. He carries the burden of the faith of his followers that he will instantly improve their lot(*1). In his efforts to justify their faith he may act for effect rather than from conviction, as Emmanuel does when he draws up the letter to La Roque. When Ben Bella instigated the building of rescue centres for the petits circeurs and the establishment of homes for old beggars who slept on the streets, he was aware that he was not dealing with the root cause of poverty, but taking positive action to reassure his followers:

'C'est parce que je sentais battre le pouls de la masse, que je voyais la nécessité d'agir vite'(*2).

Merle's biography of Ahmed Ben Bella and his account of Castro's Moncada attack both emphasise the agonising responsibility of leadership. Both Ben Bella and Castro are aware of being no longer one voice among many, but the embodiment of the will of the majority, uninformed and unrealistic though the majority may be. Because the leader is usually one of the few with the ability to take decisions, he may become a ruler, and appear to be a dictator. That both Ben Bella and Castro are aware of the temptation to become dictators is reflected in their adherence to the simple life. Merle comments (*3) that Ben Bella's personal quarters were the most spartan of those of any head of state, with the possible exception of Castro.

(*1) In Ahmed Ben Bella, Merle recounts how Ben Bella stopped by chance at a tiny village, where an old man reproached him for taking so long to come and see him: the old man expected that Ben Bella would personally attend to every detail of administration in the country.

(*2) R. Merle, Ahmed Ben Bella, Gallimard, 1965, p. 174

(*3) *ibid*, p.13

Only a controlled or directed democracy will work, and this already represents a departure from the ideal. If a group is to survive, there will have to be compromise, affecting the rights of the weak and the privileges of the strong. For the strongest member of a society will probably direct his fellows, even though they are officially his equals. This in itself means a considerable sacrifice of the leader's ideal, if he is an honest man.

Fortunately, a society is potentially stronger than its strongest single component. Group living shows up the weakness of human nature, but also its strengths. The most important of these are the sacrifice of personal considerations for the good of the group, and the communication within the group, experienced by all its members. The real strength lies in the possibility of channelling the group instinct into progress.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Merle's work is mentioned only briefly in histories of literature or discussions of the novel in France. His writing has nothing in common with the style of the nouveau roman, which represents the epitome of literary fashion. Merle himself is sweeping in his condemnation of 'fashionable' writing, declaring that,

'La plupart des romans qui passent pour bons sont illisibles'(*1).

He claims that the 57% of French people who do not read are not so much non-readers as potential readers, disgusted to find that the books they have bought do not make sense. He continues,

'La mode littéraire, c'est une chose qu'il faut traiter sans aucun respect, si vous ne voulez pas qu'elle vous dévore. Il faut résister à la soif insatiable de nouveautés, parce qu'elle est abêtissante. Il faut essayer de faire un bon roman et non un roman nouveau. Si vous voulez de la nouveauté à tout prix, vous allez tomber dans les maniérismes et les affectations. Bref, dans les nouveaux stéréotypes.

'C'est du dedans qu'il faut travailler la pâte, non du dehors. Si vous avez quelque chose à dire - un mépris, une indignation, un enthousiasme - il faut travailler à partir de là. Les procédés seront appelés et commandés par votre passion et non pas imposés du dehors.'

He claims that the novel is an extension of communication, which often proceeds by the telling of stories involving people, situations and emotions:

'Si vous supprimez tout cela, vous supprimez la communication. Vous déshumanisez le roman. Et vous fabriquez un livre artificiel, vaniteux, non humain. Un produit d'esthète, snob et dur.'

(*1) R. Merle, in an interview with Matthieu Galey, quoted in a special edition of Derrière La Vitre, for Le Cercle du Nouveau Livre, Gallimard/Jules Tallendier, 1971.

The assumptions behind this view are questionable. Firstly, Merle is claiming that the reader's expectation should determine the type of novel produced. This would preclude development, since the reader's expectation would be geared to what had already been published. Secondly, Merle is assuming that the only form of communication possible is through the combination of character, situation and emotion in a story. This is not true of poetry, analysis or reflection. The assumption that communication is the primary motive for writing is in any case suspect. But the most arrogant of Merle's assertions occurs when he implies that writers who utilise a style which happens to be in fashion are writing in order to be thought fashionable. This amounts to a denial of their intellectual integrity. What if a writer, working his material from within, as Merle advises, should find that the style which most naturally expresses his thought is the very type of writing Merle abhors? Is Merle advocating that every novel be accompanied by a declaration that it was inspired by a desire to communicate, and not influenced by the literary mode? The comments of Merle reveal that he is guilty of the sin of which he accuses his critics: he is judging a novel by its style of expression. (*1)

It is clear that a difference of opinion exists between Merle and the exponents of the nouveau roman as to what constitutes suitable material and form in a novel. There is no necessity for such an acrimonious apology. There remains the question of how faithfully Merle's own novels reflect his definition of the ideal.

It has been seen in the preceding chapters that story, character and situation - for Merle, the essential components - all play an important part in his novels. Thus far his claim is justified. These factors have been shown to be subordinated to theme, which bears

(*1) Merle is very bitter about critical reaction to his novels, and especially about comments on his style. See Appendix A: Interview with Merle.

out his claim that every aspect of the novel should proceed from the initial preoccupation of the writer. That Merle's choice of theme should so often coincide with preoccupations fashionable at the time of publication is rather unfortunate, in view of his comments quoted above, but these comments refer only to style, and the critics, less demanding than Merle, have never accused him of choosing a subject because it happened to be fashionable. They would assume that Merle's choice reflects the concerns of an educated person living in the twentieth century: war, and the possibility of a nuclear holocaust; the function and power of the individual in society; the way in which society is organised.

Adverse criticism of Merle's choice of expression would have more foundation. The style of the novels does arise naturally from the subject-matter, but the impression may be gained that all possible methods of narration arising from the subject-matter have been used, since there is sometimes an unnecessary variety of presentation. This is particularly true of the use of simultanéisme and the interior monologue. These are not allowed to stand alone, but are combined with imagery and irony, which imply a commentary by the controlling author, anxious that the reader should not miss the significance. The diversity of narration is admirable, but is such that the reader suspects that it is designed to impress. The economy of style in those novels with the most complex philosophical content, Week-end à Zuydcoote and L'Île, makes it tempting to assume that, in the other novels, expression is an adjunct of theme rather than, as Merle claims it should be, its natural consequence.

The story is a strong factor in a Merle novel, and it has been seen that the author uses all the skills necessary to capture the reader's interest. Climax, coincidence, imagery and irony are some of the means by which he controls the pace of the narrative on the 'horizontal' time-plane, while the use of 'soundings' beneath and behind the main narrative gives depth and further involves the reader in the

events depicted. The novels considered purely as fiction are convincing and compelling.

The moral and political implications emerge clearly, and this shows that the novels are also successful as fables. The main concern is with individual responsibility, and with action in accordance with conscience. There is a definite emphasis on the creation of values in society by the influence of individuals, and the actions of one person are seen to be significant in the context of the group. Personal values evolve in a secular world - conscience, for Merle, is not a matter of religion - and must satisfy the criterion of producing actions which allow the individual to retain his integrity, but which do not diminish the dignity of others. Experience is of great help in determining the code of behaviour, and a changing situation may necessitate a change of values. Thus what is right for one person may be wrong for another, or the same person, in a different situation.

The values emerging from experience are not the only ones present; the impact of the novels is dependent on judgement from outside, according to a scale of values whose existence is assumed. The most obvious example of dependence on such an external judgement occurs in La Mort Est Mon Métier. It has been explained that Lang refuses his responsibility by insisting on the virtue of obedience, and that this alienates the reader's sympathy. Yet if Lang had assumed responsibility, by admitting that he should not have subordinated the demands of conscience to those of duty, or by declaring his conviction that mass murder was justified, or by asserting that he enjoyed killing Jews, it is doubtful whether the reader's sympathy for him would have been increased. The emphasis on individual responsibility may therefore be seen to be only ostensible, since the reader judges by the actions of a character, rather than by his motivation. The reader would not agree that what Lang did was right, no matter what

explanation he gave, because the reader judges according to a concept of right and wrong which is foreign to Lang's experience.

The impact of the novels is often dependent on the author's appeal to external standards. The growing tension in L'Ile and Un Animal Doué de Raison is produced by the reader's awareness of the course of action Purcell and Sevilla should take. The reader is enabled to form an objective opinion well in advance of the characters whose experience he is supposedly sharing. Reader and author share a superior capacity for moral judgement, which is denied to Purcell and Sevilla by their inability to categorise their experience according to its relevance. The reader is in a similarly superior position with regard to Derrière La Vitre, where he is in possession of information which is available to the protagonists only in their subconscious. The students are mostly unaware of the ironic repetition of the Oedipus theme, while the reader is busily inferring patterns of behaviour.

When the impact of Malevil is analysed, again the conclusion is reached that the reader is encouraged to judge by standards apart from the novel. If integrity determined by experience is the criterion of judgement, why is Emmanuel more to be admired than le Wahrwoorde, or Peyssou, or Thomas? Why should Emmanuel's sacrifice of his own interests endear him to the reader? As has been seen in the discussion of Lang's motivation, the acceptance of responsibility does not, in itself, automatically ensure the reader's sympathy. The inescapable conclusion is that the reader's appreciation is determined by standards which the author may assume the reader already possesses: something other than Emmanuel's behaviour encourages the reader to admire sacrifice.

That standards external to the novel are intentionally evoked by the author, in the above cases, is made clear by the inclusion of directions to the reader when the author wishes to leave the issues open. Thus the reader of Derrière La Vitre is informed that

the students themselves are unconvinced of the effectiveness of their action: the passage about 'miming' revolution, and similar frank admissions, make an appeal to the reader's judgement unnecessary, especially as the author is himself uncertain of the significance of the students' actions.

In Week-end à Zuydcoote, Maillat's impossible situation reduces him to despairing inertia. Since nothing he does can affect events, he does nothing. Yet he is aware that he ought to continue his struggle against inevitable defeat, and at those two points where his action could have affected the course of events he hears the voice of conscience. This is a clear direction to the reader that Maillat's inaction is to be disapproved. The direction is necessary to show the author's opinion, because Maillat's inaction is such a logical result of his experience.

In those novels where the author encourages judgement by external standards, he is usually relying on the reader's perception of a link between responsible action and its effect, especially where it affects other people. The actions of Lang obviously resulted in the death of millions, the action of Purcell produced a happy community, and that of Sevilla averted a Third World War, while Emmanuel's actions made progress possible. These examples enable the nature of the external standards to be deduced. They are not as specific as, for example, the belief that patriotism is right - the experience of Purcell and Emmanuel is contradicted by that of Sevilla and Lang - but are so general as to be universal: dislike of murder, love of peace and desire for progress. The author may be sure that a reader will disapprove of Lang's actions and approve of those of Sevilla, Purcell and Emmanuel. In Week-end à Zuydcoote and Derrière La Vitre, where the effect of action is uncertain or distant, the reader judges by the criteria present in the novel.

Novels where Merle elicits judgement according to external

standards have a definite ending, where the reader's expectation is fulfilled: Lang is executed; Purcell, Emmanuel and Sevilla strengthen the cause of peace. The endings of Derrière La Vitre and Week-end à Zuydcoote, however, where the characters themselves search unsuccessfully for a connection between action and its effect, are rather abrupt, because no satisfactory answer has been reached. The ending of Derrière La Vitre conveys this well, because the anti-climax of the occupation is marked by a step in the personal lives of Jaumet and Denise, entirely unconnected with the problem of political responsibility. The ending of Week-end à Zuydcoote looks suspiciously as if the author is punishing Maillat's inaction. The omission of the final sentence would have reflected Maillat's uncertainty more satisfactorily. Nevertheless, the treatment of the theme of responsibility in these two novels, necessitating no appeal to external standards of judgement, marks their integral unity. This is especially true of Week-end à Zuydcoote, where all the factors necessary for the formation of judgement are present in the novel. The novel is a statement of uncertainty, but the absence of commentary by the novelist, and of judgement by the reader, make it less artificial than the novels where neat endings satisfy the reader's expectation.

Just as action is indivisible from effect - and even Maillat expects an effect - so the individual is indivisible from society. There is no such thing, for Merle, as abstract responsibility (*1).

(*1) Merle's view of the nature of responsibility entails its exposition by means of character in a social or political situation. He would not think of attempting to present responsibility as an abstract idea. The above analysis of standards and judgement makes clear that an attempt to isolate an abstract quality would be possible only in the absence of situation and characterisation, because of the necessity to separate action from effect, and consequent value-judgements. Ideally, such an analysis would be possible by employing a figure without a history, faced by an ordinary action, in a featureless limbo. This would concentrate attention on the analytical discussion. Merle would not call the end product a novel.

For him, responsibility confronts an individual who is a member of society, in a recognisable historical context. Individual responsibility entails action of a social or political nature. The most positive aspect of Merle's thought is that the individual must adopt a definite attitude, which is expressed in action, whether or not the end result of the action is apparent. He must not despair, even if he feels powerless to affect his situation. For the novels show that the leaders of society are not the only people to achieve results: one man of conscience, like Michael, can influence those around him, and a group of ordinary people, like the Malevil survivors, can combine to produce a force working to extend freedom.

APPENDIX A:

TRANSCRIPT OF AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT MERLE,

NEUILLY, 30th.MAY, 1972.

- Je voudrais d'abord vous poser quelques questions sur Week-end à Zuydcoote.

J'entends que vous avez été à Dunkerque?

RM Oui, j'ai été à Dunkerque. J'étais agent de liaison auprès de la British Expeditionary Force, B.E.F. Malheureusement j'ai perdu mon unité en route et j'ai pas pu m'embarquer à Dunkerque; et j'ai été trois-quatre jours, voilà, à Dunkerque et je n'ai pas pu m'embarquer, parce que j'avais perdu les Anglais qui me connaissaient. Alors, je suis resté avec les gens qui étaient là. Je n'ai pas pu m'embarquer non plus du côté des Français parce qu'ils ne me connaissaient pas, puisque j'étais avec les Anglais. Et alors, je suis resté là et j'ai été fait prisonnier en effet en, je crois que c'était en juin '40.

- Et vous avez vu brûler le bateau?

RM Oui, j'ai vu brûler le bateau, et tout ce que je raconte sur le bateau est strictement vrai. Ce qui m'a le plus frappé, c'est que les gens ne sautaient pas dans la mer. Vous savez, je crois qu'il y avait une raison pour cela. Le bateau était échoué. Le bateau était très très haut et la mer était peu profonde. Je crois que les gens avaient peur de se tuer. Et alors, il y avait quand-même des cordes, et je crois que déjà ils avaient respiré tellement de fumée qu'ils étaient 'groggy'. Alors, il n'y avait que quelques-uns de temps en temps qui descendaient par les cordes; il y avait quelques cordes, mais il y en avait très peu.

- Et si tout dans le roman est vrai, voulez-vous m'expliquer quel est votre critère de sélection?

RM Well....d'abord, je n'ai pas violé de jeune fille! Alors, tout n'est pas tout à fait vrai. J'ai rencontré à Armentières, dans la cave d'une maison où j'étais, une jeune fille, et alors, tout ce qui est du côté de la cave, est tout à fait vrai. Ça c'est une chose que j'ai introduite dans le roman et le personnage de Jeanne est inspiré de cette jeune fille. Mais je ne l'ai pas rencontrée à Dunkerque, mais à Armentières, au cours de la retraite.

Et alors, la partie du viol par les deux soldats, ce n'est pas une chose que j'ai vue, c'est une chose qu'on m'a racontée, et m'a-t-on dit, les soldats qui faisaient ça étaient deux M.P. anglais. Alors, dans mon roman, je n'ai pas voulu paraître anti-Anglais, parce que, bon, les Français auraient tout de suite interprété ça - ah! ces salauds d'Anglais! - alors, j'en ai fait deux Français, bien

convaincu qu'il y avait des Français qui en avaient fait autant. Et dans l'histoire telle que l'on me l'a racontée - on me l'a racontée en captivité - c'est deux Anglais, c'est deux M.P. anglais qui avaient violé cette jeune fille et avaient été tués par un sergent français. Alors, vous savez que Maillat est sergent. Ça, c'est un oui-dire. Je vous ai cité ça parce que c'est le côté qui saute aux yeux, mais tout le reste du roman, y compris la morte, vous savez, que l'on pousse, comme ça, c'est vrai.

J'ai choisi les éléments qui m'ont paru les plus représentatifs de l'époque, de la retraite, du désastre, et du rembarquement, et tout ça. Je faisais partie d'un 'mess' de soldats français qui étaient tous comme moi des agents de liaison, c'est-à-dire, des interprètes de la B.E.F.; nous avons perdu notre unité et nous avons une auto où nous nous étions groupés - nous étions quatre ou cinq - c'est là la popote. La popote décrit très bien cette espèce de famille qui s'était reformée, et qui avait des liens d'amitié, même d'affection. La mort d'Alexandre, je l'ai inventée. A côté du Sana il y avait de temps en temps des obus de 77 qui tombaient, et nous étions à la popote en train d'ouvrir une boîte de sardines, et nous avons entendu un claquement sec. Alors nous nous sommes tous dispersés dans le sable, et quand nous sommes revenus près de l'auto nous avons vu un trou par terre exactement à l'endroit où nous nous tenions, et la boîte de conserves avait disparu! Je suppose que l'obus s'est enfoncé dans le sable, littéralement à nos pieds, sans exploser.

- Vous avez eu de la chance!

RM Oui, c'est ça. Et alors, c'est à partir de ça que j'ai imaginé la mort d'Alexandre, c'est-à-dire la mort de l'un d'entre nous; en fait, aucun d'entre nous n'est mort.

- Mais c'était bien possible.

RM Oui, c'est ça. Disons que j'ai voulu un élément de dramatisation dans l'atmosphère de la popote, qui en effet a éclaté, au moment où on a été fait prisonnier.

- Est-il vrai que, après la publication de ce roman, un colonel, enfin, un officier, de l'Armée Française ait menacé de vous cravacher?

RM De me tuer. J'étais en Afrique du Nord pour faire une tournée de conférence. Alors, là, il y avait un colonel qui m'a dit que j'étais un mauvais Français, parce que j'avais raconté une défaite, que j'avais déshonoré l'armée française. L'armée française à Dunkerque s'est vaillamment battue dans un coin, mais dans d'autres coins elle ne s'est pas battue du tout. Je l'ai vu, quand même, puisque

j'ai été là. Il n'a pas voulu admettre ce point de vue. Et alors, au Maroc, j'ai été avisé par le Président de l'Alliance Française, qui s'appelait Bosco, je crois, qu'il y avait un lieutenant, ancien de Dunkerque, qui avait dit que si je venais faire la conférence à Rabat il me tuerait à coups de mitrailleuse. Alors, Bosco, qui est, comme vous savez, un écrivain connu, m'a téléphoné en me demandant, "Dans ces conditions, ne croyez-vous pas qu'il serait sage de renoncer à votre voyage?" J'ai dit, "Non, pas du tout, je viens." Et alors, ils m'ont dit, Bosco a prévenu la police française qui soi-disant devait me protéger. Mon opinion, c'est qu'elle ne m'a pas protégé du tout, parce que ce bonhomme, ce lieutenant, m'a raccroché alors que j'entrais dans l'endroit où je devais faire ma conférence. Il avait toutes ses décorations, là, qui pendaient, vous savez, de tout leur long. Il m'a dit, "Votre livre est une ordure, et voici ce que j'en fais !" Et il a essayé de le déchirer. Mais c'est très difficile, un livre, à déchirer ! Alors, il faisait ! Je lui ai dit, je lui ai suggéré que, s'il voulait le déchirer, il fallait qu'il le partage ! Il n'arrivait pas à le déchirer, alors je suis parti. Je n'ai pas pensé qu'il m'abattrait à coups de mitrailleuse, j'ai pensé que c'était un garçon qui avait écrit lui-même un livre sur Dunkerque, et ce livre avait été refusé. Il avait conçu une grande amertume et, bien sûr, il n'aimait pas le mien, parce qu'il avait écrit un livre héroïque sur Dunkerque, et moi je n'avais pas écrit un livre héroïque.

- Seriez-vous surpris si je vous disais que je trouve la langue des soldats assez brutale?

RM Non, pas du tout. Alors, il y a eu des discussions sans fin en France quand le livre a paru. Il y a des gens qui l'ont trouvé obscène, et le langage obscène. Et le curé de Zuydcoote a fait un sermon en chaire interdisant à ses paroissiens de lire mon livre. Et alors, il y avait une petite librairie qui était en même temps une mercerie, qui vendait à la fois des rubans, des boutons et des livres, et c'était deux vieilles filles, et bien sûr, elles n'ont pas voulu vendre mon livre, à cause de Monsieur le Curé. Mais il y avait à Zuydcoote un clan anti-clérical, mené par le boulanger, et qui s'est mis à vendre mon livre dans l'arrière-boutique, de sorte que Zuydcoote a eu mon livre. Et le curé m'a pris à partie en disant que j'étais un "triste éducateur", parce que j'étais professeur en ce moment-là, un "sale oiseau", parce que je m'appelle Merle, n'est-ce pas ! On m'a demandé si j'allais lui faire un procès en diffamation mais j'ai pensé que cela ne valait pas la peine. Voilà ce que je pense, moi, du langage. J'ai été prisonnier trois ans. Dans l'armée anglaise j'avais un

rang d'officier en ce sens que j'étais dans un "mess" d'officiers, mais l'armée française ne m'avait pas donné le grade d'officier. Lorsque j'ai été fait prisonnier j'ai été mis dans un "stalag", non pas dans un "oflag", c'est-à-dire, j'ai été mis avec les hommes, et là j'ai partagé la vie des hommes de troupe, "the rank and file". Surtout en majorité des ouvriers parisiens. Ils parlaient comme ça. C'était leur langage. Et c'est là que j'ai appris l'argot que je ne connaissais pas. Ils parlaient comme ça. Les soldats parlent comme ça.

- Quand j'ai écrit un chapitre sur Week-end à Zuydcoote, j'ai dit que les jeunes filles bien élevées auraient des difficultés à comprendre la langue des soldats.

RM Alors, là je dois vous dire que ce qui était un problème en 1940, en 1949, n'est plus un problème en 1970. Mes étudiants et mes étudiantes à Nanterre parlent presque aussi mal que les soldats. Ça a été un problème, mais ce n'est plus un problème.

- Passons à La Mort Est Mon Métier. Je crois que vous avez passé trois ans dans un camp de prisonnier de guerre - vous venez de me le dire - comment étaient les Allemands que vous y avez rencontrés?

RM Moi je n'ai pas d'antipathie du tout pour le peuple allemand. Et en général mes rapports avec les Allemands étaient assez bons, parce que je suis blond avec les yeux bleus. Ils étaient très racistes. Et alors, le fait que je n'ai pas tellement l'air latin, j'ai plutôt l'air anglo-saxon, m'a favorisé, en un sens. Mais ils étaient racistes. Et moi, j'ai plutôt de la sympathie pour le peuple allemand, en ce sens, que j'admire ses qualités de discipline, de travail, plus que je n'admire les Français. Les Français en captivité trouvaient que les Allemands étaient un peuple abominable. Alors les gens en Allemagne, les civils nous traitaient très bien, avaient une attitude très amicale, dans les usines. Ils avaient beaucoup de difficulté à empêcher les idylles entre les femmes allemandes et les Français; il y avait beaucoup de petits "romances" du côté des femmes allemandes et bien sûr, aussi, du côté des Français, parce qu'ils étaient sans épouses, sans fiancées, et les Allemands ont dû combattre ça très fort, et même trop fort, parce que ça posait un problème. Mais dans l'ensemble, ils ont aussi été amicaux. Et dans les usines, les gens qui étaient méchants avec nous, c'étaient les nazis; et dans l'armée, quand on avait une sentinelle qui était vraiment méchante, la plupart du temps c'était un nazi. C'est-à-dire il y avait deux choses. Il y avait le peuple allemand en général qui avait une attitude plutôt amicale, vis-à-vis des Français, et aussi vis-à-vis des prisonniers britanniques, et puis alors il y avait les nazis, qui, eux, avaient une attitude hostile.

Alors, bien entendu, en captivité, moi j'ai souffert comme tout le monde de la faim - au début, beaucoup - j'ai souffert du fait que j'étais

si loin de chez moi, j'ai souffert de l'angoisse de la survie, j'ai souffert du froid, j'ai souffert du travail trop difficile - onze heures par jour dans une usine - et tout ça, mais je n'ai pas été maltraité. Et j'ai appris l'allemand. Mes camarades, d'ailleurs, ne sympathisaient pas avec le fait que j'apprenais l'allemand. Ils considéraient que, les Allemands étant des salauds, on ne devait pas apprendre la langue allemande. Moi je n'étais pas de cet avis-là. J'ai appris l'allemand. Et bien entendu cela a été pour moi un élément très utile quand j'ai écrit La Mort Est Mon Métier. Mais je n'ai pas connu directement ce que je décris dans La Mort Est Mon Métier, car je ne suis pas un déporté, je suis un prisonnier de guerre. Alors, bien, j'ai connu des moments difficiles. Quand je me suis évadé, on m'a pris, et puis on m'a mis six semaines en cellule tout seul, puis on m'a envoyé dans un "strafkommando" - un kommando de discipline où c'était très dur. Mais ce n'était pas terrible. A mon avis, il y a une très grande différence entre la situation de prisonnier de guerre et la situation de déporté.

- Et après la guerre, est-ce que vous avez assisté au procès de Nuremberg?

RM Non, je n'ai pas assisté à Nuremberg. La Mort Est Mon Métier a été composé d'une part sur une biographie du Commandant d'Auschwitz que m'a communiquée un Américain interprète d'allemand, Gilbert, qui a interrogé le Commandant d'Auschwitz. Alors, j'ai eu accès aux archives de Nuremberg. Et toute la partie de biographie qui est une reconstitution allait de ce que je savais, moi, de l'armée allemande, et la partie sur le camp d'Auschwitz et sur la mise au point du camp d'Auschwitz, c'est une chose qui est rigoureusement historique. Il y a eu un travail d'historien.

- Vous avez vu l'autobiographie de Hoess?

RM Oui, justement, je suis heureux que vous en parliez. L'autobiographie de Hoess - en France, cela a paru sous le titre, Le Commandant d'Auschwitz Parle - il l'a écrite sur la prière des Polonais, dans sa prison polonaise. Mais on l'a laissé seul, on ne l'a pas interrogé. Il a écrit ce qu'il voulait. Elle est moins sûre que la biographie que Gilbert a obtenue de lui, parce que Gilbert, qui était psychologue de profession, a obtenu cette biographie en l'interrogeant: et bien sûr il y a autre chose.....d'écrire ses mémoires en cachant beaucoup de choses et autre chose de répondre aux questions posées par un psychologue de profession.

- Et est-ce que c'est ce psychologue, Gilbert, à la fin de La Mort Est Mon Métier?

RM Non, je ne l'ai pas introduit; j'ai mis là un colonel, mais je ne

l'ai pas introduit. J'ai mis un colonel américain parce que, à mon avis, les Américains avaient aussi des choses à se reprocher. Parce qu'ils étaient les vainqueurs mais, quand-même, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, on aurait peut-être pu faire l'économie de ces massacres, en montrant ailleurs que dans des villes surpeuplées ce que pouvait faire une bombe. En la montrant....."Voilà! On va faire tomber une bombe là, et vous verrez! Alors, si vous voulez qu'on fasse..." Et voyons, on ne leur a pas donné de chance, on les a tout de suite détruites, puis on en a détruit deux. Ce n'était pas utile de détruire deux. Les Américains ont des choses à se reprocher; alors c'est précisément pour cela que j'ai voulu faire poser la question par un Américain, pour que certaines des réponses de Rudolf fassent réfléchir un petit peu.

- Quelle a été la réception en France d'un livre qui paraît chercher à excuser un ennemi?

RM Non. Ça ne cherche pas à excuser. Personne ne me l'a reproché, d'ailleurs. Mais, ça cherche une sorte d'explication. En France, on n'a pas étécomment vais-je vous dire? Je sais bien que quand vous lisez le livre vous ne pouvez pas vous empêcher d'avoir une sorte de "sneaking sympathy" pour l'homme. Mais je l'ai éprouvé moi-même, parce que c'était pas un sadique, c'était pas un criminel, c'était simplement un petit cadre consciencieux. Mais c'est un criminel quand-même; objectivement, c'est un criminel.

Le roman a été assez mal accueilli en France par les critiques parce qu'il a paru en '52, c'est-à-dire à un moment où les Américains et les Européens voulaient réarmer l'Allemagne, de sorte que tous ces souvenirs sur le génocide et tout ça, il ne fallait plus en parler. C'était fini; en France on ne faisait plus paraître de livres de guerre. Non, c'était fini. Si vous voulez, j'ai écrit le livre à contre-courant; la mode non seulement était finie, mais il y avait une mode contraire qui s'était installée; il ne fallait plus, parce qu'on réarmait l'Allemagne. Mais, le livre n'a pas eu beaucoup de succès, enfin, en France. Il a été très lu par contre en Pologne, et en Allemagne de l'Est. Il a été traduit très tardivement en URSS parce que l'URSS a trouvé que je montrais trop le combat des nazis contre les Juifs et pas assez le combat des nazis contre les Communistes. Mais ils l'ont quand-même traduit; ils ont fini par le traduire. Cela a été traduit beaucoup, La Mort Est Mon Métier, beaucoup. Et ensuite, c'est venu tardivement dans le Livre de Poche, en '60, et dans Livre de Poche, alors, ça a eu un grand succès, parce que cela a été lu par les jeunes qui n'avaient pas connu ce mouvement, pour qui c'était un

livre d'histoire. Mais alors, actuellement on le réédite dans le Folio: cela a eu un gros, gros succès dans Livre de Poche auprès des jeunes. Moi, finalement, j'en suis content, parce que, il y a vingt ans.....

- Moi-même, je ne me souviens pas trop bien de la guerre mais, quand j'ai lu le livre, j'ai trouvé tout à fait logique ce que fait Hoess. Mais j'ai pensé que les Français, si peu de temps après la guerre, l'auraient peut-être trouvé difficile à accepter.

RM Très peu de gens m'ont accusé d'avoir des sympathies pour...parce que quand-même le livre est une dénonciation du génocide d'Auschwitz. Ils ne se sont pas plaints de ce point de vue, simplement, si vous voulez, ce genre de livre n'était plus bien accueilli, parce que, on se réconciliait avec les Allemands contre le Communisme, n'est-ce pas. On reformait l'armée allemande, on rebâtissait ses usines et tout ça, même, vous savez, il y avait un plan pour faire une armée européenne intégrée - c'est avec la possibilité pour une division française, ou un corps d'armée, d'être commandé par un général allemand. Ça s'appelait la C.E.D., la Communauté Européenne de Défense; cela a échoué, heureusement. Alors, le livre était gênant parce qu'il rappelait des choses ennuyeuses.

- Si nous pouvions en venir à L'Ile. Il me semble que ce livre se concentre sur le problème de la démocratie, et surtout, sur celui d'un système où l'idiot, comme Jono, a la même voix que l'homme intelligent, comme Purcell. Je voudrais bien vous demander: dans L'Ile et Malevil, il s'agit d'une toute petite communauté. Trouvez-vous plus facile de décrire la démocratie dans une communauté hors du monde d'aujourd'hui?

RM Aimez-vous Jane Austen?

- Beaucoup!

RM Beaucoup, bon! Moi aussi, je suis un "Jane-Austen-ite". Jane Austen a dit: "The very thing to work upon is two or three families in a village." C'est-à-dire, c'est le microcosme. C'est pas la peine de faire de vastes ensembles: vous avez là quelque chose qui est représentatif du monde entier avec tous les problèmes. Mais il n'y a pas que le problème de la démocratie dans L'Ile. Il y a le problème du parlementarisme formel, c'est-à-dire de la fausse démocratie, avec une sorte de tricherie anti-démocratique constante qui est pratiquée par Mac Leod. Alors il y a une critique du parlementarisme formel, il y a une critique du racisme. Toutes les relations entre Tahitiens et Anglais sont marquées du côté anglais par le racisme. Ils ne partagent pas les femmes équitablement, et ils ne partagent pas la terre équitablement, et c'est ça qui amène la guerre et les massacres. Et

enfin il y a une critique de la non-violence, dans Purcell. Purcell est un non-violent et, finalement, il le reconnaît à la fin, mais son attitude de non-violence était néfaste. Vous savez, il fut un moment avant-guerre et après-guerre où les gens étaient tellement dégoûtés de la guerre qu'il y a pas mal de gens qui adoptaient une attitude de non-violence. Je crois que ce n'est pas bon, parce que l'attitude de non-violence consiste à mettre dans le même sac les gens qui ont raison et les gens qui ont tort. Je crois que finalement il faut choisir son camp, et qu'il faut choisir le camp de la justice maxima, ou, en tout cas, de l'injustice minima. Et c'est ce que fait Purcell à la fin, et malheureusement il ne le fait qu'à la fin. Oui, il y a un certain nombre de problèmes dans L'Ile.

Il y a aussi le problème des femmes, qui est un problème important. Et il y a des tas d'autres problèmes. Si je retrouve la petite brochure, je pourrais peut-être vous la prêter. Il y a une dame, une Suisse, qui a écrit une brochure d'étude, pour la Faculté de Lettres de Lausanne, tout à fait remarquable sur L'Ile, notamment sur le thème de la grotte, qui est un thème très important. Si vous voulez, le thème de la grotte, c'est un retour de Purcell à l'utérus maternel; Purcell, il a cette espèce de besoin de protection, et alors, Omaata représente la nuit qui l'enveloppe; elle représente la mère, n'est-ce pas, et d'autant mieux qu'elle est noire. C'est ça; elle est grande, très grande, une géante, n'est-ce pas (la géante est quelquefois un thème homosexuel, comme dans Baudelaire) mais là, c'est un thème maternel. Et d'ailleurs, il est sans cesse protégé par les femmes, etc. Si vous voulez, c'est un thème psychologique sur Purcell. C'est un besoin psychologique de Purcell d'être enveloppé par la féminité protectrice. Et à la fin, c'est elle qui le sauve! Je crois que c'est un thème important.

- Dans vos héros, je trouve un petit peu de condescendance envers ceux de la classe ouvrière.

RM Dans L'Ile?

- Dans L'Ile, un peu; surtout dans Week-end à Zuydcoote, et dans Malevil aussi. J'ai mis la question ici parce qu'il me semble que la classe est importante pour les personnages dans L'Ile.

RM You baffle me! Parce que, en effet, je ne sais pas si vous connaissez mes opinions politiques; elles se situent assez à gauche.....

- C'est pour cela que je vous pose la question.

RM Oui! Je suis étonné! A l'égard des gens, disons, de condition modeste, les livres montrent, au contraire, beaucoup d'affection. Mais évidemment, dans la mesure où ils s'expriment avec une certaine naïveté, il y a une position d'humour, d'ironie, chez l'auteur, mais c'est une position d'ironie affectueuse. Personne ne m'a jamais dit ça, et je ne crois pas que ça soit vrai. Peut-être que c'est quelque chose qui chez vous....je m'excuse, vous êtes Anglaise?

- Oui, Anglaise.

RM C'est peut-être quelque chose qui est anglais chez vous, c'est-à-dire que nous n'avons proprement Les gens, disons d'une classe sociale comme la mienne, à l'égard d'une classe sociale prolétarienne, ils ont une attitude qui n'est probablement pas la vôtre. C'est-à-dire que, chez vous, peut-être que vous marqueriez plus de respect, mais nous, ce n'est pas une question de respect, c'est une question d'affection. Par exemple, moi, j'ai été en captivité; j'ai été tout à fait traité en égal par les autres. D'ailleurs, en captivité, on vous traite en égal, il n'y a plus de grade: il y a tout; il y a la culture, l'intelligence, l'union sociale, on n'en dit plus: vous valiez ce que vous valiez en tant qu'homme. On vous aimait, on ne vous aimait pas; on vous acceptait, on ne vous acceptait pas: mais vous valiez ce que vous valiez en tant qu'homme, et pas un sou de plus! Eh bien, si vous voulez, je me sentais l'un d'eux, et me sentant l'un d'eux, je ne pensais pas que j'avais à les respecter plus que d'autres, plus que moi-même.

- Il me semble que dans vos romans, un thème qui sort, c'est la responsabilité de l'intellectuel, de l'homme qui pense....

RM Oui, justement, mais dans L'Ile, la responsabilité de l'intellectuel, de l'homme qui pense, elle est critiquée! Elle est critiquée, parce que ce n'est justement pas lui qui a raison. C'est Jones qui a raison, qui dit, "Foutu!" à Mac Leod, c'est Jones! Alors, l'intellectuel se trompe! Avec toutes ses complexités, tous ses problèmes, il se trompe! C'est ce qui est bien montré dans L'Ile, donc je ne le montre pas supérieur aux gens plus frustes.

- Mais je crois qu'il suppose qu'il est supérieur. Il croit que la responsabilité revient sur lui, simplement parce que c'est un homme de classe plus haute, et de plus grande intelligence.

RM Alors, là, vous posez le problème du "leadership". Dans L'Ile, Purcell n'assume pas le "leadership"; dans Malevil, Emmanuel assume "leadership". Ça je l'ai remarqué. Dans un groupe d'hommes qui

vivent ensemble, c'est exactement comme dans une horde de chevaux, ou dans un poulailler de poules: il y a toujours un animal dominant. Que ce soit un bon animal dominant, ou un mauvais animal dominant, il y a toujours un animal dominant, toujours. Mac Leod est l'animal dominant! Or, Mac Leod n'est pas un intellectuel, et finalement il est presque le roi de l'île! Il a complètement neutralisé Purcell, il a mis Mason dans sa poche, et il devient le leader, n'est-ce pas?

- Mais Purcell, et le lecteur, pensent que Mac Leod a tort.

RM Ah oui, bien sûr! Mais en tout cas le point de vue de Purcell n'est pas privilégié par rapport à celui des autres, puisque le livre tout entier démontre que Purcell a tort. Et à la fin, il le reconnaît. Vous avez écrit quelque chose sur Peyssou là, qui m'intrigue....?

- Portez-vous envie à l'homme simple?

RM J'aime beaucoup les gens simples, parce que je ne suis pas simple. Je ne suis pas simple, enfin si, j'ai des manières simples, mais je ne suis pas simple. Je m'entends très très bien, à la campagne, avec les ouvriers, les cultivateurs, tout ça, je m'entends très très bien, facilement. Je n'ai aucune difficulté parce que je suis extroverti, c'est-à-dire, je parle facilement, je ris, je m'amuse, etc. Et cette attitude, c'est une attitude qu'il faut, dans ce genre; l'attitude de silence, surtout de la part d'un intellectuel, les inquiéterait; ils se demanderaient ce que je pense. Je ne crois pas qu'il y ait de la condescendance. Je crois, en effet, que j'ai une sorte d'affection pour les gens qui ont une façon de résoudre leurs problèmes plus naïve et plus spontanée que je n'aie. Bon, je ne sais pas quel genre de femme vous êtes, et si pour vous c'est facile ou difficile de résoudre vos problèmes, mais moi, j'ai eu, et j'ai toujours, de grands problèmes personnels. Bon, je pense que, je ne sais pas, c'est pour cela que je suis écrivain, c'est précisément pour cela que je suis écrivain, bien sûr. Et bien entendu, lorsque vous dites, est-ce que je porte envie, oui, c'est vrai; j'ai de l'affection et même de l'admiration pour les gens qui sont beaucoup plus simples et pour qui la vie est beaucoup plus facile.

- Moi aussi, je trouve ça.

RM Oui. Pour Alexandre, pour Peyssou, pour les gens comme ça. Et vous avez remarqué peut-être que dans mon oeuvre il y a des idiots pour qui j'ai de la tendresse, par exemple, Hunt. Hunt, et Momo

dans Malevil. C'est assez extraordinaire en France. Il n'y a pratiquement pas d'idiots dans la littérature française. Il y a des idiots dans la littérature américaine, vous savez, et même dans la littérature anglaise, mais il n'y en a pas dans la littérature française, pas que je connaisse, en tout cas.

- Et dans la vie même, je trouve qu'il y a de moins en moins d'idiots, parce qu'on les recueille dans des maisons de santé.....

RM Ah! C'est pas vrai pour la province française.

- En Angleterre aussi, à la campagne, au village, il y en a. Et il y en a qui mènent une vie assez heureuse et utile.

RM Ah, oui, par exemple, le modèle qui m'a servi pour Momo, c'est un garçon que je considère comme entièrement heureux.

- Alors, j'insiste un peu sur le thème de la classe, mais y a-t-il connexion entre ce que nous avons dit sur les idiots et les gens qui pensent, et les étudiants et les travailleurs de Derrière La Vitre?

RM Il faudrait que vous précisiez votre question.

- Dans L'Ile et Malevil, je crois qu'il y a communication entre les hommes intelligents et les idiots. Dans Derrière La Vitre, il n'y a pas une telle distance entre les travailleurs et les étudiants..

RM De travailleurs, finalement, dans Derrière La Vitre, il y en a un, Aziz. Or, Aziz est exceptionnel. Aziz est très intelligent. Aziz a aussi quelque chose de tout à fait en sa faveur: il a le même âge que les étudiants. Donc, il y a des choses qu'ils sentent en commun. Qu'il y ait eu une compréhension entre Aziz et David, je ne crois pas, parce que David est super-intellectuel, il y a des choses qui lui échappent complètement. Par exemple, lorsqu'il déprécie la chambre de la cité universitaire qu'il prête à Aziz, et Aziz, il dit, "Mais c'est le paradis" alors que l'autre lui dit, "Mais non, c'est tout petit, c'est un trou, regarde la vue qu'on a, il y a la vue sur le bidonville" et Aziz lui dit, "C'est le mien". Alors, ça prouve que David, au fond c'est un bourgeois, c'est un fils de famille, qui ne se rend pas compte de ce que c'est que le bonheur pour quelqu'un comme Aziz.

- Et aussi il y a la différence de race qui complique les choses.

RM Qui complique les choses beaucoup, oui. Par exemple, la réaction d'Aziz vis-à-vis de Brigitte est une réaction qui est typiquement arabe. Il est ébloui, et il a peur. Il est ébloui surtout parce qu'elle est blonde. Comme vous savez peut-être, les Arabes adorent

les blondes. J'avais une étudiante à Alger (je suis allé à Alger de '62 à '64), j'avais une étudiante blonde. Elle était très très jolie, et elle avait de très beaux cheveux blonds - un peu teints - et elle était littéralement suivie dans la rue par les Arabes, qui ne lui faisaient pas violence, mais elle était suivie, parce qu'ils étaient fascinés. Alors il y a une attitude chez Aziz aussi qui est tellement typique d'Arabe; il a une attitude de fatalisme. Il se demande s'il va coucher avec Brigitte, et bien qu'il aime beaucoup David, qui est son copain, il se dit, "Bon..." Il accepte la fatalité, ce qui est très très arabe, c'est islamique, même. Alors, il y a ces différences-là, mais en fait je ne dirais pas qu'Aziz est un ouvrier typique. C'est un ouvrier qui a déjà soif de s'instruire, et il n'est pas typique par rapport aux ouvriers. En fait, j'ai connu Aziz, j'en ai connu deux: il y en a un qui est maintenant licencié de mathématiques! Il va être professeur de mathématiques, un jour! Alors, il est ouvrier.

- C'est étonnant!

Eh bien, passons à Un Animal Doué de Raison. Le titre de ce roman, est-il intentionnellement ambigu?

RM Ironique. Parce que - je ne sais si en Angleterre on définit l'homme comme un animal doué de raison?

- Si.

RM Alors, nous avons la même définition. Bon. C'est une définition en toutes les langues. Chez vous, ça a été traduit par "The Day of the Dolphin" parce que les Américains n'ont pas voulu traduire le titre. Ils ont préféré "The Day of the Dolphin" à cause de l'allitération. Vous savez qu'on en fait un film? *

- Non, je ne savais pas.

RM Oui, c'est Mike Nicholls qui en fait un film. C'est un bon cinéaste américain qui a fait "Catch 22". Non, l'ironie, c'est que l'animal doué de raison, ce n'est pas l'homme, c'est le dauphin.

- Et je trouve dans ce roman l'exemple par excellence de celui qui contient de l'écriture documentaire jusqu'à un certain point, qui n'est pas facile à indiquer, puis se lance dans la fiction. Je voudrais vous demander: est-ce que vous êtes conscient du point où vous quittez le fait?

* In 1972, the film had not yet been released.

RM Oui. D'ailleurs, je l'explique dans la préface. Vous comprenez, Un Animal Doué de Raison, c'est une utopie. Ma culture est bilingue, comme bien vous vous en doutez, entièrement bilingue; par ma culture je suis peut-être encore plus Anglo-Saxon que je ne suis Français. C'est une utopie caractéristique à la Swift. C'est ce genre qui existe faiblement en France. Et alors, dans une utopie, ce qui est difficile, c'est de donner de la crédibilité à votre utopie. J'aime beaucoup les utopies, et pourquoi? mais parce que j'ai un esprit philosophique. Je m'intéresse aux problèmes sociaux, je m'intéresse aux problèmes politiques, je m'intéresse aux problèmes psychologiques, et bien sûr qu'une utopie, avec son côté un peu presque expérimental, elle me donne les coudées franches. Là j'ai très bien marqué, dans la préface, que tout était scientifique jusqu'au moment où je fais passer - c'est lorsqu'ils passent du mot à la phrase; alors, c'est là le moment où l'on passe de la science à l'utopie.

- Préférez-vous écrire la science ou la fiction?

RM La question ne se pose pas tout à fait de la même façon pour moi. Mon but est d'écrire une utopie; pour rendre crédible cette utopie, il faut que je l'enveloppe complètement, non seulement de caractères crédibles, (généralement, les personnages dans une utopie ne sont pas toujours crédibles) je l'entoure de caractères crédibles, et aussi, les faits de base sont scientifiquement très établis. Mais le but de mon histoire, bien sûr, c'est l'utopie, parce que c'est l'utopie qui me permet, non pas de démontrer, mais de mettre l'accent d'une façon satirique, pour les dénoncer, sur les choses que je considère mauvaises. Ainsi par exemple, il est évident que dans le roman il y a une dénonciation des services secrets américains.

- Si nous pouvons passer à Derrière La Vitre. Frémincourt, c'est quelqu'un qui vous ressemble?

RM Oui, c'est moi. Effectivement, c'est un auto-portrait, parce que je voulais montrer un professeur faire un cours magistral, qui en soi n'était pas mauvais, mais qui ne touche pas du tout les étudiants. Et je ne pouvais pas emprunter le cours d'un autre professeur; ça aurait été délicat. Alors j'ai pris un de mes cours, que je ne trouve pas plus mauvais qu'un autre, d'ailleurs, sur Hamlet. Et alors, ça m'a amené à me mettre en scène, comme professeur libéral, critiqué par les étudiants les plus gauchistes,

et critiqué aussi par les autres. Par cette position un peu malheureuse qu'avaient les professeurs libéraux à Nanterre, qui étaient à la fois critiqués par les professeurs réactionnaires, et critiqués par les étudiants de train révolutionnaire, c'est ce que j'ai voulu faire.

- Et est-ce que vous avez par hasard commencé par le cours sur Hamlet quand vous avez pensé au livre? Parce qu'il me semble que le thème de Hamlet est central.

RM Non, c'est plus tard que j'ai pensé que Hamlet, enfin, c'est aussi le problème d'un jeune. Alors, bien sûr, c'est une des raisons pour lesquelles j'ai choisi Hamlet et je n'ai pas choisi Macbeth ou Othello, alors que le thèmesurtout parce que parmi ces jeunes gens et ces jeunes filles, j'ai été très très frappé par le nombre de complexes d'Oedipe que j'ai rencontrés. Alors, j'ai voulu aussi le traiter dans le cours. Ça c'est une remarque juste, sûrement.

- Je voudrais discuter, au sujet de ce roman, votre portrait de la femme. Il me semble que les personnages féminins de L'Île et d'Un Animal Doué de Raison menacent de remplacer les héros - je pense à la grande Tahitienne, Omaata, et à la delphine, "Ei" - mais je trouve que leur supériorité vient de leur charme et de leur intuition, et non pas de leurs qualités de chef. Mais dans Derrière La Vitre, je ne trouve rien de remarquable dans les personnages de femme. Il me semble qu'elles sont un mélange de motifs confus et de mauvaise foi. Je ne sais pas s'il est vrai que les étudiantes de Nanterre soient des personnages faibles par comparaison avec les étudiants?

RM Alors, je ne suis pas d'accord. Non, je ne suis pas d'accord. J'ai décrit un personnage qui est un personnage très très faible: Jacqueline, la fille qui se donne sans motivation, et qui se suicide et qui va se suicider sans motivation, simplement parce que - elle flotte, elle flotte, comme un chien crevé, elle flotte. Et Brigitte déjà, Brigitte enfin, la fille qui vit avec David, déjà elle a des problèmes, mais c'est une personnalité un peu plus forte. Et enfin il y en a une, je m'étonne que vous l'ayez oubliée, et qui est très très très très bien, c'est la communiste. Elle est exceptionnelle! C'est au fond, en tant qu'être humain, la mieux, mieux que les garçons!

- Mais n'est-ce pas par amour pour Jaumet qu'elle est communiste?

RM Ah non! Elle était communiste avant. C'est très bien dit dans

l'histoire. Elle était communiste avant.

- Quand-même il me semble qu'elle est le seul personnage à Nanterre à ne pas se sentir seul. Mais elle pense, "Heureusement que moi, j'ai le Parti." Ce n'est pas pour cela qu'elle est devenue communiste?

RM Non! Elle explique comment elle est devenue communiste. Elle a vécu dans une famille prolétarienne, où il y a une mère qui a des préjugés bourgeois et un père qui est dominé mais qui a le coeur à gauche; son frère, lui, devenu tout à fait bourgeois, et elle, à l'Ecole Normale, s'est choisie communiste. C'est à l'Ecole Normale d'Institutrices qu'elle est devenue communiste. Et alors, bien entendu, elle est sensible à ce que lui apporte le Parti communiste; le Parti communiste lui apporte une famille -c'est ça, parce qu'un des drames de Nanterre, c'est l'isolement - mais ce n'est pas pour cela qu'elle est communiste, pas plus qu'elle n'est communiste parce qu'elle aime Jaumet. Vous n'êtes pas convaincue?

- Si, je crois. Et dans Malevil, les personnages de femme? La Menou?

RM Il y en a plusieurs. Il y a la Menou. Alors, la Menou, il ne faudrait pas la négliger du fait qu'elle est sexuellement pas du tout "attractive". Il ne faudrait pas la négliger. La Menou, c'est une formidable petite personne! Et elle a précisément ces qualités de sagesse, de courage et de force qui sont tellement typiques des gens de la campagne, et en particulier de la campagne française. Alors, les gens m'ont demandé: "Mais enfin, ils sont sans femme et enfin vous leur trouvez une femme, et cette femme, c'est Miette, pourquoi? Pourquoi est-elle muette? Et même, quelqu'un m'a demandé, si je la rencontrais dans la vie, si le fait qu'elle soit muette ne lui donnerait pas un charme de plus. J'ai dit non. Mais vous savez, puisque tous ces hommes étaient sans femmes, et qu'ils en rencontraient une, j'étais dans la position de Dieu-Père créant Eve! J'avais à créer Eve! Et à ce moment-là, j'ai trouvé attirant au point de vue dramatique et au point de vue psychologique, de la créer la plus primitive possible. Et c'est pour ça que j'ai fait cette espèce de fille très forte, avec des jupons rapiécés, les pieds nus, des grands cheveux, mais à un air gentil, mais, muette, n'est-ce pas, parce que, si vous voulez, c'est l'ébauche d'une Eve primitive.

Du point de vue du roman, ou de l'efficacité romanesque, je crois que Miette est un personnage extraordinairement efficace. Et d'ailleurs sa conduite est si naïve, quand chaque soir elle prend

un homme par la main et l'emmène; je pense que cette conduite, qui est une conduite très très primitive, ne serait pas explicable avec quelqu'un de plus compliqué ou de plus sophistiqué. Voilà.

- Et surtout, je me souviens de Miette. Et dire que c'est dans un roman, c'est déjà quelque chose. Au cinéma, par exemple, on la verrait, mais arriver à lui donner une présence dans un roman; quand on lit, on ne voit pas....

RM Vous ne la voyez pas?

- Si, je la vois.

RM Oui, vous la voyez. Vous savez, c'est un personnage très difficile. Il est très difficile de donner de la présence à un personnage qui ne parle pas, c'est ça. C'est qu'elle est très présente, et pourtant, elle ne parle pas. Aussi, le fait qu'elle soit muette, "emphasises" sa féminité; elle est deux fois plus femme qu'elle (sic) ne dit rien - pour les hommes - c'est-à-dire, elle devient une sorte d'objet, d'idole, presque, et le fait qu'elle ne parle pas, comme les idoles, rend la chose plus facile.

- C'est un peu comme les Tahitiennes qui ne parlent pas anglais.

RM Il n'y en a qu'une qui ne parle pas. C'est Itiata, qui ne parle pas beaucoup, et les autres ne parlent pas du tout anglais.

- Quand j'ai vu le titre, Malevil, j'ai pensé à un jeu de mots bilingue. Vous y avez pensé aussi?

RM Bien sûr, oui. Cela doit se prononcer "Mal-vil". Mais c'est bien simple: Mal-Evil. Ce qui est mal est 'evil'. Le château, c'est un château anglais, alors c'était très tentant, puisque c'est un château anglais qui a été ensuite, à la Renaissance, augmenté par un seigneur français. Donc c'est un château anglo-français. Alors il était par conséquent extrêmement tentant de lui donner un nom français qui est aussi un nom de la région, parce que Maleville existe dans la région.

- Oh, il existe? Je ne savais pas. J'avais regardé, mais...

RM Avec deux 'l's? Oui, c'est un nom de la région.

- Et c'est un petit village?

RM Oui; Marquay, c'est Malejac, le petit village qui est complètement détruit.

- Pourquoi n'avez-vous pas ajouté de préface à Malevil? Ce serait tellement plus commode, vous savez.

RM Ecoutez; vous savez, les préfaces, j'ai remarqué, induisent les critiques en erreur, et à propos de mes préfaces, j'ai eu des

critiques qui sont quelquefois stupides. Ainsi, par exemple, dans Derrière La Vitre, où j'avais parlé du simultanésme, pensant que tout le monde savait que le simultanésme avait été créé par Dos Passos dans la trilogie des U.S.A., mais les critiques n'ont rien compris du tout, et ils ont parlé de l'unanimesme de Jules Romains. Alors, je me suis dit, je les induis en erreur.

Alors, maintenant, ce que je vais faire, je vais faire des préfaces pour l'édition de poche. C'est pour cela. Et il y a des critiques aussi qui se sont très irrités de mes préfaces, parce qu'ils estiment (ah, ça, c'est une réaction mesquine, mais) ils estiment que je n'ai pas à leur dire ce qu'il faut penser du livre, et qu'ils sont assez grands pour faire les découvertes tout seuls. Mais ce n'est pas pour cela. Fondamentalement c'est parce que j'ai remarqué, pour Derrière La Vitre, par exemple, que cela avait nui au livre, dans la réaction critique, parce que les critiques n'avaient pas compris la préface. Alors, s'il faut donner à un livre une préface qui explique le livre, et qu'ils ne comprennent pas, c'est vraiment dommage.

La préface, moi je l'écris pour le lecteur, et alors, puisque je l'écris pour le lecteur, je l'écrirai dans le livre de poche.

- On a remarqué que dans vos romans il y a souvent un personnage central qui a à peu près le même âge que vous.

RM Ce n'est pas vrai dans Malevil. Ce n'est pas vrai dans L'Ile. Ce n'est vrai que dans Derrière La Vitre et dans Un Animal Doué de Raison. Purcell est beaucoup plus jeune; Sevilla, bon, il avait mon âge à peu près quand j'ai écrit le livre. C'est vrai dans Derrière La Vitre pour Frémincourt, mais ce n'est pas tellement un personnage central.

- Il me semble que dans Malevil vous vous préoccupez du futur. Je voudrais vous demander, si ce n'est pas une question trop indiscrete, si la dédicace à Fernand, c'est à votre fils?

RM Non, c'est un cousin germain que j'aimais beaucoup, que je considérais comme un frère, et qui est mort.

- Oh, je m'excuse.

RM Non, pas du tout. Je conçois que vous ayez pu penser que c'était un fils; non, ce n'est pas un fils, c'est un cousin germain.

- Et le choix du nom, Emmanuel?

RM Ah, bien sûr, oui!

- Est-ce par ironie que vous l'avez choisi?

RM Pas tellement. Pas tellement, parce que finalement il devient abbé de Malevil, vous voyez? Je ne vais pas jusqu'à dire qu'il est l'élu

de Dieu - c'est ça que ça veut dire, Emmanuel, l' élu de Dieu, Sauveur? Il est sauveur, en un sens, mais qu'il soit l' élu de Dieu, non. Il y a une petite ambiguïté, voulue.

- Vous n'êtes pas croyant?

RM Non.

- A votre opinion, existerait-il une vérité en dehors de l'expérience de l'homme?

RM Quand je dis que je ne suis pas croyant, ça veut dire que je ne crois ni d'un côté ni de l'autre, c'est-à-dire, que je n'affirme pas, mais que je ne nie pas non plus. Quoiqu'on dise, affirmer ou nier sont des attitudes également fausses. Je ne suis pas athée. Je ne suis pas croyant mais je ne suis pas athée.

- Il me semble que, dans Malevil, vous essayez la définition du saint moderne. Et je voudrais établir le rapport avec ce que vous avez dit sur "Che" Guevara, je crois que c'est dans votre préface. Vous avez dit que, quand il quitte Cuba, il est comme un saint qui se dépouille. Je voudrais vous demander s'il y a un lien avec ce que fait Emmanuel, parce que, comme plusieurs de vos héros, Emmanuel doit choisir entre sa vie à lui et une vie dévouée aux autres. Je voudrais vous demander s'il y a un lien.

RM C'est une question que je trouve très intéressante. Que vous ayez fait le lien entre ce livre-làc'est ma femme et moi qui avons entrepris "Che" Guevara, et ma femme a traduit beaucoup plus que moi, parce qu'elle sait beaucoup mieux l'espagnol, mais j'ai écrit la préface. Et dans la préface, j'ai remarqué le côté religieux de "Che" Guevara - religieux-laïque, bien sûr, remarquez, le côté religieux - et le fait qu'il s'est dépouillé, en effet, de tout, et qu'il a même peut-être cherché à le marquer, ce que ne fait pas Emmanuel. Emmanuel ne cherche pas à le marquer, mais il est évident qu'Emmanuel, dans au moins un cas, quand il renonce à prendre Miette, quand il dit: "Je ne veux pas dire que Miette sera à moi; Miette sera ce qu'elle voudra, ou bien elle sera à tous," et quand il se refuse au couple, plus tard, avec Agnès. Il aime Agnès, n'est-ce-pas, c'est évident, et il ne l'a pas épousée, et puis il regrette de ne pas l'avoir épousée. Quand il ne reparle plus de reprendre Agnès, il pense en termes de communauté, c'est-à-dire que là évidemment il sacrifie le bonheur individuel, le bonheur du couple, au bonheur de la communauté, c'est vrai. Alors, là, il y a une liaison. Entre les deux il y a encore le fait que....Emmanuel

est un politique, et un politique habile; alors, le côté machiavélique d'Emmanuel, là j'ai plutôt pensé à des gens comme de Gaulle, ou à des gens comme Fidel Castro, c'est-à-dire à des gens que je connais bien (je connais bien Fidel Castro; de Gaulle, je ne l'ai pas approché, mais je connais bien Fidel Castro); c'est-à-dire à des gens qui incontestablement sont animés par un grand amour de l'humanité, mais qui sont en même temps extraordinairement rusés et machiavéliques, parce qu'il le faut, parce que l'amour des hommes ne peut être servi que par une habileté exceptionnelle. Il y a ces deux côtés: il y a le Machiavel et presque le saint, en tout cas, l'homme qui se dévoue à une corvée. Je suis très content que vous ayez fait ce rapprochement.

- Il me semble que la plupart de vos héros doivent choisir, faire le choix, que leur responsabilité devient

RM Bien, c'est vrai pour Sevilla, c'est vrai pour Purcell. C'est-à-dire qu'à un moment donné Sevilla comprend que son attitude, c'est une attitude qu'on pourrait définir comme "escapism", elle n'est pas possible. Sur l'affaire de Michael, qui est en prison, il arrive à adopter une attitude plus résolue, en face de ceux des problèmes politiques qu'il avait dit jusque-là: "Moi, je ne peux pas juger, je laisse au Président des Etats-Unis de choisir, moi, pas; il connaît tous les faits, moi, pas," enfin il refusait ses responsabilités de concitoyen. Et ensuite il les accepte. Alors, c'est vrai pour Sevilla, c'est vrai pour Purcell à la fin. Et c'est vrai pour Emmanuel, mais dès le début.

- Oui, c'est comme si Emmanuel commence là où Purcell finit.

RM Oui, c'est ça. C'est bien: Emmanuel commence là où Purcell finit. C'est pour cela, d'ailleurs, qu'il arrive à dominer la démocratie. Il arrive à la dominer précisément parce qu'il a compris la nécessité de prendre sa responsabilité vis-à-vis de ses camarades.

- Et croyez-vous que c'est ce que font les politiques dans la vie réelle?

RM Je crois. Les gens qui sont "dedicated". C'est-à-dire, pas les politiciens comme Pompidou, Wilson.....!

- Je pense surtout aux leaders de communauté comme Castro et Ben Bella.

RM Oui, c'est ça. Ce sont des hommes qui sont entièrement désintéressés, qui n'ont pas d'ambition personnelle, mais dont l'ambition est de servir leur pays, à cause de l'amour qu'ils ont à la fois pour leur

pays et pour l'humanité en général. C'était le cas de de Gaulle, vous savez. Je sais bien que de Gaulle a été très haï. Il a été haï mais maintenant il est très admiré par ceux-là mêmes qui l'ont haï, parce qu'il avait cette foi dans les hommes, puisque c'est un humaniste dévoué. Il ne se désintéressait pas du tout de ce qui se passait au Vietnam, par exemple, il avait une attitude définie; ni de ce qui se passait en Afrique. Finalement, c'est de Gaulle qui a donné l'indépendance aux gens de l'intérieur (sic); il l'a donnée, n'est-ce pas, puisque l'armée française aurait pu, comme l'armée américaine, continuer à se battre pendant vingt ans, trente ans. C'est simplement qu'il a reconnu que c'était tellement stupide.

APPENDIX B:

ROBERT MERLE REpond AU QUESTIONNAIRE DE MARCEL PROUST

Quel est pour vous le comble de la misère?

Savoir comment on vit dans les pays sous-développés et ne pouvoir rien y changer.

Où aimeriez-vous vivre?

En Utopie: je veux dire dans un pays ensoleillé et calme où je trouverais la même vie intellectuelle qu'à Paris.

Votre idéal de bonheur terrestre?

A part la résidence (voir plus haut) je l'ai atteint.

Pour quelles fautes avez-vous le plus d'indulgence?

Pour tous, sauf pour la cruauté.

Quels sont les héros de roman que vous préférez?

L'idiot.

Quel est votre personnage historique favori?

Hô Chi Minh.

Vos héroïnes favorites dans la vie réelle?

Ninon de Lenclos.

Vos héroïnes dans la fiction?

Lady Cartlewood dans Henry Esmond

Votre peintre favori?

Renoir.

Votre musicien préféré?

Le vent dans les peupliers.

Votre qualité préférée chez l'homme?

La bonté.

Votre qualité préférée chez la femme?

La même.

Votre vertu préférée?

Le courage.

Votre occupation préférée?

Ecrire. Et quand je n'écris pas, travailler de mes mains.

Qui auriez-vous aimé être?

Hugo.

Le principal trait de mon caractère?

La générosité (mais pas tous les jours, ni avec tous)

* The interview is quoted from an edition of Derrière La Vitre published for members of Le Cercle du Nouveau Livre; Gallimard/Jules Tallendier, 1971.

Ce que j'apprécie le plus chez mes amis?
L'humanité.

Mon principal défaut?
L'imprudence.

Mon rêve de bonheur?
Je l'ai réalisé.

Quel serait mon plus grand malheur?
Le perdre.

Ce que je voudrais être?
Un écrivain qui progresse de livre en livre.

La couleur que je préfère?
J'aime toutes les couleurs chaudes.

La fleur que j'aime?
Le géranium.

L'oiseau que je préfère?
La bergéronnette.

Mes auteurs favoris en prose?
Il y en a tant....

Mes poètes préférés?
Il y en a si peu....

Mes héros dans la vie réelle?
L'ouvrier algérien qui, chaque mois, envoie la moitié de son salaire à sa femme en Algérie.

Mes héroïnes dans l'histoire?
La mère de famille.

Mes noms favoris?
Eh bien, je trouve que "Merle", par exemple, c'est simple, mais ce n'est pas mal.

Ce que je déteste par-dessus tout?
La haine.

Caractères historiques que je méprise le plus?
Thiers.

Le fait militaire que j'admire le plus?
La guérilla victorieuse d'une petite nation sur son sol.

La réforme que j'admire le plus?
L'enseignement gratuit et obligatoire.

Le don de la nature que je voudrais avoir?

La longévit  sans g tisme.

Comment j'aimerais mourir?

J'aimerais autant pas.

Etat pr sent de mon esprit?

Anxieux dans les petites options, serein dans les grandes.

Ma devise?

Vivre.

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