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'C'est un ouvrage qui sera compris plus tard'

Conceptual and stylistic innovation in the *espace automythologique* of Raymond Guérin

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Abstract

The work of Raymond Guérin (1905-1955), always a marginal figure even during his own lifetime, is a place of experimentation and ingenuity that makes it worthy of greater attention. One of the major causes of the *incompréhension* which typified reception of Guérin's works was its constant innovation, a refusal to stay in one place stylistically, which made a reading as such problematic for contemporaries.

This thesis aims to offer for the first time the comprehensive reading that Guérin sought. It attempts to explain the architecture of the overall corpus, and examines the place within the whole of each individual work. One of its contentions is that amongst the many new ideas introduced by Guérin are concepts which pre-date by three decades similar techniques considered revolutionary in the autofictional work of Serge Doubrovsky.

Taking and redirecting the ideas of Philippe Gasparini, Philippe Lejeune, Jean-Marie Schaeffer and Gérard Genette, the thesis posits the need to see Guérin's individual works as blocks in the creation of an *espace automythologique*. This label describes Guérin's global project of endlessly re-presenting the self, a modern *Essais* but deploying a range of genres and modes of writing. Guérin's work is seen as an *exercice de style* on a grand scale, the literary equivalent, to use an image employed by Guérin himself, of exposing a metal bar to different acids and observing its reaction.

The thesis uses as its structure the tri-partite generic schema that, in the image of Gide, Guérin adopted for his corpus. Under each heading - *mythes*, *confessions*, *fictions* - it elucidates Guérin's conception of the term, on the basis of the works themselves and public and private utterances. '*Confessions'* describes the apprentice writer's developing conception of writing about the self, from the formulaic and classical opening text (*Zobain*) to the highly skilled and political *Quand vient la fin*. '*Fictions'* explores Guérin's particular understanding of 'the fictional' via his innovative '*mythologie de la réalité'*, and examines the three different formats conceived for the published volumes of the autofictional project *Ebauche*. The '*mythes'* section highlights the original use made by Guérin of base myth. The thesis identifies two radical new processes: *remythification,* that is the repurposing of mythemes to tell an entirely different story, and *metamythification*, the incorporation within the text of reflection on the genesis and processes of myth itself.

An important part of this discussion is the paratext of each work. The thesis explains how and why, in the work of Guérin, the paratext is such an active space, reasons rooted in the writer's impatience with the reception accorded his work and his desire to frame it himself, and examines the innovatory ways in which the writer exploits it.

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Author's declaration:

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Michael Busby

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Section 1 – Introduction and Theoretical Statement

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For two decades Raymond Guérin was a prominent name in the literary (and even temporarily the wider cultural) debate in France. 'Discovered' by Jean Grenier, he became a protégé of Marcel Arland and Jean Paulhan. A friend and correspondent of literary figures in France, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, as well as international luminaries like Henry Miller, Ettore Settanni and Curzio Malaparte, Guérin established himself as a member of the Gallimard 'stable'. He was nominated for several literary prizes, including the 1941 Prix Goncourt.

Yet, despite a substantial body of published work (thirteen books in his lifetime, one posthumously), even at the time of his death in 1955 Guérin's star had begun to fade, and over the decades that followed his corpus was increasingly neglected. One of the objectives of this study is to correct this, and to bring his innovation and originality to the attention of modern readers.

The republication of several works in the 1980s returned Guérin briefly to the attention of the public, but this renewed interest in him again dissipated. With the transfer of most of Guérin's papers to the *Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet* in the early 2000s, a number of texts relating to Guérin began to emerge – volumes of his correspondence with Henri Calet[1] and that during his wartime captivity with his partner, Sonia[2], and latterly a biography of the writer by Jean-Paul Kauffmann.[3] Small excerpts from his journal, *Le Temps de la Sottise*, have been published by minor publishing houses[4], as have an edited collection of his articles in *Juin* magazine[5] and six of the nine articles he contributed to *La Parisienne* in 1953-1954.[6]

Guérin's life – some salient points

Born in the same year as Sartre, Guérin's life was marked primarily by outsidership. An unwanted child, Guérin was materially spoilt but largely left isolated by his parents. As a young man, the interests and ambitions of this sensitive intellectual were scorned by the same mercantilist parents, who extracted him from his education and dispatched him to endure a brutal apprenticeship in a Paris hotel. Not the product of one of the *grandes écoles* but an autodidact who broke through into the literary milieu, until his death Guérin continued to earn a living as an insurance agent.

A native Parisian, Guérin remained domiciled throughout his adult life in Bordeaux but he never really felt accepted in either place. At times the search for a sense of belonging was poignant: Guérin was thrilled to move into a house which had previously been occupied by a Bordeaux literary 'immortal' Montesquieu, as if this were affirmation in itself. Guérin's visits to Paris were infrequent. He felt gauche and inadequate in the presence of other intellectuals, a feeling which was translated into the hostility of articles in *La Parisienne* in

[1] *Henri Calet, Raymond Guérin – Correspondance, 1938-1955. Edition, notes et préface par Jean-Pierre Baril* (Paris : le dilettante, 2005).
[2] *Raymond Guérin – Lettres à Sonia Raymond Guérin 1939 – 1943 (*Paris : Gallimard, Collection Les Inédits de Doucet, 2005).
[3] *Raymond Guérin, 31, allées Damour (*Paris : La Table Ronde, 2007).
[4] *Retour de Barbarie* (Bordeaux: Editions Finitude, 2005) ; *Représailles* (Bordeaux: Editions Finitude, 2006) ; *Le Temps de la Sottise* (Paris: Le dilettante, 2013).
[5] *Raymond Guérin - Chroniques d'une année 1946-47* (Bordeaux : La Nerthe, Collection La Petite Classique, 2015).
[6] *Humeurs* (Paris: Le dilettante, 1996).

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which he was devastatingly critical of Parisian literary society. During his career, Guérin was largely shunned as an anomaly by the literary elite of the capital.

Perhaps the most vivid example of his outsidership were the 42 months spent by Guérin in captivity during World War II (June 1940 – November 1943), a period which both made him as a writer – over 4000 pages of manuscript produced – and destroyed him as a man. The experience of captivity only reinforced Guérin's sense of injustice. He was perplexed to find himself one of the most enduring victims of a war which he had always opposed as a pacifist, a rancour amplified by his being the only French intellectual in captivity – or so he declared. Following his release, he resented the attention directed towards members of the Resistance, many of whom in Guérin's eyes were either quiet collaborators or only very recent affiliates to the movement, while his own ordeal was unacknowledged and his freedom uncelebrated.

What scholarship exists already on Guérin?

There are few studies of Guérin's work. Guérin was the subject of a German study looking at aspects of Existentialism within his *fiction*s[7], as well as a thesis in Belgium. In France itself, the book by Bruno Curatolo is the only published volume devoted solely to Guérin, and as its title suggests has a narrow focus (the theme of '*dérision'*) and covers only a few works (*Ebauche*, *La Confession de Diogène* and *La Main Passe*) selected in illustration of the titular contention.[8] Kauffmann's biography, without pretending to be a full critical study, provides admirable brief accounts of each text passim. Despite his protestations that his work was being ignored, Guérin received a moderate level of press attention at the time. Some works attracted more coverage (as well as length and greater depth of analysis) than others (*Zobain*, *Quand vient la fin*, *L'Apprenti* and *Les Poulpes*). These were also the works which most often made the transition from the exclusively literary journals into the literary rubrics of the mainstream press.

Why does this writer deserve attention?

To devote a full-length study to the work of Raymond Guérin may not, in the light of the above, immediately appear warranted. One of the objectives of this thesis is to establish the contrary.

There was little equivocation at the time, even amongst critics, that some of the published works were distinctive and of merit. *Zobain* was admired both within Gallimard[9] and by the reviewing media; published during Guérin's captivity, *Quand vient la fin* was felt by critics to have had a profound impact on its release in occupied France and it was partly political interference by the Vichy regime that prevented its securing for Guérin the Prix Goncourt [10]; *L'Apprenti* was the focus of national attention, the centre of a debate on the

[7] Thomas Laux : *Individualität und Mittelmass: Raymond Guérin und seine Ebauche d'une mythologie de la réalité* (P. Lang, Internationaler Verlag Der Wissenschaften, 1990).
[8] *Raymond Guérin – Une écriture de la dérision* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 1996).
[9] Letter from Jean Paulhan to Jean Grenier : 'B.C. [Benjamin Crémieux] a refusé le livre de G[uérin]. (de Bdx). [...] Je ne puis le croire. Un des rarissimes manuscrits de valeur est refusé et chaque jour on publie des idioties invendables.' Letter from Jean Grenier to Jean Paulhan, dated 15/5/36 : 'Vraiment Zobain mérite d'être publié.' In *Jean Paulhan – Jean Grenier Correspondance 1925 – 1968* (Paris : Calligrammes, 1984) pp. 73 and 75.
[10] 'l'explosion silencieuse de cette bombe atomique' – Morvan Lebesque, *Carrefour*, 2/11/49, p. 8; 'La critique parle jusqu'ici de Quand Vient la fin comme d'un grand chef-d'œuvre. Pas une dissonance.' Unpublished letter

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ethical standards of contemporary society and the writer's right to describe them. These (and others) are works which deserve to be read.

In the years after Guérin's death, there was periodic recognition of the quality of his work. The critic Louis le Sidaner[11] called Guérin 'la grande révélation de ces dernières années.' Writing in *Le Populaire du Centre* (10/11/56) Robert Margerit stated that 'Raymond Guérin était en train de s'élever à la classe des Balzac, Zola, Proust…' Margerit was unable to see anyone else doing what he, Guérin, had done, describing Guérin as a '*colosse'* that the current fad for sentimentality ('*la mièvrerie de la littérature actuelle'*) could not bear.

C'est le bouquet ![12] republished René Etiemble's detailed study of Guérin which had appeared in the NRF.[13] In his preface to Georges Hyvernaud's *Le Wagon à Vaches*[14], Etiemble recalled his attachment to Guérin's work : 'Ce Guérin-là, je ne l'avais pas raté : dès son Zobain je l'avais célébré' (Hyvernaud, 1986, p. II). Maurice Nadeau, who in a survey of critics[15] placed *L'Apprenti* in his list of the top 10 novels published since the war, was still three decades later motivated to incorporate a lengthy section on *L'Apprenti* and Guérin in *Grâces leur soient rendues.*[16]

If this is the case, one needs to ask <u>why Guérin's work was and is not being read</u>.

For his contemporaries, Guérin must have been a remote and unappealing figure, an outspoken and judgemental outsider. His career was slow to develop and never really acquired momentum. Ten years separated the publication of his first and third new works, in part owing to his 42 months in captivity which meant that his second work appeared in his absence. To some extent a result of his own choices – his refusal to join the Paris literary circuit; his rejection of all invitations to contribute to journals until 1946 – Guérin failed to make his name familiar to a wide readership. There is no doubt also that his interventions in public reflected an increasingly embittered perspective after his release from captivity in November 1943. These were not going to endear him to a public which had had its own but different experience of wartime hardship.

In terms of later readers, Guérin's work may appear too rooted in its time – a misconception, perhaps related to his integration within several texts of cultural allusion to the period. The very size of several of the works is also inhibiting. In exhorting Guérin to '*faire long ... très long'* Jean Grenier may not necessarily have advanced Guérin's long-term interests.

Perhaps the most powerful force is the *oeuvre*'s perceived difficulty or inaccessibility. In any first contact with the secondary studies of the work of Raymond Guérin one is struck by the recurrence of certain concepts. One in particular - '*incompréhension'* – stimulated the project of which this thesis is the outcome.

Jean Paulhan to Raymond Guérin, dated 7/9/41. Fonds Guérin, Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet (hereafter BLJD].

[11] *Masques et Visages*, January 1956.

[12] Paris: Gallimard, 1967.

[13] *Du style soutenu au style souteneur : Pour R. Guérin* pp. 60-77.

[14] Paris: Editions Ramsay, 1986.

[15] *Carrefour* 28/12/55, an article by-lined Le Magot Solitaire, who described *L'Apprenti* and *Quand vient la fin* as 'inoubliables'.

[16] Paris: Albin Michel, 1990, p. 188-191.

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What is '*incompréhension'*? Whose '*incompréhension'* is it? Why did the work of Guérin attract this '*incompréhension'*?

Kauffmann is emphatic that the cause of '*incompréhension'* is one of inattentive or prejudiced reading:

> De *L'Apprenti* datent les malentendus sur son œuvre. Ils ne sont toujours pas dissipés aujourd'hui. Ce n'est pas qu'on ne lit pas Guérin. C'est beaucoup plus simple : on ne sait – ou on ne veut pas – lire ce qui est écrit. (Kauffmann, 2007, p. 192)

Curatolo points to the power of the paratext surrounding Guérin, which reinforces '*malentendus'* or received ideas about his work: that he is a realist, that his work is influenced by that of Céline and so on.[17]

Perhaps the explanation lies elsewhere. Although it may be succumbing to an orthodoxy propagated by Guérin himself, in essence '*incompréhension'* appears to be a synonym for unpredictability, a frustration of the public's (and most critics') apparent need – according to Guérin - to classify both the individual and the writer once and for all.

Guérin's refusal to re-use styles of writing – in Kauffmann's words, the continual shattering of the moulds – contributed to this uncertainty, but was a fundamental characteristic of the writer's approach. There are two aspects to this.

First, there was the uncompromising determination of the writer to find a form for communicating his ideas which best suited the material. This was shared in a very early letter to Paulhan (dated 5/6/36): 'Gide a raison (comme presque toujours): Comment ne parlerais-je pas difficilement ? J'ai des choses nouvelles à dire'.

As Guérin wrote in an article in *La Parisienne*[18], his constant experimentation of format and style was an imperative:

> Dans mes écrits personnels, ce n'est jamais mon tempérament qui mène ma main. Ce sont les personnages, les milieux, les sujets que je choisis. C'est si vrai que je n'ai jamais su ni pu écrire un livre qui ressemblât à l'autre. Ce n'est pas le désir de changement (comme chez Gide) ou par caprice d'alternance (comme chez Montherlant). Non. C'est uniquement parce que ce livre que j'ai le dessein d'écrire m'impose sa force, le rythme qui lui conviendra et jusqu'à l'arabesque où il lui plaire de s'inscrire. Donc …

At a fundamental structural level, the repurposing of literary 'moulds' is excluded.

Second, as always with Guérin, there is an element of bravado. Not content with the self-gratification of being 'a writer', there is an impression of his wishing to be '*the* writer', that is the individual blessed with the mastery of all forms of writing. Privately, Guérin often boasted of his ability to pastiche, a claim he made public in the article in *La Parisienne* mentioned above:

> Si peu que je fréquente une œuvre et, hop là ! Je peux écrire naturellement dans le ton même de cette œuvre. [..] Montaigne, Stendhal, Valéry, Gide, Alain, Proust, Colette, Giraudoux, tous

[17] 'Raymond Guérin. Le Malentendu' in *La Revue Littéraire*, textes réunis par Bernard Alluin et Bruno Curatolo, Le Texte et L'Edition, Université de Bourgogne, 2000. Quoted by Kauffmann, 2007, p. 192.
[18] 'L'inimitable, le jongleur et le novice' in *Humeurs*, 1996, pp. 93-111. Originally published in *La Parisienne*, juin 1954. The quotation on this page is from page 94.

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> ceux que vous voudrez, et encore plus, et encore plus, je les imite à volonté. […] Ce don (ou ce travers, comme on voudra) m'est si familier qu'il n'y a pas que les œuvres dont je subisse l'empreinte.

The display of virtuosity is thus in part just that, ostentation.

Guérin's resistance to a settled mode of writing represented a consistent challenge to the readership. If the picture of the implied author was a highly confused one, this according to Kauffmann (2007, p. 350) was precisely the objective. In a letter to Guérin dated 7/12/1946, Jean Grenier referred to what Kauffmann calls 'la nature insaisissable de ce mutant*'* : *'*Je ne vous connais pas du tout, je ne connais que plusieurs Raymond Guérin qui n'ont aucun rapport l'un avec l'autre'.[19]

With the appearance of each new work, the numbers of the disaffected grew, to the point at which Guérin was literally appealing to the 'happy few' of his and Stendhal's imagination.

In terms of the content of the works, '*incompréhension'* is code for 'disapproval'. To reject the writer's assertion of his '*droit de tout dire'* and his incorporation within the literary text of language and material which contemporary society might consider unpalatable, this is a militant failure of understanding. This form of '*incompréhension'* is expressed through the instruments of the state, represented by the censors whose intervention in 1946 mutilated the published version of *L'Apprenti*.

These were battles that Guérin was more than happy to fight. His correspondence contains many declarations of intransigence: every new text required a new mode of expression, and no term or topic was to be considered inadmissible if it were appropriate for the discourse.[20]

In the short term, *incompréhension* was for Guérin a desirable commodity, albeit a qualified one. For the inflated but fragile ego of Guérin, an accommodation with the fact of his limited popular appeal needed to be found. Acutely conscious of the elite intellectual stature conferred upon him by the very fact of publication[21], and perhaps surprised that this was not widely and repeatedly acknowledged by the public, Guérin's protective carapace was founded on a distorted logic that the public's indifference to his work was evidence of its difficulty and complexity, hence of its value, hence of his entitlement to status for having produced it. In this context, Kauffmann recalls with justification the line from *Parmi...* in

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[19] Quoted by Kauffmann, 2007, p. 350. Letter in Fonds Guérin, BLJD.

[20] One example, from a letter to Henri Calet, 16/01/39 : '[Lettre à un jeune esclave] …. Ouvrage nécessaire et neuf en tout cas, pour lequel il me faudra recommencer à zéro comme j'avais commencé pour Zobain. Sans doute aurais-je été mieux vu, si j'avais refait un deuxième Zobain. Mais ce genre de prostitution ne m'intéresse pas. / J'écris Quand vient la fin. Et pour Quand vient la fin, ce sera un troisième recommencement à zéro car il y a aussi loin de Quand vient la fin à Zobain ou à Lettre à un jeune esclave qu'il y a loin entre ces deux derniers. Et avec mon Empédocle ou avec mon Album, que j'ai déjà fini de rédiger ce sera un quatrième et cinquième recommencement.' In *Calet, Guérin Correspondance*, 2005, p. 34.

[21] Guérin in a letter to Jean Grenier, 7/6/36, on learning of the imminent publication of *Zobain* : 'Je ne fais plus partie de la foule des hommes ; je me suis rangé parmi les 4 ou 500 artistes qui ont la prétention d'avoir un cerveau spécial'. BN Fonds Grenier, also quoted by Kauffmann 2007, p. 59.

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which Monsieur Hermès refers to 'l'amer délice d'être incompris': 'Guérin a parfois abusé de ce plaisir'.[22]

Guérin's attitude to published criticism was complex. An individual who made a statement of his own intellectual and geographical isolation he nonetheless craved attention, collected and often annotated all reviews[23] (a subscription to *l'Argus de la Presse*[24] was maintained throughout his career right up until his death) and for all but a few critics, whom he habitually contacted directly in the event of an article that he considered favourable, maintained a hearty contempt.

Guérin's correspondence in the post-war period is dominated by an anguished perception that his work is the victim of misreading. In a letter to Louis Emié (28/11/46)[25] he refers tiredly to 'cette étrange, trop étrange incompréhension' which surrounds his writing. This imperfectly expresses the extent of his frustration: to Marcel Arland he complains that the reaction to *L'Apprenti* has left him '*démoralisé'*[26], whilst to Jean Paulhan he returns again and again to the same grievance.[27]

Two tactics were adopted by Guérin in the campaign against *incompréhension*. The first was to intervene directly in public with statements about his work.[28] The second was a strategic exploitation of the paratextual opportunities with each published book. Guérin mobilised the space around the text itself to create the conditions for a desired reception. This very modern weaponisation of the paratext will be examined for each text covered in this thesis.

There is no doubt that, despite the positive elitist rationale with which he was able to intellectualise it, Guérin was fearful of '*incompréhension'.* That is, he feared – correctly, in his own lifetime – that no one would be able to identify the link of all the disparate works in

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[22] Kauffmann, 2007, p. 270.

[23] In his review of *Quand vient la fin* (*Aujourd'hui*, 10/9/41), Jean-Pierre Maxence commented that some pages reminded him of 'Sartre, moins la poésie'. In the cutting of this article seen in the scrapbook at Guérin's house, the last three words quoted had been scratched out in pen by Guérin himself.

[24] Guérin compiled scrapbooks from the cuttings sent to him by *l'Argus de la Presse*. The author was fortunate to be able to consult these scrapbooks during a visit to Guérin's former home in Bordeaux in 1987, and they are now in the Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, in the Fonds Guérin. As the information was not fully recorded in the scrapbook, for some of the newspaper and journal articles mentioned in this thesis the author is able to provide a date of publication, but unfortunately not a specific page reference.

[25] Quoted by Kauffmann, 2007, p. 192.

[26] Letter Raymond Guérin to Marcel Arland, dated 12/12/46, quoted by Kauffmann 2007 p. 191.

[27] Unpublished letters Raymond Guérin to Jean Paulhan : 'Je crains bien que les critiques ne comprennent pas grand'chose de *L'Apprenti*… […] Mais il faut bien avouer que personne jusqu'ici n'a su dire, ni sur la forme et l'expression du livre, ni sur le sens profond de mon entreprise (et ses prolongements et ses ambivalences : grossièreté, pureté) ce qui méritait d'être dit. Oui, la critique […] risque, cette fois, de passer complètement à côté.' (7/10/46) ; [On *Parmi*..] 'Il est bien évident que ce livre est, de loin, de très loin, supérieur à tout ce que j'ai écrit jusqu'ici. Seulement voilà, à part quelques-uns, personne n'a jamais vraiment lu ce livre, ce que j'appelle lire, avec lenteur, dans le détail, comme on lirait un récit court et ciselé. Bah !' (Undated letter, early October, 1951) ; 'Marcel m'a dit que Dominique Aury parlera des Poulpes dans la NRF. Il me tarde de lire ce qu'elle va en dire. Ça me changera sûrement des idioties, des mornes idioties que ce petit imbécile froid, que ce scolaire-glacé de Nimier, a commises à mon sujet dans Carrefour.' (20/6/53) I will argue in the chapters below that one of the explanations for this critical 'misreading' is that the project itself is so radical and innovatory.

[28] For example, an article published in his column in *Juin* magazine, 'Les Egarements de la critique', in which he explored and repudiated these in relation to *L'Apprenti*. This article is reproduced in *Chroniques,* 2015, pp. 158-165.

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his name, that his *oeuvre* would remain fragmentary. Writing in his wartime diary *Le Temps de la Sottise*, he states:

> La seule chose qui me chiffonnerait, serait de laisser justement une fausse idée de moi par mon œuvre. […] J'ai dit déjà que je n'étais pas loin de considérer dès ses débuts mon œuvre comme manquée du fait que je n'avais pas pu en faire un tout unique, un seul livre auquel j'aurais pu donner le titre de 'Métamorphoses' et dans lequel seraient venus se ranger tous mes ouvrages. Mais quelle déception ! Ce ne seront jamais maintenant que fragments épars. VIII, 58-59

> Qui verra, qui dira le lien qui lie l'un à l'autre, malgré de si violents changements de ton, non seulement *Zobain* ou *Quand vient la fin*, *L'Apprenti Psychologue* ou *La Confession de Diogène*, mais encore tous les autres ? VIII, 59

> Et maintenant que mon *Apprenti* est sans doute sur le point de paraître, je sens bien que je suis hélas ! exposé à de nouveaux malentendus. Car enfin, qui saura que *L'Apprenti* ne fait que s'insérer dans une série de 'fictions' nullement gratuites mais où j'ai placé des êtres en face des problèmes et des situations les plus pathétiques de la vie ? Pour moi, *L'Apprenti* ne peut pas se détacher d'un ensemble qui comprendra aussi *Parmi tant d'autres feux*, *Les Poulpes* et au moins, *Je est un autre*.

<u>This study – intentions and parameters</u>

The objective of this thesis initially, and long before the extracts above from *Le Temps de la Sottise* had come to the author's attention, was to attempt to explain the architecture of the overall corpus, and examine the place within the whole of each individual work. This thesis provides for the first time the type of comprehensive reading that Guérin sought, but in a manner perhaps more critical than he envisaged.

Looking at the tri-partite schema adopted by Guérin – the organisation of (most) texts under three umbrella terms: *mythe*, *confession*, *fiction* – I contend that there is a conscious attempt to create what I call an '*espace automythologique'*, a multiplicity of perspectives on the self, developed using a collage of different types of text.[29] This is an *exercice de style* on a grand scale. An important part of this discussion is the paratext of each work. I explore why it is that, in the work of Guérin, the paratext is such an active space – reasons rooted in the writer's impatience with the reception accorded his work and his desire to frame it himself - and examine the innovatory ways in which the writer exploits it.

As this project developed, however, it became clear that proper acknowledgement needed to be made of the truly ground-breaking nature of some aspects of the corpus. As I assemble the evidence in the course of this thesis, I hope to sustain the contention that this is an innovatory autonarrational project, and that in *Ebauche* in particular we see original autofictional tropes that pre-date the work of Doubrovsky by 30 years. I argue that so revolutionary are they that, in part, they contributed to the pall of '*incompréhension'* that enveloped this *oeuvre.*

[29] Owing to limitations of space, texts which fall outside the main genre brackets have had to be omitted from this study. These works are : *La Main Passe* (1947), *La Peau Dure* (1948), *Un romancier dit son mot* (1948), *Du côté de chez Malaparte* (1950) and *Fragment Testamentaire* (1950). The most likely reason for their exclusion by Guérin from the tri-partite schema itself is that they were not published by Gallimard. For the same reason, one *confession*, *La Tête Vide* (1952), has also had to be omitted. There is a brief discussion of these texts in the Conclusion. The arguments advanced within the thesis apply equally to these texts.

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An introduction to the '*espace automythologique'*

The theoretical context

Guérin's work pre-empts by several decades the arrival in 1977 of the term which revitalised *écritures intimes*, *autofiction*. Below, I summarise the elements of Serge Doubrovsky's concept which appeared initially to be so new : first, because of its influence in shaping the space and, second, because I will argue later that Guérin's *Ebauche* is an autofictional project *avant la lettre*.

The work of Vincent Colonna and Philippe Gasparini is used to provide clarity on the confused space of *écritures intimes* post-Doubrovsky, in which in my view the work of Guérin sits. Ultimately, I adopt Gasparini's concept of *autonarration* to define the parameters of this type of writing.

Autonarration assists also in the construction of a stable theoretical model to describe what I contend to be the writer's global objective. *Autonarration* repairs a conceptual hole at the centre of Philippe Lejeune's idea of *l'espace autobiographique*, an idea which I contend to be broadly similar in function but especially in intention to what I label Guérin's *espace automythologique*.

Within *écritures intimes* the texts and structures which surround the main text are often part of the act of communication. To account for Guérin's active exploitation of this paratextual space I rely on the terminology and ideas of Gérard Genette's *Seuils*.

One element of the paratextual sphere, and a component in the construction of *l'espace automythologique*, is genre. To support my comments regarding Guérin's use of genre I depend on the work of Jean-Marie Schaeffer.

Serge Doubrovsky and the 'birth' of autofiction

The term '*autofiction'* appeared for the first time in 1977 on the cover of the book *Fils* by Serge Doubrovsky, and was explained in a short theoretical text.[30]

Broadly, *autofiction* designates a text in which the identity of writer, narrator and central character is common; which is constructed around real events, documents, conversations and so on, all as Doubrovsky claims thoroughly documented[31] in order to ensure their veracity; which contains an element of psychoanalysis of the self; which does not necessarily respect chronological time but establishes its own time parameters; which is innovatory in its style; and whose '*pacte'*, to use Lejeune's term, is '*romanesque'* and not referential. The self is thus

[30] Serge Doubrovsky, 'Autobiographie/vérité/psychanalyse', in *Autobiographiques de Corneille à Sartre* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1988) pp. 61 – 79.

[31] 'En bonne et scrupuleuse autobiographie, tous les faits et les gestes du récit sont littéralement tirés de ma propre vie : lieux et dates ont été maniaquement vérifiés. La part d'invention dite romanesque se réduit à fournir le cadre et les circonstances d'une pseudo-journée, qui serve de fourre-tout à la mémoire. […] L'identité supplémentaire de l'écrivain et du critique me permet ici de garantir la véracité du registre référentiel.' (Doubrovsky, 1988, p. 69).

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producer and product of text, or as Doubrovsky puts it (1988, p. 61), '*le projet d'autobiographie moderne consisterait moins à vouloir se peindre que s'écrire.*'

The novelty or defining trick of *autofiction,* at its inception at least, was its incorporation within the work of real names, albeit in a fictional setting: 'A l'inverse du 'Roman Autobiographique' traditionnel, qui présente une histoire (plus ou moins) vraie comme fictive, en déguisant notamment les noms propres, *Fils* offre une histoire et des noms propres authentiques sous la rubrique du 'roman'. (Doubrovsky 1988, p. 74)

Theoretical work on the evolution of *écritures intimes* in the period after *Fils*

Vincent Colonna's[32] principal contention is that 'autofiction' is nothing new, but rather a novel label for a form of writing which has existed since Antiquity.[33] He identifies several literary traditions: 'une tradition fantastique, où l'écrivain se travestit en chaman pour s'aventurer; une tradition spéculaire, qui multiplient les jeux de miroirs et les clins d'œil; une tradition biographique; une forme intrusive'.

Colonna maintains that it is the breadth, or more accurately vagueness, of the term '*autofiction'* that allows it to be so widely claimed (2004, p. 15). Since dictionaries bring only further uncertainty[34], he seeks to offer his own definition of the term '*autofiction'*:

> Tous les composés littéraires où un écrivain s'enrôle sous son nom propre (ou un dérivé indiscutable) dans une histoire qui présente les caractéristiques de la fiction, que ce soit par un contenu irréel, par une conformation conventionnelle (le roman, la comédie) ou par un contrat passé avec le lecteur. (Colonna, 2004, pp. 70-71)

Colonna asserts that there are several identifiable forms of '*autofiction'*, each differently manifesting an entity which can to a greater or lesser extent be held to be a projection, inscription or referent of the writer: *Autofiction fantastique* (p. 75), *Autofiction biographique* (p. 93), *Autofiction spéculaire* (p. 119) and *Autofiction intrusive (autoriale)*. The definition of these depends not on the formal elements of the text in themselves, more the effect that these have on the reader. (p. 74).

In his 2004 study, Philippe Gasparini[35] asked what he considers the most pressing question in the mind of the reader: ''Est-il je?', autrement dit: 'Est-ce l'auteur qui raconte sa

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[32] Vincent Colonna, *Autofiction, et Autres Mythomanies Littéraires* (Paris : Editions Tristram, 2004).

[33] In a lengthy footnote, Colonna surveys the usage of the neologism in the decades after its coinage. First, he examines the successive redefinitions of the term provided by Doubrovsky himself (*Parcours Critique*, 1980; *Autobiographiques*, 1988), in the course of which '*autofiction'* was gradually brought to the point where its definition overlapped with what Colonna refers to as '*le roman autobiographique nominal*' (2004, p. 196). The term was quickly appropriated by critics as a synonym for '*fiction de soi', 'invention de soi', travestissement imaginaire de soi*' etc. It was used in a 1978 article by Lejeune (reproduced in *Je est un autre*, 1980) and by Genette to describe the ambiguous fictional status of *A la Recherche du temps perdu* (*Palimpsest*es, 1982, p. 293). Attempts to define the neologism continued throughout the following decades. In general, it served to indicate what Colonna calls '*une inflexion de la littérature personnelle*' in a period of suspicion and hostility towards autobiography and in place of the term '*roman autobiographique'*. Depending on the individual's point of view, it could be seen as an important contributor in an age of hyperindividualism, or an egregious example of '*nombrilisme, impudeur, exhibitionnisme, impuissance créatrice'* (2004, p. 199).

[34] Colonna found 'deux significations tout aussi malheureuses : l'une restreinte et sans intérêt, où il se confond avec l'autobiographie (c'est celle du Larousse) ; l'autre, plus large mais trop élastique, où il forme une sorte de mana pour distinguer tous les alliages compréhensibles de la fiction et de l'écriture de soi (c'est à peu près celle du Robert)', (2004, p. 15).

[35] Philippe Gasparini, *Est-il Je ? Roman autobiographique et autofiction* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 2004).

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vie ou un personnage fictif ?*'* (Gasparini, 2004, p. 9). The reader, he contends, has a feeling that the writing belongs to a particular literary category, but is unable to ascribe a genre or describe the genre precisely, nor find a label for it which is recognised and used generally.

Summarising first what he sees as the essential features of Doubrovsky's definition (Gasparini, 2004, p. 12), and the later proposition of Genette and Colonna that this term be reserved for cases of '*fictionnalisation de soi*', Gasparini feels that usage has superseded these definitions, and the neologism is now essentially a synonym for the '*roman autobiographique*' whose semantic content it has inherited. This, in his view, confounds those advocates of '*autofiction'* as 'une forme d'expression inédite, postmoderne, sans antécédent, sans généalogie, sans histoire'.

The problematic of this previously undefined genre, according to Gasparini, is that it requires what he calls simultaneous double reading. Its twin status, as both fictional and referential, and 'saturated' with indicators of both, enriches the pleasure of the text. He borrows Lejeune's idea of the fictional/referential axis, on which each text takes a particular place, within the global concept of an *'espace générique'* rather than a strict genre itself. This enables a flexible approach to be adopted so that a wide range of texts broadly of this nature can be incorporated. Gasparini's definition of the '*espace générique'* is as follows:

> Ce genre regroupe à mon avis tous les récits qui programment une double réception, à la fois fictionnelle et autobiographique, quelle que soit la proportion de l'une et de l'autre. Dans cette optique, le degré de véridicité importe peu. C'est la richesse rhétorique des procédés de double affichage qui devient, à l'intérieur de cette classe de récits, un critère de classement et d'appréciation. (Gasparini, 2004, p. 14)

The idea of the '*espace générique'* is one that Gasparini developed fruitfully in his 2008 study,[36] which addresses the root of the diversity and incoherence of applications of the neologism, caused principally by its suffix. 'Fiction' is used by some critics as an affirmation that a text is composed of imaginary events, by others as a simple – or in Gasparini's opinion specious - token of literariness, in opposition to texts of a referential nature. Gasparini contends that Doubrovsky exploits this confusion, coining a term which enabled him to subvert the distinction between autobiography and fiction. Lejeune's work had established the notion of '*contrat de lecture*', but by authorising writing about the self which contained no reference to the concept of truth he made this redundant.

The key concept that Gasparini adopts for all *écritures intimes* is *autonarration*, a neologism borrowed from Arnaud Schmitt[37], whom Gasparini quotes as follows:

> Se narrer, s'autonarrer consiste à faire basculer son autobiographie dans le littéraire. Se dire, certes, mais avec toute la complexité inhérente au roman et aux variations modales, polyscopiques, stylistiques propres au genre. En d'autres termes, s'autonarrer consiste à se dire comme dans un roman, à se voir comme un personnage même si la base référentielle est bien réelle.

[36] Philippe Gasparini, *Autofiction – Une aventure du langage* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 2008).
[37] Arnaud Schmitt, 'Auto-narration et auto-contradiction dans Mercy of a Rude Stream d'Henry Roth', *L'Autorité en question*, Annales du CLAN, 29 (2005), (Pessac : Maison des sciences de l'homme d'Aquitaine), pp. 181-196. Quoted by Gasparini, 2008, p. 312.

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Incorporating the Robert definition of *narration*: 'un exposé écrit et détaillé d'une suite de faits, dans une forme littéraire,' and the etymology of the word itself, whose indo-European roots relate to 'knowledge', and adding to that its usage in Latin in which it acquired the sense of recounting or relating, Gasparini considers it an ideal term to be used specifically for the texts in question. He continues :

> Flanqué du préfixe *auto* (en anglais *self*) il va permettre de qualifier un texte relatant 'une suite de faits' dignes d'être communiqués parce que l'auteur les *connaît* intimement et qu'il les inscrit dans un plaidoyer *pro domo sua*. (2008, p. 312)

'*Autonarration'*, however, thus has a broader sphere of usage than '*autofiction'*. It designates not a genre, but the contemporary form of an archi-genre.

Like Colonna, Gasparini emphasises that many of the traits which seem to characterise *autonarration* today and which appear so modern appeared in the *roman autobiographique* well before 1975. He alludes to the extensive *tradition égotiste* in French writing, citing Montaigne, Rousseau, Châteaubriand, Stendhal, several of whom were central to the ideas and writing practices of Guérin.

The fact that writers have been striving to go beyond the traditional strategies is evidenced by Gasparini in the number of new formulae proposed. Included in these are Michel Leiris' '*essais autobiographiques'*, '*une fiction qui n'en soit pas une'* (Sartre), '*le mentir vrai'* (Aragon), '*dit par un personnage de roman'* (Barthes), '*nouvelle autobiographique'* (Robbe-Grillet), '*traité de mémoire'* (Roubaud), '*surfiction'* (Federmann), and '*roman du Je'* (Forrest). To which it would be possible to add, as I will show, '*mythologie de la réalité'* (Raymond Guérin).

The encompassing concept of *autonarration* in place, Gasparini is able to account for the theoretical status of other *écritures intimes*. Autofiction is in this model now merely one example of *autonarration*:

> Le terme *autofiction* retrouve une cohérence sémantique pour désigner les textes appartenant à la second catégorie d'autonarration, le composant *fiction* indiquant clairement qu'un certain nombre d'éléments de l'auto-récit ont été imaginés ou remaniés par l'auteur. Autofiction ne signifiera ni plus ni moins que *roman autobiographique contemporain*. (2008, p. 313)

<u>*Autonarration* – an enhancement to Lejeune's *espace autobiographique*</u>

Gasparini's original contention is that *autonarration* is an archi-genre, the equivalent of Lejeune's *espace autobiographique* : 'Il recouvre des textes strictement autobiographiques, régis par le pacte du même nom, et des *romans autobiographiques*, obéissant à une stratégie d'ambiguïté générique plus ou moins retorse'. (2008, pp. 312-13) This enables Gasparini to propose a solution to what he perceives to be the theoretical instability in Lejeune's concept, the space occupied by the work of Gide, as articulated in *Le Pacte Autobiographique*.[38]

Gasparini observes that the texts which comprise Lejeune's *espace autobiographique* are of radically differing natures in terms of their '*pactes'*. Some establish a '*contrat de vérité'*, others a '*pacte fictionnel*', but to use the single term '*espace autobiographique'* ignores this. In addition, what Lejeune had not contemplated, before the arrival of Doubrovsky, was the

[38] Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (nouvelle édition augmentée), Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1975, 1996.

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possibility of the existence of a third pact. Gasparini's term *autonarration* inherently accounts for all three types of pact and resolves this theoretical anomaly. For this reason, I adopt it as a working tool.

Nonetheless, *autonarration* and *espace autobiographique* are still not fully synonymous. What Gasparini omits is the idea of intentionality. The differentiating function of Lejeune's concept is that it is pre-emptive, organising. *L'espace autobiographique* is not simply one in which the writer indulges in Schmitt's self-narration, but is a rather a highly strategic tool designed to express the multiplicity of the self. This distinction is crucial, particularly to my own assertion of Guérin's *espace automythologique*, which I contend is precisely strategic in this way.

Exploring *l'espace autobiographique*

In his chapter on Gide in *Le Pacte Autobiographique*, Philippe Lejeune identified the writer's project as global and encompassing. Coining the phrase '*espace autobiographique'*, Lejeune described the objective behind Gide's corpus as the expression and embodiment of his own polyvalency. This idea, he conceded, was not new, and indeed its possibility had been visualised by writers since the end of the 18th century (Lejeune, 1996, p. 185). What distinguished Gide, states Lejeune, is its transformation into a conscious strategy: 'D'un effet produit aléatoirement il a fait un but visé a priori de manière très volontaire : tout se passe comme si son œuvre était en réalité lue d'avance.' (Lejeune, 1996, p. 185)

The defining characteristic of Lejeune's concept is its intentionality. He maintains that the variety and internal contradictions of the corpus were, as it were, known in advance. Lejeune refers twice to Gide's early vision of his '*Œuvres complètes'*, existing as volumes to be written, but which existed already in that form (1996, pp. 171, 192). The corpus thus becomes a collection of works which have a significance beyond themselves, all contributing to the overall picture of Gide:

> Le *but* de Gide est donc de produire (au double sens d'inventer et de manifester) l'image de soi, celle d'un être vivant avec toute sa complication et son histoire ; mais le *moyen* de ce but n'est pas le récit autobiographique stricto sensu. C'est à une architecture de textes, certains de fiction, d'autres de critique, d'autres intimes certes, que Gide remet la tâche de manifester son image. Tout se passe comme s'il n'avait pas à écrire qui il est, mais à l'être en l'écrivant. L'image de soi n'a rien à voir avec un contenu d'énoncé, c'est un effet d'énonciation. Pour être produite, l'ambiguïté autobiographique ne passe pas nécessairement par l'autobiographie. Au contraire. (Lejeune, 1996, p. 171)

For the reader, the existence of all works within a corpus gives the impression of '*une lecture déjà faite'* (1996, p. 186), that there exists a meaning elsewhere than in the reception of the reader but to which the reader does not yet have full access. Chronology, too, is important. A contemporary reader of Gide would have been required to shed any assumptions based on previous texts as new texts arrived, each time as a fresh enigma.

Lejeune's appraisal is unequivocal. He describes the elaboration of '*l'espace autobiographique'* as 'l'invention la plus originale de Gide sur le plan des formes littéraires' (1996, p. 184), in its conception and through the extent of its stylistic reach. The key differentiator in Lejeune's concept is that of intentionality. This was a project pre-conceived and implemented, not the outcome of a random collection of texts. It is this element, in

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conjunction with Gasparini's *autonarration*, that will be instrumental in defining Guérin's *espace automythologique*.

Exploiting the paratext: Gérard Genette's *Seuils*

The notion of '*pacte'* is central to *écritures intimes*, as the recent work of Lejeune and others has demonstrated. '*Pactes'* are usually visible and explicit, however, even if formulated ironically. In modern writing, and especially in the field of *écritures intimes* or *autonarration*, there has been a tendency also to exploit areas surrounding the text as the locus for communication, much of it coded or subliminal. The strategic use of this 'paratext' is a particular feature of the work of Raymond Guérin, one that in this writer's view is innovative and tactical. In order to explore these aspects of Guérin's work, I propose to base my observations on the work of Gérard Genette.[39]

In common with Genette, I too find the reflections of J. Hillis Miller on the prefix 'para' an illuminating starting point:

> A thing in 'para' is, moreover, not only simultaneously on both sides of the boundary line between inside and outside. It is also the boundary itself, the screen which is at once a permeable membrane connecting inside and outside, confusing them with one another, allowing the outside in, making the inside out, dividing them but also forming an ambiguous transition between one and the other.[40]

These observations are especially pertinent to the work of Guérin, in which – as I will show – the 'inreach' and 'outreach' are at times almost flaunted.

Genette defines the space around the text in two terms: the *peritext*, which covers all of the features, usually but not necessarily in text form, which directly surround the published text, such as title, epigraph(s), dedications, prefaces and so on; and the *epitext*, which describes all references to the text in interviews, critical works, correspondences and so on which have the capacity to inform reception of the main text.

This '*zone indécise'*, this 'fringe' (Lejeune, 1996, p. 45), is not, in Genette's view, an innocent one. 'Cette frange .. constitue, entre texte et hors-texte, une zone non seulement de transition, mais de *transaction'* (Genette, 1987, p. 8). He lists the illocutionary powers of the paratext: communicating a simple piece of *information*; making known an *intention*, or an editorial / authorial *interpretation*; sharing a *decision*, a piece of *advice*, even an *injunction*. 'L'essentiel', declares Genette, '[…] est l'aspect fonctionnel du paratexte. [….] le paratexte, sous toutes ses formes, est un discours fondamentalement hétéronome, auxiliaire, voué au service d'autre chose qui constitue sa raison d'être, et qui est le texte'. (Genette, 1987, p. 17).

As Genette further comments, '*tout contexte fait paratexte'* (Genette, 1987, p. 13), using as an example how a knowledge or ignorance of Proust's homosexuality can produce radically different readings of *A la Recherche.*. (Genette, 1987, p. 14). I will argue first that this is especially pertinent in the case of Guérin's work, in which the introduction of personal detail into the text is so strategic; and second that Guérin's own sensitivity to its possibilities

[39] Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987).
[40] J. Hillis Miller, 'The Critic as Host', *Critical Inquiry*, 3, (3) (1977), 439-447 (p. 441). Quoted by Genette, 1987, p. 7 footnote 2.

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– a lesson learned the hard way in the aftermath of the publication of his first work, *Zobain* – caused him to seek to make the paratext an active space.

Genre

Defined by David Duff *as* 'a recurring type or category of text, as defined by structural, thematic and/or functional criteria,'[41] genre theory began with Plato and Aristotle, developed through Hegel and Brunetière, and was embellished by the Romantics. [42] Even in the Twentieth Century it remained problematic, as the rambling non-definition of it in the discussion of Wellek and Warren[43] illustrated.

Derrida saw genre as the imposition of restriction or external force.[44] It is, in his view, an authoritarian imperative which needs to be acknowledged, resisted and deconstructed:

> Dès qu'on entend le mot « genre », dès qu'il paraît, dès qu'on tente de le penser, une limite se dessine. Et quand une limite vient à s'assigner, la norme et l'interdit ne se font pas attendre : « il faut », « il ne faut pas », dit le « genre », le mot « genre », la figure, la voix ou la loi du genre. (Derrida, 2011, p. 252).

Without denying the existence of genres, but refuting their exclusive application, Derrida asserted that the use of the 'genre' label served to impoverish the text, whose natural intertextual adherence across the frontiers of genres is thereby diminished.

For Tzvetan Todorov, in his article of that name, [45] the origin of genres is, simply, other genres. There is no such thing, according to Todorov, as a literature before genre; but what is genre?

> Genres are therefore units that one can describe from two different points of view, that of empirical observation and that of abstract analysis. In a society, the recurrence of certain discursive properties is institutionalised, and individual texts are produced and perceived in relation to the norm constituted by this codification. A genre, literary or otherwise, is nothing but this codification of discursive properties. (Todorov, 1976, p. 162)

Looking at the institutionalised status of genre is significant, as this permits the incorporation of reception:

> It is because genres exist as an institution that they function as 'horizons of expectation' for readers, and as 'models of writing' for authors. […] On the one hand, authors write as a function of (which does not mean in accord with) the existing generic system, which they can demonstrate both within the text and outside it, or even, in a way, between the two: *on the cover of the book*. [my italics] [...] On the other hand, readers read as a function of the generic system, with which they are familiar through criticism, school, the distribution system for the

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[41] *Modern Genre Theory* (edited and introduced by David Duff) (London: Routledge, 2000), p. xiii.
[42] Genette, in *L'Introduction à l'architexte*, contends that the claim by medieval and early modern scholars that their theories on genre were rooted in the texts of Plato and Aristotle was spurious. According to Genette, this bogus claim for the authority of the classical masters was repeated by the Romantics, whose ideas now shape contemporary thinking on genre.
[43] René Wellek and Austen Warren, *The Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1948); (London : Cape, 1949) pp. 241 and 245.
[44] Jacques Derrida, 'La loi du genre', *Glyph* (7, 1980), reproduced in *Parages*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. Edited by John P. Leavey & Tom Conley (2011), 251-87.
[45] Tzvetan Todorov, 'The Origin of Genres', *New Literary History* 8, (1) (1976), translated by Richard M. Berrong, 159 – 70.

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> book, or simple hearsay; it is not necessary that they be conscious of this system, however. (Todorov, 1976, p. 163)

This transfer of genre, which is now seen as a property in the custody as much of the reader as of the writer, informs much of the argument of this thesis. Todorov concludes by re-emphasising the link between genre and speech acts. The importance of the reception of the work is evident in the ideas of Wolf Dieter Stempel.[46] He sees genre as almost a set of guidelines, contemporary to its time, which establish an approach to consuming the text.

An approach to genre: Jean-Marie Schaeffer

For Jean-Marie Schaeffer [47] the name of a genre is the function of a number of factors (Schaeffer, 1989, pp. 122-123). He offers as an example the status of the *Bildungsroman* genre:

> Le terme de *Bildungsroman* délimite son corpus textuel au niveau de l'énonciation (il s'agit d'une fiction narrative écrite), au niveau de la destination (le destinataire est le lecteur réel, c'est-à-dire qu'il n'y a pas de destinataire intra-fictif), mais encore au niveau sémantique (thème : éducation d'un homme) et au niveau syntaxique (plus précisément narratologique : la narration est hétérodiégétique et chronologique). (Schaeffer, 1989, p. 123)

The diversity of generic labels is most evident when we differentiate those created by the writer himself and those which are attributed by critics, theorists and general readers.

> Ou, pour le dire autrement : les mobiles des identifications génériques 'indigènes' sont loin d'être toujours réductibles à ceux des identifications 'exogènes' : classificatoires ou prescriptives (ou les deux à la fois) dans le second cas, elles obéissent souvent à des stratégies plus complexes dans le cas d'un 'baptême' auctorial. Faisant généralement partie de l'appareil paratextuel (page de titre, prologue, avertissement au lecteur etc) leur fonction est essentiellement pragmatique : règle de lecture, mais tout aussi bien, surtout à des époques où les théories exogènes ont une forte emprise sur l'institution littéraire, tentative de légitimation de la pratique littéraire de l'écrivain. (Schaeffer, 1989, pp. 127-28)

These last points are, in my opinion, fundamental to an understanding of Guérin's work. Importantly. Schaeffer also argues that the generic label attached to a text is no guarantee of the nature of text that may follow (Schaeffer, 1989, pp. 128-29).

Schaeffer completes his argument with two critical points:

> Une seule conclusion importe : du point de vue générique il n'y a d'identité textuelle que relative au(x) niveau(x) du message investi(s) par le nom de genre. (Schaeffer, 1989, p. 129)

> Il faut ajouter que dans aucun des exemples que nous avons rencontrés l'identité générique n'est superposable au texte comme totalité syntagmatique-sémantique : ce n'est jamais le texte *total* qui est identifié par un nom de genre, mais tout au plus un acte communicationnel *global* ou une forme fermée – ce qui, nous l'avons vu, n'est nullement la même chose, le texte étant la réalisation de l'acte et la forme n'étant qu'un aspect du texte. (Schaeffer, 1989, p. 130)

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[46] Wolf Dieter Stempel, 'Aspects génériques de la réception', in *Théorie des genres* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1986), pp. 161-78. Article originally published in *Poétique* 39, 1979.

[47] Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Qu'est-ce qu'un genre littéraire*? (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1989).

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'*Relative'*; 'acte communicationnel *global*' - these two ideas need to be retained as we examine the texts bracketed together by Guérin under particular labels.

In terms of 'contracts', or to use Lejeune's term *pactes*, or in his own terminology *généricité auctoriale* or *généricité lectoriale*, Schaeffer argues that texts interact with the nomenclature of genre in both a synchronic and diachronic manner. A text is unable to predetermine its later relationships with other texts or classes of texts which did not exist at the moment of its production, these links depending as much on texts to come (as well as possible historical changes to the criteria of classification), as to the intrinsic properties of the text itself. At the level of the author, he states, the only generally pertinent traits are those which refer to the tradition preceding the text. 'En ce sens', he declares, 'la généricité auctoriale est stable.' (Schaeffer, 1989, p. 148)

Schaeffer utilises a phrase from Alastair Fowler to begin his discussion of *généricité lectoriale*: 'on soutient souvent que les genres procurent un moyen de classification. C'est là une erreur vénérable […] en réalité […] la théorie générique sert à tout autre chose : elle a une fonction de lecture et d'interprétation.' [48] Schaeffer's conclusion reflects this, and re-introduces the idea of diachronicity:

> Au moment de la genèse du texte, généricité auctoriale et généricité lectoriale se superposent plus ou moins [...] Cependant, plus on s'éloigne chronologiquement – ou culturellement – du contexte dans lequel l'œuvre a vu le jour et plus les différences entre la généricité auctoriale et la généricité lectoriale risquent d'être grandes : la généricité auctoriale reste liée au contexte d'origine, puisque c'est une constante, alors que la généricité lectoriale est une variable qui s'enrichit (ou s'appauvrit) de tout contexte inédit. (Schaeffer, 1989, pp. 153-54)

One of the arguments I will develop, reflecting the assertion made above by Schaeffer, is that Guérin was conscious of posterity and, as he appeared to perceive it, its threat to his work. This explains, I will contend, the extent of his use of paratextual strategies as well as his conviction that his texts, even if already published, remained permanently eligible for revision.

In his concluding chapter, Schaeffer identifies four factors which can underpin the classification of texts:

> Tout texte est en effet un acte communicationnel ; tout texte a une structure à partir de laquelle on peut extrapoler des règles ad hoc ; tout texte […] se situe par rapport à d'autres textes, donc possède une dimension hypertextuelle ; tout texte enfin ressemble à d'autres textes. (Schaeffer, 1989, p. 185)

So, genre is a 'relative', flexible concept capable of operating in a number of ways at the same time. Any commonality of '*généricité lectoriale'* and '*généricité auctoriale'* is transitory and their divergence over time inevitable. No text exists in isolation, but establishes its generic identity through its relation to other texts. These ideas are central to our discussion of Guérin's use of terms of genre.

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[48] Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature. An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 137; quoted in Schaeffer, 1989, p. 153.

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The project of Raymond Guérin – *autonarration*, and the creation of the *espace auto-mythologique.*

Autonarration – the first indications

As Kauffmann observes of Guérin (2007, p. 271) : 'L'Histoire n'est qu'un matériau comme un autre qu'il façonne à sa guise pour donner forme à son œuvre. Sa matière première, c'est lui.'

From an early stage, it is possible to detect the presence within the project of *autonarration*. In a letter to Paulhan (24/5/38), Guérin declared that writing was not peripheral, but an integral part of his journey towards himself: 'je ne veux plus écrire que pour m'aider à devenir cet être humain qui est ma véritable ambition.' Five years later, this ambition remained the same. In his letter to Henri Calet (27/9/43)[49], he stated : 'C'est l'homme qui est encore en sommeil en moi dont je voudrais faire une œuvre. Mes livres, pendant longtemps encore sans doute, ne seront que des exutoires.*'* Writing is thus of the self and part of the process of becoming the self, that is a process of *autonarration*.

That writing provides such a vehicle is evident in the function of *Zobain*. This is not merely a published work, but is the name given also by Guérin to the personality and world view of the self of that phase. The framing of the identity as such occurs in the final section of the text itself, and the identity then enters the lexis of Guérin as shorthand to be used in, for example, his correspondence with his partner, Sonia. When Guérin refers sardonically in letters to M. Zobain, or asserts that in a future fiction the change in Zobain will be evident, the reader accesses the entirety of the construct immediately. *Zobain* is third a metonym for Guérin's writing of the period. As he wrote to Paulhan (25/7/36)[50], Guérin acknowledged that in *Zobain* the reader could appreciate

> … à quel point fut ignorante ma pensée, plat mon style, et faux mon jugement. Mais *Zobain* cependant devait être écrit. Il était nécessaire. A cause de *Zobain* je peux progresser un peu plus. Je ne veux pas renier ce résultat de dix ans de gammes, car à travers le néant dont il est sorti je devine les promesses du futur..

Like the later writing of *Parmi …*, the composition of *Zobain* enables Guérin to resolve 'pas mal de complexes [littéraires]'.[51] The self informs the narration, yet is at the same time being formed by the narration. The importance of this symbiosis became stark to Guérin in the early years of his captivity. In diary entries which are distinctly ambiguous, he recognises the value of what he calls *Le Temps de la Sottise* in helping him to define his project.[52] Writing [*Le Temps de la Sottise*] is a tool in shaping his self-creation – that is, almost, a modern *Essais*. In a passage which echoes the final sections of *La Confession de Diogène*, he states:

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[49] In *Calet, Guérin Correspondance* 2005, p. 83.
[50] Fonds Guérin, BLJD.
[51] Letter to Henri Calet, 18/7/49, in *Calet, Guérin Correspondance* 2005, p. 261.
[52] 'combien utile aura été, pour moi du moins, j'en suis maintenant sûr, le temps de la sottise. Il m'aura permis de me trouver. Ou sinon de me trouver – car ce serait avouer une autre sorte de mort – du moins de trouver le chemin qu'il faut suivre pour se trouver'. VI, 7. The ambiguity lies in the title : *Le Temps de la Sottise* was both the name of the diary, and the label given by Guérin to the state of contemporary society. The act of writing the diary and the experience of the time are thus fused into a single concept. Fonds Guérin, BLJD.

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> Ecrire pour moi est une manière d'exutoire, où je me délivre de mes phantasmes et où, en même temps, je me prépare à affronter l'avenir. Ma seule œuvre véritable, si je parviens jamais à la parfaire, ce serait ma propre existence, sublime comme un poème éternel et forte comme une tragédie. Ma propre existence ! Et vis-à-vis de laquelle mes œuvres écrites ne seraient que des brouillons de travail, que des matériaux voire que des déchets, dont la disparition ou la destruction ne m'importerait guère.. VI, 43

Writing therefore has two functions. It enables the writer to package the self, and through this process to facilitate the development of the self. The written works are a by-product, a crystallisation of aspects of the self but not the self in totality.

Autonarration is intrinsic to the project, which however functions on a much larger scale than that of the individual text. In a letter to Paulhan (10/4/44)[53], the undeclared idea of the *espace automythologique* is already discernible:

> Ou plutôt que ma personnalité est d'avoir une âme kaléidoscopique capable de faire jour, tour à tour en moi, à diverses personnalités par ce fait même toujours contrariées. D'où, sans doute, l'intérêt pour moi, d'écrire. C'est la somme seule de ces composantes qui pourra me fixer. Il faut me prendre comme je suis.

It is to this wider project that we now turn.

Raymond Guérin and the creation of the *espace automythologique*: a conscious act

The page '*du même auteur'*, which lists the other works of the author of the main text, is a familiar paratextual feature. In conceptual terms, this corpus list is a versatile entity. It may be a catalogue, perhaps a list of good intentions or merely airy promises. It may assume a status beyond the individual works that constitute it. Including a corpus list may be simply a conventional space-filling exercise, a courtesy to the reader. Many if not most published works list other books by the same writer, so to do so could be argued to be respecting the expectations of that page. On the other hand, as Genette states, the paratextual space is one of transaction. Given the amount of attention devoted to the corpus list by Guérin it is reasonable to examine the nature of any communication that may be taking place.

Sharing a corpus list with the public is in essence a performative act. It suggests that a larger world exists, inhabited and implicitly controlled by the writer, to which the reader is being allowed partial access. To some extent this is expressed in Lejeune's idea that the reader may feel that the texts have seemingly been '*lu[s] d'avance'*, but 'partial' also describes a further quality of the reception: that is, while the reader may access and appreciate the current text, (s)he retains the sense that there may be a wider truth beyond the confines of the individual work. Reception thus becomes a necessarily provisional act. The existence of a series such as *Ebauche* only reinforces this. Any individual text creates its own meaning, but in its juxtaposition with preceding and successive texts, and by the looming presence of the over-arching project, it appears to have the potential for more. The mystique is enhanced if reception is synchronous, that is if the reader is co-opted on to an ongoing and developing project.

The presentation of the corpus list contains implicit statements about the writer. The presence of the publisher's logo establishes first the value of the individual (recipient of the

[53] Unpublished letter. Fonds Guérin, BLJD.

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support of the publisher, of its history and status), then as part of that publisher's team. This is reinforced on the back cover of many texts, in which the name of the current author occupies a place in the list of other titles / authors published by the same house. The imprimatur of 'stable' is important, particularly for an emerging writer like Guérin.

The organisation of the page - the use of a tri-partite schema - is important too. A reader might immediately think of Aristotle, or in the modern era Gide. The importance of the current author is thus quietly elevated by context: the reader may easily begin to consider this a serious project. The distribution supports also the contention that the meaning of each text has already been finalised, that this is 'une lecture déjà faite'. In the allocation of titles under each heading, there must be an organising purpose - this is not merely a random series of titles.

L'espace automythologique: beginnings

The genesis of the concept of *l'espace automythologique* can be traced to the early years of Guérin's captivity, which began in June 1940. The first explicit indication of these reflections was contained in a letter to his partner Sonia (27/3/41),[54] issuing instructions for the liminary pages of the soon to be published *Quand …* Amongst other points, Guérin is insistent that the work is not to be labelled '*roman'*, and he gives precise specifications as to the language and layout of the page '*du même auteur'*. This is the first evidence of his interest in exploiting the paratext.

That this was an ongoing process is reflected in the pages of Guérin's wartime diary, *Le Temps de la Sottise*. Volume VI begins (entry dated 3rd October, 1942) with a reflection on the whole corpus, most of it unpublished at that stage, and the extent to which it reflects the light and shade of the writer's persona. This leads Guérin on to a prospective title for the corpus:

> Aussi suis-je conduit très naturellement à placer toute mon œuvre sous un signe unique. Si je voulais rassembler tous mes livres, écrits ou à écrire, sous un seul titre qui garantirait l'unité de ma démarche – comme '*les Essais'* ou '*Le Temps Perdu'* – c'est le titre de '*Cheminements'* qu'il me faudrait adopter. (VI, 6)

A month later, the development of this idea in the writer's mind is clear. In an entry dated 7th November, 1942, Guérin rues what he considers to have been a missed opportunity.

> Si je l'avais su plus tôt, j'aurais ordonné mon œuvre autrement. Je n'aurais pas laissé paraître mes premiers livres. J'aurais conçu mon œuvre comme un ensemble, comme un tout dans sa diversité. Déjà, autrefois, j'avais été séduit par la façon dont se présentent aux lecteurs les œuvres de Montaigne et de Proust. Mais maintenant, je sens bien que ma vocation profonde me destinait à faire une œuvre de cette parenté. Ce qu'il en paraîtra, ne sera pas autre chose que des fragments. A défaut d'un titre unique comme '*Les Essais'* ou '*A la recherche du Temps perdu'*, peut être mon frémissement intérieur me permettra-t-il de lier entre eux tous ces fragments par un fil secret. Cependant, ce ne sera jamais qu'une œuvre mutilée. VI, 44-45

Already, then, at this stage, there is a clear commitment to an encompassing project. The ultimate published shape of the corpus is also beginning to emerge:

[54] Reproduced in *Raymond Guérin : Lettres à Sonia,* 2005, p. 117

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> Toujours me restera-t-il le regret de n'avoir pas pu écrire un seul livre, un livre qui aurait été le Journal de ma vie intérieure au cours de son long et trébuchant cheminement depuis le temps de mes illusions jusqu'à celui de l'épanouissement de mon esprit. Au lieu de tout cela, me voilà partagé entre les confessions, les fictions et les mythes. Et si je me laisse entraîner depuis quelques années par le plaisir que j'ai à enfanter ces fictions, ce n'est pas que j'aie le sens du tragique ni le sens du comique, mais que j'ai le sens de la vie multiforme. VI, 45-46.

The tri-partite schema is thus, to begin with, albeit a choice consciously made, nonetheless almost a form of damage limitation.

Despite his reservations about fiction, Guérin is beginning to see its possibilities, and the autonarrational project is forming in his head. Insecurity, or indeed doubt, about the reception of his work was already a recurrent theme of Guérin's reflections.[55] To make readers aware of these underlying structures required some paratextual steps, one of which was the move towards an organised corpus, an *espace automythologique*. The urgency to create one was further stimulated by a question in a letter from Henri Calet, following his reading of *Quand…*[56] In an entry dated *31 mai 1943*, Guérin quotes from the letter from Calet:

> « où placer *Quand vient la fin* dans votre œuvre ? Un commencement ? Un écart ? Après *Zobain* on est surpris. »
>
> Voilà, enfin, un point de vue intéressant. Henri Calet a très bien su mettre le doigt sur une des particularités [here the word '*questions'* had been erased and replaced by '*particularités'*] qui m'ont moi-même le plus intrigué. Pourquoi ce *Quand vient la fin* après *Zobain* ? Pourquoi ce second livre si différent du premier, si opposé de ton et de facture ? Par besoin de renouvellement ? Par jeu ? Voulais-je changer de manière ? Mais je n'ai pas de manière. Alors était-ce un accident ? Mais dans ce cas on pourrait dire que chacun de mes livres a été un accident. (VIII 229)

It is clear that, for Guérin, this latter case had to be avoided. If the published works were received as random and independent of one another, the public would have fallen victim to a falsehood.[57] Within the same diary note, *l'espace automythologique* takes on a twin function: that of encapsulating the multiplicity of selves of which Guérin feels himself composed, whilst at the same time offering a structure within which the interplay of texts could be appreciated by a reader.

At this point the full self-mythological dimension begins to emerge. Not only is Guérin clear that the base material of the works is the same – personal experience – but that the use of moulds other than the epistolary / confessional offers the capacity for this material to be resorted, re-presented. That is, fresh perspectives on the self can be obtained, through the prism of different forms of writing.

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[55] Qui verra, qui dira le lien qui lie l'un à l'autre, malgré de si violents changements de ton, non seulement Zobain ou *Quand…*, *l'Apprenti Psychologue* ou *La Confession de Diogène*, mais encore tous les autres ? […] Car enfin, qui saura que *l'Apprenti* ne fait que s'insérer dans une série de 'fictions' nullement gratuites […] ? Pour moi, *l'Apprenti* ne peut pas se détacher d'un ensemble qui comprendra aussi *Parmi.. , Les Poulpes* et au moins *Je est un autre*. (VI, p. 59).

[56] Letter dated 15/5/43, received by Guérin 27/5/43; reproduced in *Calet, Guérin Correspondance*, 2005, p.72.

[57] 'J'ai toujours été hanté par le désir de donner un sens profond et précis à mon œuvre. Cela m'aurait été si pénible d'écrire des ouvrages « gratuits », dûs à ma seule imagination et non essentiels à mon comportement' (VIII, p. 320).

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> Ma forme la plus instinctive d'expression a toujours certainement été celle de la confession. Je me souviens encore du temps où je ne rêvais que d'une œuvre sans personnages et où j'aurais pu constamment dire 'Je'. J'approuvais ceux qui disaient qu'ils voulaient casser les reins au roman. Et pour ma part j'avais pris la décision de n'écrire que par lettres, estimant que c'était là, la forme la plus véritable de toute écriture.
>
> *Zobain, Lettre à un jeune esclave, Album, Quand*… sont sortis de cette veine. Mais j'ai compris plus tard que la forme romanesque pouvait me permettre un élargissement et un enrichissement de l'expression. *l'Apprenti, Les Poulpes, Parmi..* procèdent de cette volonté et cependant ils ne font qu'utiliser, d'une autre manière, la matière de mes confessions.
>
> Enfin, j'ai éprouvé le besoin le besoin d'échapper davantage encore à la réalité. Il ne me suffisait pas du refuge commode de la fiction. Les masques, pour grimaçants qu'ils fussent, restaient encore trop près de la représentation humaine. Cette matière de mes confessions, arrangée, interprétée, maquillée, dans mes fictions, j'ai voulu le transposer tout à fait. Et c'est ainsi que des Mythes ont imposé à moi leur nécessité. *La Confession de Diogène* et *Empédocle* en sont les premières manifestations. (VIII, pp. 231-32)

The fact that Guérin had seen a pathway for his work was reinforced in a diary entry dated 5th September 1943, that is two months prior to his release. (VIII, pp. 320-21). In a long tour d'horizon of the oeuvre, some published, some existing in draft form, some purely at this stage a vision, Guérin set out the function of each text, in broad terms. The material of the self is now packaged as the experiences of '*l'être*', the project has entered the realms of the mythological:

> Je voyais tout d'abord l'être aux prises une confusion de sentiments et de pensées, qui se cherchait (ce fut : *Zobain*). Cet être, se cherchant et regardant autour de lui, en venait à constater que, pour la plupart des humains, que la vie avait perdu son sens et qu'elle n'était au fond qu'une farce, farce tantôt burlesque et macabre (ce fut : *Quand vient la fin*), tantôt incohérente et inutile (ce fut : *Parmi tant d'autres feux*). A partir de là, l'être eut conscience de soi et comprit qu'il était seul au monde, qu'il lui fallait solitairement organiser son destin (ce fut : *l'Apprenti*) mais n'étant pas moins soumis pour cela à la Société et qu'il avait à redouter les forces mauvaises de celle-ci (ce fut : *Les Poulpes*). (Et ce fut aussi *Empédocle* où sur un plan non plus direct cette fois mais mythique, ces forces mauvaises étaient définies.)
>
> Toutefois, la vie n'était pas entièrement à rejeter. Elle pouvait être aussi – malgré la Société et en dehors d'elle – magnifiquement, merveilleusement belle (ce fut : *Album*). Il lui restait donc à chercher une façon de vivre qui lui permettrait de sauver le meilleur. (Ce fut, pour l'actuel, *Lettre à un jeune esclave*, et d'une façon plus philosophique *La Confession de Diogène*). Mais, de l'épreuve même, l'être ne pourrait-il pas tirer les conséquences capables de l'ouvrir à cette vie ? (Ce fut : *Le Temps de la Sottise*). Enfin, parvenu à cet équilibre, que restait-il à cet être, pour achever de donner à son existence une signification et une harmonie, sinon la passion de la connaissance de soi ? (Ce ~~fut~~ sera : *Je est un autre*). [fn1 – Je laisse ici la place à quelques incidences possibles pour l'avenir.]

By the time of his release in November 1943, Guérin had a clear vision of the corpus he wished to produce, outlined in the diary entry above. It was this that he presented, for their observations, to his trusted literary friends Paulhan, Arland, Camus and Sartre during his two-week stay in Paris post-captivity of November - December 1943.[58]

[58] Described in Volume IX of *Le Temps de la Sottise*, extracts of which were published in *Retour de Barbarie* (Bordeaux: Editions Finitude, 2005).

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Sharing the news: presenting *l'espace automythologique* to the public

Introducing the corpus to the public had to wait a little longer. Indeed, Guérin became frustrated at the 18 months that separated his release from captivity and his first intervention in the public space, and this only in order to publish a revised edition of *Quand….* with a short postface, *Après la fin*. Importantly, this edition provided the first opportunity for the display of the new corpus list, with its tri-partite structure and a wealth of promised material.

To observe the change of direction in Guérin's thinking, we need only examine the corpus list of the two editions of *Quand vient la fin*, 1941 and 1945. The 1941 edition features a page ('*Du même auteur*') with the sub heading *aux éditions de la NRF*. In part, this latter could be seen as an attempt to establish the credentials of Guérin, at the time a prisoner-of-war, as an intellectual and therefore eligible for consideration for release. This presentation of the corpus closely follows the guidelines set out by Guérin in the letter to his wife mentioned previously. The list consists of three texts '*à paraître'*, one of which (*Lettre à un jeune esclave*) featured on the same page in *Zobain*, whilst the other two appear for the first time (*Empédocle*, *La Confession de Diogène*).[59]

In 1945, on the other hand, the reader is introduced to a corpus organised according to a tripartite generic structure, consisting of five '*confessions'* (which includes the current volume), a '*fiction'* describing itself as '*Ebauche d'une mythologie de la réalité'* comprising five volumes, and three '*mythes'*. There is a clear direction now towards a body of work, some already '*en préparation*' (*Album, La Sottise du Temps*, all of *Ebauche* and *La Confession de Diogène*), the place of the rest apparently already allocated within the generic layout. Several impressions are created: this is a serious writer, with a substantial corpus of work in train, and in a hurry to share these ideas with the public. Whereas in 1941 *Quand…* had been simply the next book after *Zobain*, now in 1945 it was a necessary and important part of a coherent superstructure.

Over the subsequent eight years, there were only small revisions in the corpus list, involving changes of status (for example, in 1946, *Album* was no longer listed as '*en préparation'* but listed all the same) as well as revisions to titles (again in 1946, the alteration of Volume IV of Ebauche from '*JE est un autre*' to '*Il s'agit d'un autre*'). Whilst in itself this is a significant change, (the removal of the first-person pronoun, to be replaced by the impersonal verb form, underscores the 'fiction' of the generic label, and removes any hint within the title of self-referentiality), at corpus level it does not represent a major development.

In the liminary pages to *Les Poulpes* (1953), there was a dramatic transformation in the corpus list. Suddenly, the oeuvre consisted of ten *confessions*, six *mythes* and the five volumes of *Ebauche*, of which Volume IV is described as '*en préparation'*.[60] Of the '*confessions'* in the list, three were published (*Zobain*, *Quand vient la fin* and *La tête vide*), one was '*en préparation'* (*La Sottise du Temps*), another - as indeed it had been for 17 years - was listed as '*à paraître'* (*Lettre à un jeune esclave*) whilst five were announced by title only:

[59] This conforms exactly to the writer's specific instructions for this page, conveyed to Paulhan through the intermediary of his wife Sonia (letter dated 27/3/41). Reproduced in *Raymond Guérin : Lettres à Sonia,* 2005, pp. 116-17.

[60] This claim looks dubious. Guérin always kept his correspondents abreast of his current projects, and there is no reference to work in progress on this in any of the correspondences.

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one re-announced (*Album*) and four others advertised for the first time (*Les petits riens, Madame Mère, La figure dans le tapis* and *A nu*).

Of the *mythes*, two (*La Confession de Diogène*, *Empédocle*) were published. *Les Arlequins* had featured on the corpus list since 1945, whilst the three remaining titles (*Diotima*, *Fini l'Opéra* and *Hermès Blues*) appeared for the first time. Of these, only *Diotima* may have actually existed at this stage, and only then as a potential project.

The revised architecture - implications

Given what we know of Guérin's state of mind at the time, the list published with *Les Poulpes* would seem to be a definitive and final statement of the shape of the corpus. Or perhaps it represents a strategic calculation. In *La Confession de Diogène* (pp. 48-49), Diogène reflects on the loss of his own corpus, which for posterity now exists in purely titular form.

> Il n'est rien resté de mes écrits. Et entre parenthèses, c'est là l'hommage le plus conséquent qu'ait pu me rendre le destin. Pour moi, qui avais décidé de faire de ma vie un chef-d'œuvre, il est certain que les écrits que je pouvais composer ne devaient constituer que des moyens, que des exutoires et que des exercices capables de m'aider à parvenir à mon but.
>
> La totalité de mes écrits s'est donc perdue. Je me félicite de cette chance. Ainsi, les critiques m'ont laissé dormir en paix et se sont abstenus par force de faire assaut de sottises sur mon compte, de m'inventer quand mes œuvres n'avaient rien d'ambigu et, au contraire, de me prêter les intentions les plus sordides quand j'avais justement enrichi mon texte de sous-entendus.

Perhaps the allegedly 'lost' works of Diogène offer a clue as to the status of the unwritten or unpublished works of Guérin. Guérin was specific at his death that all drafts be destroyed, a reflection of his determination to retain systematic control over the corpus. All that remains of the unpublished works is their title, from which the reader – in the same way as the historian of Diogène – is left only with conjecture.[61] Filling the *espace automythologique* with hints and promises of material to come is a cynical form of window-dressing, of creating an impression of a greater complexity and depth of the self than the evidence supports. Perhaps this is the function of the final corpus list, a declaration to posterity, the fullest expression of the multiplicity of the self about which the future can only speculate.

This study : a synopsis

To summarise, the premise of this thesis is as follows : that the multiplicity of the self can only be appreciated by accessing all of the corpus; that varied modes of writing, whilst permitting the writer to display his technical virtuosity, also enable an impression of the full versatility of the self to emerge ; that it was important in Guérin's eyes that readers understood that any volume was but part of an over-arching project; and that from 1943 onwards his was a conscious attempt, in the manner of Gide and his *espace autobiographique*, to create a body of work which taken together reflected, as far as possible, the cameleon-like individuality of its creator. To this initiative, in order to account for the

[61] Kauffmann succumbs to this temptation in his speculation based on the titles in the corpus. 'Un titre comme Hermès Blues frappe l'imagination: quelle forme inédite notre écrivain-caméléon aurait-il donné à un tel récit ?' Kauffmann, 2007, p. 204.

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wider auto-mythological, rather than strictly auto-referential, implications of much of the content, I have attached the label '*espace automythologique*.'

In the chapters which follow I will examine the course of this project, and evaluate its successes and innovations. This thesis, by doing so, will offer a template for a first comprehensive appraisal of Guérin's work.

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Section 2 – *Confessions*

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'*Confessions'* – Theoretical Introduction

The root of the term '*confessions'* is of course religious.[62] Its essence is the transparent and full sharing of fault with an interlocutor, initially in this religious context the representative of God. Technically, even in this primitive structure, there are therefore two *destinataires*. The listener is not passive: he receives the account of the confessee, and is then the agent of judgement, facilitating the next phase of the process which is that of the confessee's remorse and reparation. Schaeffer, citing Searle, might describe confessing as an *acte perlocutoire*: the words do not fall into a vacuum, but are delivered with a purpose, absolution, in mind.[63]

The dictionaries themselves chart the creeping acceptance of the term away from the strictly religious into the literary.[64] The impulse to talk openly and frankly about the self is visible in for example Montaigne, and in numerous English writers of the early modern period even before the Romantic era.[65] Gasparini [66] contends that by the time of the publication of de Quincey's *Confessions of an Opium-Eater* (1821) and certainly of Musset's *Confessions d'un enfant du siècle* (1836) this 'secularisation' of the genre was complete, and it had now been assimilated into literature alongside '*mémoire'* and '*journal'* (Gasparini 2004, p. 256).

The confessional mode – what is it?

If there exists in Lejeune's term a '*pacte autobiographique'*[67], it must be reasonable to assert also the possibility of a '*pacte confessionnel'*. What would this look like?

Now existing outside the purely religious sphere, '*confession'* nonetheless brings with it the core principles of the religious process outlined above. The wholesale importing of these features into a literary context is potentially problematic. Like an autobiography, it is possible the events described within a '*confession'* can be verified, however difficult – given the personal nature of the material - this inquiry might be.[68] The truth may be about or derive from the confessee, personally, but has the same referential value as that of the historian or the journalist.

A confession too establishes a contract with its recipient, although this is more complex. First, there is the contract with the direct interlocutor, the recipient of the 'confession' who may or may not be inscribed within the text. This is almost inevitably a synchronic arrangement, although it is possible to imagine a confession directed towards an interlocutor on the understanding that reception will take place later. At a textual level, this pact is symbolic of the second pact, that with the reader. Where the presence of the interlocutor is highlighted within the text, a second contract evolves, this time between the

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[62] *Robert* (pp 424-25) ; *Grand Larousse de la langue française* (p. 882).
[63] Jean-Marie Schaeffer, 1989, p. 103.
[64] *Robert* (pp 424-425) - titre d'ouvrages où l'auteur expose avec franchise les fautes, les erreurs de sa vie. *Les Confessions* de saint Augustin (v siècle). *Les Confessions*, de J-J Rousseau (1781-88). *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle*, de Musset (1836). ; *Grand Larousse de la langue française* (p. 882) - *Spécialement* : Autobiographie où l'auteur veut être d'une sincérité totale : *Les 'Confessions' de Saint Augustin, de Jean-Jacques Rousseau.*
[65] Laura Marcus: *Confession, Conversion, Testimony* (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2018) pp 12-14.
[66] Philippe Gasparini, 2004.
[67] Philippe Lejeune : 1975, 1996. *Signes de Vie. Le pacte autobiographique 2* (Paris: Seuil, 2005).
[68] Lejeune calls this a '*pacte référentiel*'. (Lejeune, 1996, p. 37).

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interlocutor/editor and the reader. The successful conclusion of this second contract is not necessarily inevitable.

The reader, the second 'confessor', is by definition not synchronous with the confessee. As we saw, the role of interlocutor in the confessional process is not passive, but requires some form of judgement and the delivery of absolution. It is not a given that the reader, in the same position as the inscribed confessor, would receive and respond to the confession in the same manner. A changed moral or intellectual climate may render a later reader less inclined to acquiesce in the stance taken by the inscribed confessor, and introduces the possibility of an entirely new and unenvisaged type of reception for the initial confession.[69] A confessee sensitive to this may introduce within the confession mechanisms to guard against the judgements of the future, albeit potentially at the risk of prejudicing transparency. It should be observed, finally, that in this new, literary, disposition the reader comes to play the role of the indirect *destinataire* of the religious confession, God.

In theoretical terms, however, the '*confession'* can be stripped down to its essentials: a commitment to tell the full truth, an acknowledgement of the possibility of fault, and an assumption of interlocution.

Guérin's corpus and what it tells us about his '*pacte confessionnel'*

In the liminary pages to *Les Poulpes* (1953), ten works were listed under the rubric '*confessions'* in the '*Oeuvres de Raymond Guérin'*. Three were published (*Zobain*, *Quand vient la fin* and *La tête vide*), one was '*en préparation'* (*La Sottise du Temps*), another - as indeed it had been for 17 years - was listed as '*à paraître'* (*Lettre à un jeune esclave*) whilst five were announced by title only: one re-announced (*Album*) and four others advertised for the first time (*Les petits riens, Madame Mère, La figure dans le tapis* and *A nu*).

Of the new titles, only one was referred to elsewhere by Guérin. In a letter to Paulhan (11/12/1953) he mentions *La figure dans le tapis* as one of his current projects, 'comme un retour à la ligne de Zobain, que je veux, du moins, de forme très accomplie et d'arabesque toute classique'. It may be that '*A Nu'* is the type of explosive, uninhibited confession of which Guérin thought himself both capable and destined.[70] The others are evocative by their title, but could be included as window-dressing.[71]

Album was one of the texts composed by Guérin in captivity, and sent from the prison camp to his wife on 25th August, 1941.[72] In its '*avertissement'*, Guérin described the contents as a collection of descriptions of places visited on holiday in the period 1934-1938: 'leur seule raison d'être fut d'entretenir mon souvenir et mes amitiés'.

La Sottise du Temps would appear to be a revised version of the journal maintained by Guérin during his period in captivity. Guérin worked on the text following his release, with a

[69] With regard to autobiography, Lejeune terms this 'un effet contractuel historiquement variable' (Lejeune, 1996, p. 45); Schaeffer sees the issue in more general terms, as changes in perceptions of the genre label potentially impact on the reception of the text, that is the coincidence of *généricité auctoriale* and *généricité lectoriale* exists only at the time of publication and thereafter is increasingly likely to diminish. (Schaeffer, 1989, p. 153).

[70] See below, section on '*Aveux-limites'.*

[71] See the introduction to the thesis, which explores the whole idea of exploiting the corpus list as a weapon in the battle to establish the *espace automythologique.*

[72] *Raymond Guérin – Lettres à Sonia*, 2005, p. 141.

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view to publication. It seems to have consisted of two different types of reflection: a commentary on the absurdity of contemporary society and politicians, and a glimpse of the 'writer at work'. Despite the evidence that there was a text, it could be that *La Sottise du Temps*, like *Lettre à un jeune esclave* which follows, was eventually reduced to fulfilling a purely titular function, an ornament as opposed to a constituent element of the corpus list. Looking at the *espace automythologique* as a whole, one element missing from it is such a text, the equivalent for example of Gide's *Journal* about which Guérin was effusive in his review in *Juin*.[73]

Lettre à un jeune esclave was a text first conceived by Guérin in 1935.[74] Guérin's loyalty to this project is reflected in the fact of its being announced in every published corpus list until *Les Poulpes*. Its subject is a matter of conjecture. Described tiredly by Paulhan as '*déjà mille fois traité'*, it would appear to be a pacifist / internationalist tract strongly influence by the ideas of the philosopher Alain, a supposition rendered plausible by the positive reaction to it of Jean Giono. Perhaps the most important aspect of the text is its title. This was the nearest any of the many '*Lettres'* composed by the apprentice-writer came to publication, although the fascination with the epistolary form is visible in both *Zobain* and Part II of *Parmi..*

The epistolary form was adopted by Guérin for his first '*confession'*, *Zobain* (1936).[75] This is a first-person confession through the medium of letters addressed to an inscribed confessor figure, ultimately revealed to be the editor of the text. *Quand vient la fin* (1941, republished 1945 with a postface, *Après la fin*) is a quasi biographical work, relating first the life and experiences of his father, and then the latter's agonising death with a cancer of the anus. It is not primarily in the first-person, does not wittingly reveal truths about the self and does not address a confessor figure. *La tête vide* (1952), an inventive patchwork of referential material and testimony from a number of sources, is a text which explores the difficulties created when there is an absence of a confession to an interlocutor.

As this summary suggests, Guérin's conception of '*confession'* is broad. Other than *Zobain*, no text approaches the definition of the term proposed earlier. The *pacte référentiel* exists, but only in places, while only in *Zobain* is there a first-person delivery directed towards an interlocutor, albeit only one revealed at the end of the text. These texts take their place under the label '*confessions'* by a process of elimination: they are not '*fictions'*, and neither are they '*mythes'*. Nonetheless, *généricité lectoriale*, to use Schaeffer's phrase, brings to these texts the notions of 'confession' which obtain at the time of reception, which almost certainly mean, without pre-empting evolutions in the meaning of the term itself, an assumption of referentiality. In the reader's mind at least, this is the distinguishing element.

[73] *Gide – Journal (1939-1942),* in *Chronique*, 2015, pp. 95-100. In a later review of the *Journal* of Ramuz, Guérin expressed his enthusiasm for this type of text: 'Rien de plus excitant pour l'esprit, semble-t-il, que la lecture du journal d'un écrivain justement réputé et dont on a lu d'abord avec admiration les ouvrages d'imagination ou les essais', p. 117.
[74] The first reference to it is in a letter to Grenier dated 27/10/35. BN, Fonds Grenier.
[75] The first edition of the work bore the legend '*roman'* on the front cover.

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A lifetime commitment to sincerity

Gasparini helpfully defines the term 'sincere' for us: Est 'sincère', d'après le dictionnaire Robert, 'qui est disposé à reconnaître la vérité et à faire connaître ce qu'il pense et sent réellement sans consentir à se tromper soi-même ni à tromper les autres' (Gasparini, 2004, p. 233).

Aspects of this definition are problematic as regards Guérin. Claiming faithfully to be representing yourself is one thing, implementing that is quite another. In addition, what if the impression of the self is diverse ('*Arlequin'*, '*homme multiple'*), and in addition transitory and fleeting?

In terms of subject matter, Guérin rejected the view that certain areas of experience were inadmissible in writing, identifying himself with '*l'art de tout dire dont Diogène reste l'ancêtre'.*[76] To omit, for example, detailed accounts of degenerative illness was a choice, one made by writers whom, in Guérin's view, were unworthy of the critical acclaim that generally greeted their work.[77]

Guérin detected the same '*tartufisme',* as he called it, in attitudes to the use of language which would offend the '*bienséant'*. Sincerity in this sense means saying words that everyone knows but which remain unsaid, that is it is the conscious breaking of a taboo. This is at two levels. The first is the incorporation of terminology which is not properly suited to the written form, such as the unmodified use of terms from the street. The second concerns the inclusion of abusive, sexualised and even swear words.

Within Guérin's conception of sincerity lies the pact of completeness, that what is expressed, albeit perhaps edited, is whole. Guérin obviously has himself in mind in the long section of *Contre …* which underscores the importance of being frank:

> Il est, notamment, d'autres écrivains dont la soif d'absolu, de pureté, d'idéal est telle que l'approche seule de la réalité quotidienne les bouleverse. […] A tout prix, ils veulent pouvoir presser le pus de leurs plaies, inciser leurs abcès, vider leurs tripes, guérir ! Du fond de la misère où ils sont retenus, leurs livres ne sont, en substance, que des exutoires où ils se délivrent du pire. … ils préfèrent grossir leur œuvre de tout ce qui reste en eux d'impur afin de s'en purifier du même coup. (Guérin, 1948, pp. 121 – 122).

Within this text, interestingly, is a remnant of the original religious experience of confession, the objective of absolution (in this case through self-cleansing) attained through writing. The motif of the pus to be squeezed was maintained throughout his career,[78] and was the title of Guérin's log of the illness which ultimately claimed his life, *Le Pus de la Plaie*.

Fourth, within some writers of confession lies a propensity or drive for taking the reader into areas of experience which lie beyond the habitual. Bestowing on them the label of '*aveux limites*', Gasparini defines such admissions as follows:

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[76] 'Contre une terreur des faits', p. 131, in *Un Romancier dit son mot* (Paris: Corrêa, 1948) pp 87 – 134.
[77] See also 'D'une optique de l'indécence', (in *Un Romancier dit son mot,* pp. 166 – 73) with regard to sexual themes.
[78] 'Mes livres ne sont que des exutoires et si j'y presse le pus de mes plaies, peut-être viendra-t-il un jour où, ces plaies étant cicatrisées, il me sera donné de n'écrire plus que des pages de confiance et de lumière.' 'Des égarements de la critique', reproduced in *Chronique*, 2015, pp. 164-65.

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> les révélations intimes qui 'passent les bornes' en ce sens qu'ils franchissent trois lignes de démarcation. Une limite morale lorsque le fait avoué implique une infraction au code éthique commun au lecteur et à l'auteur. Une limite psychique dans la mesure où cette action est le symptôme d'une névrose : 'limite' prend alors le même sens que l'anglais *border* dans le mot *borderline*, qui caractérise un état proche de la folie. Une limite générique, enfin, dès l'instant où l'aveu trouble le lecteur, encourage et en même temps rend douteuse l'identification de l'auteur au héros. Il donne au personnage une dimension supplémentaire, inquiétante, extraordinaire, potentiellement romanesque et, simultanément, il rattache le texte au paradigme référentiel de la confession. (Gasparini, 2004, p. 262).

Gasparini claims that such admissions unsettle ('*perturber'*) the reader, because they take him/her outside generic and ethical norms, without there being any remorse on the part of the confessee, nor any form of punishment or penitence. Such a step has the effect of transforming a fault into a '*fête du langage'*, for the enjoyment of a spectator, who may or may not be prepared to become complicit. Indeed, the existence of the interlocutor/reader is essential for the full pleasure of the emitter to be realised.

The '*aveu'* is necessarily and consciously polarising (Gasparini, 2004, p. 263), and is made in full awareness that it has the capacity to become public property, that is an object of which the writer is no longer in control (Gasparini, 2004, p. 265) In this respect, an '*aveu-limite'* is both attention-seeking – it is made in the knowledge that it will attract attention and seeks to do so - and an appeal for solidarity and understanding from the like-minded. It is a foregrounding and politicisation of the concept of the *'happy few'*.

The subject of the admission transforms himself into a kind of object, 'comme un autre, un double incompréhensible et nuisible' (Gasparini, 2004, p. 267). This is all, continues Gasparini, part of the strategy: 'Renonçant à se saisir comme un tout cohérent, connaissable et bien-faisant, ils pourront être identifiés à une personne réelle et contradictoire, elle aussi, l'auteur bien sûr, ou peut-être le lecteur' (Gasparini, 2004, p. 265). Seeing the self as 'other', both synchronically and historically, is integral to Guérin's entire project. Implicating others as responsible for what has become of the self, likewise. In addition, Guérin was possessed of an instinctual thirst for attention, a need to speak, an overwhelming sense of personal injustice. His itch for '*aveux-limites*' is visible from a relatively early stage. There are two types of interior drive: that towards a Jouhandeau-style '*Essai sur moi-même'*, against which Paulhan cautioned, [79] and the burning, relentless compulsion to extreme confession.

Guérin evoked such a possibility in a letter to Paulhan (10/4/44) : 'Et pourtant, vaille que vaille, je crois que ce que je peux sortir de meilleur de moi c'est encore une œuvre de confessions presque intolérables. Intolérables à divers points de vue, d'ailleurs.' Paulhan clearly recognised this. In his reply (13/04/44), he states : 'Oui, je vois très bien approcher l'œuvre de 'confessions intolérables'. Je l'attends de pied ferme. Je crois que ce sera la plus grande de vos œuvres.' [80]

The exact phrase was used again by Guérin in his interviews with Claude-Henri Rocquet.[81] Asked to describe his principal motivations for writing, Guérin replied : 'Mes

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[79] Letter of 4/12/47 : 'Ah ! mais surtout il ne vous faut pas encore écrire votre Essai sur moi-même. Dans dix ans.' Unpublished letter, Fonds Guérin, BLJD.
[80] Both quotations in this paragraph, Fonds Guérin, BLJD.
[81] *Entretiens avec Claude-Henri Rocquet*. Text of interviews conducted by M. Rocquet with Raymond Guérin in 1955, seen by the author at M. Rocquet's residence, Paris, July 1987.

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livres ne sont que des cris de détresse […] J'ai besoin d'être aimé.' Poignantly, given that the interviews were conducted shortly before his death, Guérin said that, when he grew up, his ambition was to produce 'confessions sans réticence, oui, [..] ce que j'ai appelé les 'aveux intolérables.' That this was still his ambition at nearly 50 years of age indicates the enduring strength of the compulsion.

Summary – *le confessionnel*

For Guérin, '*confession'* was a state of mind, an objective, an example to be emulated and ultimately a mirage. His internal contradictions made lasting confession meaningless, as Guérin himself realised but never fully acknowledged. The desire to confess was a fundamental personal imperative which was difficult to stifle, and even then was only deferred rather than extinguished. In terms of the corpus list, it represents a confused swirl of texts, all suffused with a reflection on the nature of truth but lacking many of the basic constituents of the genre as described above. '*Confession'* begins outside '*mythe'* and '*fiction'*, but not entirely. If *La Confession de Diogène* is a '*mythe'*, is *La tête vide* not a '*fiction"*? And how can it be that *Quand vient la fin* is so intensely mythological, and (ostensibly) says so very little about the self? To explore these questions and others will be the ambition of the chapters which follow.

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Zobain - 'Je cherchais alors une solution sans la trouver'[82] The stylistic trials and tribulations of Guérin's first published work

Zobain[83] provides a helpful base from which the developing prowess of the writer can be measured. Ostensibly a first-person confession within an epistolary framework, strongly influenced by Gide's *récits,* the work made technical demands of the writer which exceeded his capabilities at the time. This chapter explores those failures, which set in train a process of reflection and then experimentation culminating in works a decade later unimaginable in 1936.

Received with almost universal critical approval[84], the text established Guérin both as a writer of promise and as a figure within the literary world. The fact of a first publication exposed him to the possibilities of the paratext, both its applications and its dangers. This chapter explains the nature of the lessons learned here, and how they shaped Guérin's entire career.

The text consists of a series of letters written by Zobain to a trusted friend, the first dated 2nd July 1933, the last 5th June 1934. These narrate the decay and ultimately collapse of the letter-writer's marriage, culminating in divorce. There is no introduction from the '*cher ami'* (p.11), but the work concludes with a series of notes from the addressee, now assuming an editorial function, who explains that although the correspondence has continued it has been his decision to suspend its publication at this point. In addition, in a final section, he provides an update on the psychological health of Zobain one year later, as well as an opportunity for Zobain to comment on his former issues and his progress since.

Paratextual elements

Perhaps owing to inexperience or lack of status, Guérin's control of the appearance of this first published text was less marked than that over subsequent works. In addition, the publication of the text preceded the conception of the *espace automythologique* as reflected in a corpus list. Nonetheless, the paratext is already a particularly active place.

Although later classified as a '*confession'*, *Zobain* was first published and identified on the front cover as a '*roman'*. This places it in a context of fictionality, in which a commitment to truth is procedural rather than authentic. Most critics referred to the text as a '*roman'*, and treated it with the underlying assumption of its being a '*roman épistolaire'*.[85] In terms of reception, the repercussions of this label are powerful. It enables, for example, questions of plausibility to be aired. The review of Ramon Fernandez[86] is expressive in this regard:

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[82] Guérin, interviewed by Martial Bardinet, *Nouvelle République du Sud-Ouest (Bordeaux)*, 8/10/54.
[83] Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1936. All references will be to this edition of the text.
[84] *L'Ordre* 1/11/36 – refers to the 'grand art*'* of Raymond Guérin; *La Concorde* 11/11/36 – J. Debû-Bridel: Zobain is 'complexe et nuancé*'*; *Le Charivari* 5/12/36 – Jean Robert describes *Zobain* as the best first novel of the year; *Tolosa (Toulouse)* 6/12/36 – Louis G. Boursiac : 'Art sans pareil, éclairage brutal, souvent en demi-teinte' ; *Le Canard Enchaîné* 9/12/36 – 'Les six-quatre-deux' : 'le plus beau roman de l'année, peut-être.'
[85] 'M. Raymond Guérin a choisi la forme difficile entre toutes du roman par lettres*'* - Jean-Pierre Maxence, *Gringoire*, 27 novembre 1936, p. 6; 'reprochons-lui d'avoir conservé la forme épistolaire (date – mon cher ami) à des pages qui n'eussent rien perdu à n'être pas présentées sous cette forme*'* - René Etiemble, *Europe*, n°174, 15 juin 1937, pp. 282-83.
[86] Ramon Fernandez, *Marianne*, n°220, 6 janvier 1937, p. 4.

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> Et nous apprenons alors quelque chose qui, à mon avis, fausse un peu le roman : Mme Zobain est vierge, son époux ne l'a que trop respectée. Cette révélation fausse l'esprit du roman parce que l'idée qu'une maladie pouvait briser un bonheur est assez riche et assez forte par elle-même pour se passer d'un détail accidentel, qui banalise l'histoire au lieu de l'assaisonner.

In Fernandez's view, based on the generic context, the work is undermined by precisely the detail to which Guérin attaches the greatest value, the unflinching statement of the true. This collision of artistic and ethical imperatives is reflected in the writer's correspondence. In a letter to Guérin (18/10/35) Jean Paulhan wrote that *Zobain* 'n'est pas au point.. vous n'avez pas le droit de faire disparaître l'héroïne'.[87] In his reply (23/10/35), Guérin rejects the suggestion ('je ne sais pas me plier à une telle demande'), accusing Paulhan of taking him for 'un inventeur de scénarios'.[88]

Such an exchange reflects the determination of the emerging writer to incorporate only lived experience within his work, to observe punctiliously the detail of the real event and to reject any imagined or fictionalised episodes. If, as was the case, the woman really had disappeared, to represent the circumstances otherwise would be '*odieux',* Guérin's 1935 letter continued. This is in stark contrast with the writer that Guérin was to become, one who by 1948 had comfortably adopted an autofictional approach.

The commitment to 'sincerity' was at this stage impassioned, almost fanatical. In the same letter to Paulhan referred to above, Guérin asserted:

> *Zobain* est un récit autobiographique, que j'ai tiré tout entier, sans en falsifier un seul épisode, ni une date, ni un lieu, de ma vie. Je ne saurais rien inventer ; il n'y a dans ces pages aucun artifice de fait. J'ai assez souffert pendant deux ans pour qu'on respecte la véracité de cette catastrophe.[89]

This declaration is important in several respects. It powerfully rejects the notion of invention as '*falsifier'*; it highlights the writer's lifelong awareness of his own limitations in terms of his inability to conceive fictional characters and settings and narrate them[90]; and it introduces the confessee's search to express and perhaps assuage 'suffering'.

Title : *Zobain, sa correspondance*

If one of the unconscious aims of the new writer was to attract attention, the choice of a title which appeared to refer to the male sexual appendage was adroit.[91] The title –

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[87] Unpublished letter Jean Paulhan – Raymond Guérin. Fonds Guérin, BLJD.

[88] Later in the same letter Guérin concedes that the couple had in fact met up one more time, during the divorce proceedings, and wonders if this might meet the requirement of Paulhan. The published text reveals that this was the solution finally adopted, the final letter of the confession (p. 244) describing the day in court.

[89] Paulhan's reply, by his later standards very quick indeed, marked a retreat on this point. Paulhan agreed not to press for changes 'si cela vous donne le sentiment du mensonge'. He undertook to commend the work to Gaston Gallimard as 'une oeuvre extrêmement forte et juste' whose 'invraisemblances' and 'défauts' were the result of the writer's 'scrupules*'*. Letter Jean Paulhan – Raymond Guérin (28/10/35). The use in this letter of the terms '*mensonge'*, '*juste'* and '*scrupules'* indicate a terrain of confession rather than fiction.

[90] 20 years later, in *Entretiens avec Claude-Henri Rocquet*, Guérin was still forcibly making this same point.

[91] Writing in the *Revue des Auteurs et des Livres (Leuven)* January 1937, the critic J. Dewalque stated that the work was characterised by its 'impudeur, profanation. Ce livre est à proscrire'. In the *Revue des Lectures* of 15/2/37, Ch. Bourdon included *Zobain* in a list of novels of '*mauvaises moeurs*'. The fact that this detail

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explained by Guérin as a nickname derived from his adolescence – was the cause of considerable objection from within Gallimard. Pressure was placed on Guérin to abandon it, which he resisted.[92] Guérin had perhaps seen the difficulty coming. Writing to Jean Grenier[93], he acknowledged the existence of the faults identified by Grenier within the draft, including the title, but explained the latter's importance: '…ce nom avait une histoire qui m'était chère, voilà pourquoi j'y tiens.' Hostility towards the title failed to abate, and Guérin was forced into a more strident defence:

> Mon livre est une confession dans laquelle je n'ai rien truqué. Je n'ai pas changé un fait, une date, pas un lieu, pas une circonstance. Je vous l'ai dit, je ne suis pas romancier, je n'ai pas d'imagination. Vouliez-vous qu'à ces pages si vraies, si sincères, je donne un titre inventé ? Il faut vous dire que si je l'avais pu, ce livre, je l'aurais appelé 'Raymond' ou 'RG'. Il fallait, ne serait-ce devant ma conscience, que le héros porte ce nom, puisque j'étais ce héros, ce pauvre hère [...] C'est pourquoi j'ai choisi Zobain, qui est un surnom qui m'a été donné en 5ème au lycée, et que j'ai porté pendant dix ans.[94]

The title itself inscribes the *roman* firmly within the expectation set of an epistolary novel. When the devices of that type of writing are used[95] – presence of an editor / addressee, almost a badge of '*fictivité'* - the reader's response towards this as a work of fiction is triggered. The later reclassification of the work in the rubric '*confessions'* becomes problematic. The reader might well ask why it is necessary in such a work to borrow and flaunt the trappings of fiction. Indeed, when the text was reclassified as a '*confession'*, the opportunity to adjust the title accordingly was not taken. The *oeuvre* is left with a generic hybrid, a confession in the form of an epistolary novel which demands now to be read as a confession.

Nonetheless, for a small group of readers of 1936, those aware of the nickname and its owner, the autobiographical nature of the text would have been obvious, their intuition supported by details within the text (for example, the identification of Bordeaux as the place of residence).

For Guérin, the name assumed a wider significance. It became a metonym for that period of his life, a phase in his development which was (in most respects) complete. The writing of the work itself can be said, as Guérin himself observed, to be the encapsulation of it, or indeed part of the process of moving beyond it:

> Du reste, Zobain, à mon gré, n'est point admirable. Il symbolise au contraire un passé révolu, artificiel. J'aurais honte aujourd'hui d'être un Zobain. Je l'ai dépassé. Ses monologues étaient

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informed some critical discussion of the text was alluded to in the article of René Etiemble, *Europe*, n°174, 15 juin 1937, p. 282-83. 'Alors que certains ont cherché dans *Zobain* (dont le titre, à lui seul, semble un défi) l'exposé d'un cas monstrueux, et concentré leur attention sur un détail (après quatre ans de vie commune, la femme de Zobain reste vierge*).*' The discussion surrounding the sexual connotation of the name was revived by Kauffmann (2007, p. 65) for whom the presence of apparent allusion to the phallus in the title of the first published works of both Guérin and his wife Denyse Montauriol was not accidental.

[92] Kauffmann describes the title as '*disgracieux'* in the view of Gallimard editorial staff, and quotes the adjective used by Grenier in a letter to Guérin dated 21st March, 1935: '*ridicule'*. (Kauffmann, 2007, p. 58).

[93] Letter dated 25th March 1935 – unpublished correspondence Raymond Guérin - Jean Grenier, Fonds Grenier, BN.

[94] Letter Raymond Guérin – Jean Grenier, 9/9/36, Fonds Grenier, BN.

[95] Bower, 1997, p. 14, describes the 'the letter's formal properties' as 'salutations and closings, time lapses between letters, orthography and language style, the letters' lengths, and changes in addressees'.

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> malsaines, sa sincérité était fausse. Il fallait bien que je l'exprime pour m'en délivrer. Mais je crois que ce que j'écrirai à l'avenir sera tout différent.[96]

The expression or purging of this state was one to which Guérin felt he would need to return. In a letter to Jean Grenier dated 25th March, 1935, he confided : 'tout n'a pas été dit sur la propre nature sexuelle de Zobain et sur ses goûts, et c'est là que gît peut-être le drame'.

The construct 'Zobain' was retained by Guérin as a working tool. In his wartime journal *Le Temps de la Sottise* it is a convenient mechanism for comparing the factors influencing his own evolution with those of Gide and Valéry: 'Mais Gide et Valéry sont comme Zobain était. Ils n'ont jamais eu de faim […] de peur […] connu la captivité.'[97] Equally, the wartime correspondence with his wife Sonia is sprinkled with allusions to himself as M. Zobain. More striking is his declaration to Sonia that a draft on which he had been working in captivity reflected conspicuous development in the persona with which she had been familiar: 'Oui, Zobain n'est plus. Vous lirez dans *Les Poulpes* comment il a changé grâce à Delphine Rollin'.[98]

'*sa*'

The use of the possessive pronoun within the title introduces the scope for a number of readings. In a conventional reception of the text as an epistolary novel the phrase '*sa correspondance'* makes immediate sense. These are letters written by one individual to another, whose presence is revealed at the end of the work. With a change of generic indicator, the inference of the word '*sa'* is more problematic. Within the confessional model the possibility of the inscribed confessor sharing the detail of the confession is excluded. One reading that becomes possible is that these are letters collected together by an individual now reflecting on his younger self. This reading supports the idea mentioned above, that the correspondence has a role beyond itself, that is in expressing or even facilitating the shedding of one particular skin for the revelation of another. The pronoun '*sa'* in this instance really means '*ma'*, albeit in relation to a persona which has been consciously abandoned. The subtitle '*correspondance'*, following the front cover declaration of '*roman'*, makes relatively straightforward the decision as to the *généricité lectoriale* of the text. This may not, however, entirely coincide with the *généricité auctoriale.*

It is known that the epistolary was the preferred format of the emerging writer.[99] A lengthy paragraph from a letter to Jean Grenier (dated 23rd July 1935) explains the reasons for this preference:

> *Zobain* est composé sous forme de lettres. Je compte du reste ne donner jamais aucune autre forme à mes écrits ; qu'ils constituent un livre ou un morceau détaché. Ce n'est pas un système arbitraire. Je ne saurais jamais écrire autrement. Je manque totalement d'imagination et j'éprouve une sorte de malaise devant les écrits que je sens présentés avec artifice. Rien ne

[96] Letter Raymond Guérin – Jean Grenier, 2/3/36, Fonds Grenier, BN.
[97] *Le Temps de la Sottise*, III, 99.
[98] *Raymond Guérin : Lettres à Sonia*, 2005. p. 111.
[99] The postface to *Raymond Guérin : Lettres à Sonia,* 2005*,* pp. 316-17, contains a list of 8 '*lettres'* identified by Guérin in one of his notebooks as '*à écrire'*. The first mention of *Zobain (sa correspondance)* is dated 14 October 1933.

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> me semble plus sincère que la lettre, plus vrai … La lettre, c'est pour moi la seule, la réelle raison qu'on a d'écrire : s'adresser à quelqu'un à propos de qui ou de quoi que ce soit.

This paragraph contains many seminal insights on the apprentice writer. His '*malaise'* at the thought of '*artifice'* reflects a supposedly innate commitment to truth about the self, whatever that may be. The value he places on the '*sincère'*, the '*vrai'*, is evident, and reaching them is the declared objective of his writing. Sincerity and truth are only accessible, however, in one mode: they cannot simply be written down and stand for themselves, but must be directed towards a recipient, whose reception of the message needs to be imagined in order to permit the message properly to be delivered at all. The addressee thus occupies a place almost beyond that of the confessor, whose role is to receive, judge and absolve, but whose reception is not inscribed or imagined in the delivery of the confession.

This introduces a circular, unresolvable paradox: epistolarity guarantees truth, but the very fact of writing 'for' a recipient is a formulation or 'packaging' of truth, an act of fiction whose status is reaffirmed by the generic label on the front of the work and thus the *généricité lectoriale* of the text.

Correspondence requires an addressee, but this latter does not necessarily have to be identified within the text. If an addressee is identified, (s)he does not necessarily need to exist, even intratextually, but could be a construct of the letter-writer posited in order to direct a message. In *Zobain*, the addressee is doubly identified, first within the letters themselves, and then – at least the coincidence of the two entities is inferred - at the end as the editor of the volume. Care is taken to incorporate the addressee within not just the etiquette of presentation but also the body of the letters.

The addressee is clearly identified: a close and long-standing friend of the letter-writer (p. 45), later a friend to the couple (p. 238) who attended the wedding (p. 160) and proposed a toast (p. 161). At this point the reader has several options: to believe that this is a real correspondence, with real letters which were really sent; alternatively, that the addressee may exist in reality, and have performed the deeds ascribed to him, but was never the recipient of letters from Zobain; or third that the addressee is a construct conceived to permit the production of the text.

The letter-writer is conscious of his addressee when composing the letters.[100] 'Vous détestez le mélodrame et je vous ai souvent entendu dire que la vie réserve ses catastrophes à ceux qui les attirent. Vous y mettiez de l'ironie.' (p. 51) he observes, as he begins to describe the events of his wife's suicide attempt. The addressee's powers appear almost God-like ('D'autres que vous dont l'esprit n'a point d'ombres ni de secrets, s'étonneraient sans doute de mes façons', p. 138), and provide a model of personal conduct which Zobain seeks to emulate ('Si j'avais votre force de caractère certes, je serais plus souciant', p. 140). The struggle to make the situation of the self intelligible, that is the influence of the perception of a recipient, in places becomes overt:

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[100] Jean Rousset, *Forme et signification : essais sur les structures littéraires de Corneille à Claudel* (Paris : Corti) 1962, p. 73 : 'Cette présence constante du destinataire à l'horizon … modifie profondément la conscience que l'on prend de soi-même.'

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> Je peux sourire de nos façons, de notre maladresse, de notre naïve ardeur, mais du moins si vous y avez pu croire, c'est que je n'ai pas en vain dans cette lettre multiplié des scènes dont j'aime assez peu les effets. Un moment j'avais espéré que je saurais vous raconter ces souvenirs ainsi que j'en concevais le récit dans mon cerveau. Devant le papier il m'a bien fallu renoncer. J'ai dû communément employer des mots, des phrases, que j'avais cependant bien des fois raillés chez autrui. (p. 149)

Such compromises are an impediment to sincerity, precisely the principal objective of the choice of diegetic format. Ultimately, Zobain comes to appreciate that the construction placed on his utterances may not be those he desires: 'je ne voudrais pas que ces propos vous déçoivent.' (p. 238).

In a manner which respects the conventions of an epistolary novel, but which at the same time apes those of a confessional text, the letter writer regularly asserts his commitment to unexpurgated truth. Referring overtly to his own letters as a '*confession'* (p. 49), and to aspects of their content as '*un aveu*' (p. 51), later, p 141, '*un aveu terrible*', Zobain reassures his addressee of the veracity of his account ('Vous pensez que j'ironise. Mais non. Tout cela est véridique' p. 27) and of his determination to omit nothing ('je ne vous ai fait grâce d'aucun détail ; vous avez tout su', p. 141). Again using the language of the confession, Zobain is eager to admit his failings ('Oui, là est ma faute', p. 199) and is aware of his own inclination to falsehood ('Je mens avec facilité', p. 80).

As many critics observed, running through the text is Zobain's lack of awareness about himself, a fact of which he becomes more acutely conscious as he later re-reads the correspondence at the invitation of the addressee/editor ('Et même en relisant ses lettres, il haussa plusieurs fois les épaules*',* p. 251). In the manner of a confessor, the addressee/editor delivers his own judgement on what the letters reveal:

> Le texte de ces lettres me paraît déconcertant en ce sens qu'il n'est presque jamais conforme au caractère de leur auteur. Moi qui le connais bien, qui crois le bien connaître, en jugé-je du moins ainsi. Je suppose du reste que beaucoup auront su deviner quel homme cachaient ces *attitudes*, quelle pensée ces discours, et voir ce que Zobain était, à travers ce qu'il croyait être devenu. (pp. 247-48)

At a structural level, this section is interesting for several reasons. First, unlike in a normal confessional situation, the confessee is accorded the right to look over and assess for himself the content of the confession. Second, the later reflections of the confessee are incorporated within the confession itself. Third, whilst the addressee reminds us of his privileged position as an intimate of Zobain and therefore equipped to make character judgements, such God-like access to a higher truth, the authority to look beyond the temporary and to see the reality concealed by the '*attitudes'*, are also the properties of a confessor figure.

Other features of an epistolary novel are evident within Zobain. First, the writing of the letters is a catharsis (p. 107), a cure (p. 73) and a means of self-analysis (p. 45). Second, the receipt of letters back from the addressee has an impact on Zobain. From the beginning, they are a major source of reassurance (p. 13) and, as the correspondence continues, so the dependency of Zobain grows (p. 140) until it becomes the only thing which sustains him : 'Bien souvent, vous avez été mon seul recours' (p. 228).

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Unlike the religious confessor, whose role is passive until the point of judgement, through his correspondence the addressee plays a formative part in Zobain's '*confession'*, a term he himself uses on page 49. Indeed, the '*confession'* is based partly on a negotiation ('A cela vous allez répliquer que je n'ai point changé. Je vous l'accorde, mais ces beaux raisonnements ne me contentent pas…*'* p. 141) which is inconceivable in actual confession.

Furthermore, again contrary to the procedures of confession, the confessee assumes for himself the right to revise and correct his previous utterances. 'Mes doutes, dans ma dernière lettre, étaient provoqués par je ne sais quelle poussée d'angoisse' (p. 234) explains Zobain, as he goes on to articulate new grounds for optimism. In places, the revision is a further opportunity to influence the reception of the message, that is to affect the response of the would-be confessor: 'Dans ma dernière lettre, j'ai délivré des images bien incertaines. Je suis confus de vous les avoir imposées. Mais peut-être vous ont-elles aidé à mieux tolérer ce que ma correspondance a d'outré' (p. 83). Finally, Zobain is offered further control of the 'confession' when he is invited by the editor/addressee to read and correct the proofs of the printed volume.

In a further departure from the norms of confession, the '*confession'* itself has material consequences within the course of events. The sight of Zobain writing causes his wife distress (p. 227) and results in her collapsing to the floor. This confessional act is far from being neutral and confidential with implications only for the confessee.

Overall, the epistolary format is an apparent attempt, typical of Guérin, to occupy two seemingly contradictory positions at the same time. The tropes of epistolarity, used as a bed in which to accommodate a text of a confessional nature, enable the production of a text which, in the short term at least, provided Guérin with the cover necessary to be able to explore some deeply personal issues.

The compromise, however, is a narratological muddle. It is perfectly possible, for example, that the construct of the editor/addressee is derived from reality, but it is nonetheless a construct. The conceit that these are real letters written to a real addressee is just that, a pretence which renders the subsequent appearance of the addressee as the editor of the volume a further expression of the unreal. As a result, the reader is left with an enigma, unresolved and unresolvable, in which a multiplicity of Zobains, present and past, speak all at the same time, one in the first person as 'editor/addressee', another in quotation marks as the eponymous subject seen one year later, who is invited to read the proofs of his own 'letters' and to comment on his own evolution and who is described in the third person by the 'editor/addressee'. As we will explain below in our discussion of the epigraphs, further confusion is introduced when the narrow boundary of paratext and text appears to be dissolved.

<u>*Zobain* as an epistolary novel</u>

Typically, in *Zobain* the main correspondence is one of a network of correspondences. By contrast with epistolary novels such as *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, the full text of these auxiliary correspondences is not included, and we know of their existence only through the references to them by Zobain himself. These secondary correspondences consist of that between Zobain and his wife, intermittent and only with the permission of her doctor, from which extracts are at one point included in the text (pp. 131-33); that between Zobain and his

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wife's various doctors; that between Zobain and a priest who knows the couple (p. 190); that between Zobain and unnamed correspondents in Paris ('des lettres que je reçois de Paris…', p. 92). Finally, Zobain finds evidence in his wife's affairs of letters to her from her sister.

Often, the notion of exchange and interaction intrinsic to epistolarity appears absent, the text instead becoming a form of journal with epistolary adornments.[101] There is a 50-page reflection on the nature of solitude (pp. 70-122)[102]; a passage of some 24 pages (pp. 144-68) in which the focus of the letter-writer is on photographs, whose appearance he describes and from which he is stimulated into flashbacks; a section in which the letter-writer reports a commentary from one of his wife's doctors on the conditions of some of his other patients (pp. 205-06) and then specifically on patient W (pp. 211-13); and several sustained periods of reverie about the couple's relationship, such as the circumstances of their meeting and initial romance (pp. 216-19).

The responses of the editor/addressee are not included, although the terms used in his replies are reflected in the comments of Zobain. In themselves, these utterances appear gratuitous, contrived. The text bears the impression of inauthenticity[103], in that these (regular) references back to the editor/addressee appear almost an addendum to a pre-existing text to create the appearance desired, that of epistolarity. If the epistolary flourishes were removed, the text remaining could function perfectly adequately as a journal.[104]

The 'corpus list'

On the following liminary page appears what will later become a very crowded space, that of the writer's other works. Here only one work is listed '*à paraître'*, *Lettre à un jeune esclave*, a text which – as we saw in the introduction to '*confessions'* – retained this status for the rest of Guérin's life. To the reader of 1936, it offers the possibility that this is not, as feared by Paulhan and Grenier, a writer with only one book in him,[105] (a view shared by some at Gallimard including, as Kauffmann states, Jean Prévost), that the text in front of him is only the first step in a new literary adventure. The second inference to be drawn derives from the term '*lettre'*, which with the title of the current text in mind underscores the writer's preference for epistolarity.

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[101] As Rousset, 1962, p. 100, comments on *Obermann*: 'Sous le couvert du roman par lettres, c'est en réalité le journal intime qui s'introduit dans le roman'.

[102] Letter Jean Paulhan – Jean Grenier, dated 11 July 1935 : '*Zobain* est assez passionnant. : tout au moins dans la première partie (tant qu'il est question de la femme) ; il me semble que la deuxième partie montre un peu la corde, est un peu astucieuse. / Autant son ton est émouvant et direct (et même grand) quand le héros parle de sa femme (ou de lui-même à travers sa femme) autant il devient, je le crois, traînant et insistant quand il ne parle plus que de lui seul, sans prétexte. [..] Il me semble infiniment désirable : [..] [q]ue les lettres de la 2ème partie soient allégées, écourtées.' *Paulhan – Grenier Correspondance* (1984) letter 32, p. 62. This section is likely to be the part Etiemble had in mind when he commended *Zobain*, conditionally: 'Débarrassez-le de quelque fatras philosophaillant…' *Europe*, 15 June 1937, pp. 282-83.

[103] This despite the fact that, as Versini, 1979, pp. 50-51, states, the function of the letter format is the elimination of '*romanesque'*, the creation of '*authenticité'*.

[104] Precisely the reservation about the text expressed by Etiemble.

[105] 'Qui est M. Raymond Guérin ? Quel âge a-t-il ? Serait-ce le seul 'livre de sa vie'?'. Letter from Jean Paulhan to Jean Grenier, dated 11th July 1935. Reproduced in *Paulhan –Grenier Correspondance,* 1984, letter 32, p. 62. Kauffmann, 2007, p. 67.

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The dedication

The work is dedicated cryptically '*à D.*' Until *Les Poulpes*, this was the only text published by Guérin which did not explicitly acknowledge a living literary figure. The identity of '*D*' is a matter of speculation for the reader. Given that in the text that follows the wife of Zobain remains unidentified as anything other than '*ma femme'*, the reader could be forgiven for imagining that '*D*' and she are in some way connected. To the group of people who know the reality behind the name Zobain, the dedication is obviously to Denyse Montauriol, indeed the wife whose story is told in these pages. Guérin was insistent that the name be omitted from the text and refused all invitations to provide one, either real or invented.[106] The value of this apparently ethical stance will be evaluated below.

Epigraphs

Striking for a reader of 1936, but less so for readers of later works by Guérin, *Zobain* is introduced with three epigraphs, from Montaigne, Stendhal and Gide. A reader accustomed to a single epigraph (if any) may speculate as to the reasons behind the inclusion of three – insecurity, perhaps, or the opposite, a bold declaration of intent.

All on the theme of self-discovery and the susceptibility of the self to constant change, the epigraphs create within the reader an expectation of a text with the same concerns. The reader might also be struck by the selection itself for two reasons: first, in terms of the type of text with which these names are associated, there is a mixture of the referential and the fictional; second, these are French writers from three entirely different epochs, an indication perhaps that the writer of the current work is working within a cultural intertext, or in emulating these writers is perhaps seeking to insert himself into the tradition.[107] The selection makes an ideological statement about the writer to the reader: these are forebears whose work I value, the influences which inform if not directly this work then the processes which have brought me to create the text in front of you.

Towards the end of the text itself, Zobain reflects on the beginnings of his relationship with his wife. Very much sharing an interest in literature, the couple explore together the greats of literature. 'Dès le début, des gens aussi considérables que Montaigne, que Stendhal, qu'André Gide avaient été nos parrains*'* (p. 217). The coincidence of this list with that of the epigraphs will not escape an attentive reader. It is a moment in which the barrier between the text and its surrounds appears to be breached. It reinforces the intuition that Guérin/Zobain are one and the same, and that the epistolarity is a facade. Given that this doubt arises some 30 pages only before the revelation of the editor, that device is almost programmed to appear gratuitous and wholly unconvincing.

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[106] Letter Raymond Guérin to Jean Grenier, 23/07/35 : 'Rien ne me semble plus sincère que la lettre, plus vrai … si je ne donne pas le nom de la femme de Zobain, c'est parce que je ne me sentais pas le droit de lui donner son nom véritable et que cela est impossible.' Unpublished letter, BN, Fonds Grenier.

[107] Some of the comments of Brasillach in his review amplify this: 'Mais il est d'autres ouvrages qu'on remarque peu à peu, et auxquels seront toujours sensibles les amateurs d'âmes, les esprits curieux d'une certaine forme de récits qu'a toujours aimés, aux meilleures époques, le lecteur français. [..] Il serait fâcheux que, dans un pays où l'analyse, avec ses qualités et ses défauts, a toujours fait partie de l'essence même de la race, on ne sente pas combien il est important que la continuité de notre littérature soit représentée par des œuvres comme *Zobain*, même si nous avons quelques reproches à lui faire.' Robert Brasillach : *L'Action française*, 14/01/37, p. 3.

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Other paratextual features

The first edition of *Zobain* was accompanied by a *prière d'insérer* written by Jean Grenier.[108] This text, originally anonymous but following a request from Guérin signed by the renowned writer [109] offered a lengthy précis of the subject of the work, and concluded :

> Avec un grand art, l'auteur montre à l'œuvre tous ces [faits] infiniment petits qui, par leur insensible variation, font que la même chose qui causait notre bonheur cause aujourd'hui notre désespoir. Et il ne nous dit pas tout : comme celle des grands écrivains, son analyse baigne dans le mystère.

Such an endorsement from a figure like Grenier is important for several reasons: it provides almost a guarantee of a readership, sympathetic or otherwise; it certainly guarantees the attention of professional critics and therefore the opportunity to be reviewed; it offers some credibility to the apprentice writer that Grenier is prepared to attach his own name and reputation to the work; it identifies Guérin as a writer of potential stature, a worthy addition to the Gallimard fold. The fact of the signature is critical, as Guérin – always alive to the requirements of reputation-building – appreciated.

Notice biographique

Included in the press pack of the first edition of *Zobain* was a '*notice biographique'* composed by Guérin at the request of Gallimard. The full text of this '*notice'* was reproduced in an article entitled *'*Raymond Guérin*'* on page 6 of *Le Figaro littéraire,* dated 21/11/36, by André Billy:

> « Né à Paris en 1905. Etudes au lycée Voltaire, puis au lycée et à la Faculté de Poitiers. Jusqu'à vingt ans ne vit que pour le sport : course à pied, boxe, rugby ; joue deux saisons avant au Racing. Cesse de jouer à cause de sa mauvaise vue. Se met à lire. Sent naître en lui un impérieux besoin d'écrire. Mais a horreur des gens qui vivent de la littérature. Décide d'apprendre un métier, gagne sa vie. Commence alors son « apprentissage d'écrivain » durant ses heures de loisirs ; pendant dix ans, travaille ainsi à ce qu'il appelle ses « gammes », soutenu par quelques amis, et compose pendant ce temps, à titre d'exercices, plusieurs ouvrages qu'il ne publie pas. Enfin à trente ans, se jugeant prêt, remet à Jean Grenier, puis à Marcel Arland et à Jean Paulhan, *Zobain*, qu'il vient de terminer. » « Vit actuellement à Bordeaux. »

Billy was brutal in his critique of Guérin, deploring especially the young writer's attack on those who earn their living from writing, accusing Guérin of representing a return to the 'ivory tower' elite of the 1885 Symbolists.

However reluctant Guérin had been in preparing this text, and however negative the reaction to it was in some sections of the media[110], it nevertheless served its purpose: it

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[108] Full text reproduced in *Raymond Guérin: Lettres à Sonia*, 2005*,* p. 325, footnote 4.

[109] In a letter to Grenier (27/10/35) Guérin was overwhelmed by the warmth of the endorsement: 'Je ne croyais pas que vous parleriez de mon livre si élogieusement.' Sensitive as ever to the eyes and conclusions of others, Guérin felt it was too positive to appear without signature. 'Tout le monde pensera qu'elle est de moi. Le grand scrupuleux que je suis en est gêné, affreusement gêné...' Unpublished letter, BN, Fonds Grenier.

[110] Letter Jean Paulhan to Raymond Guérin (1/12/36): 'On me parle beaucoup de votre livre. On s'accorde à le juger très beau ; et la notice biographique un peu difficile à avaler (d'un orgueil un peu gauche)'. Fonds Guérin, BLJD.

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created an awareness of Guérin amongst the critical fraternity[111] and especially, through the coruscating article of André Billy, with the general reading public. In his reply to Paulhan, Guérin was uncharacteristically defensive, and then characteristically brash. Admitting that the '*notice'* was 'quelque peu orgueilleuse', he continued : 'Mais comment dire "ce qu'on est" et "ce qu'on a voulu entreprendre" en quelques lignes ?' Je me suis trahi en voulant trop schématiser. Cependant mon orgueil n'est-il pas justifié ?' [112] The article was useful also in associating Guérin's name in print with Paulhan, Arland and Grenier. In literary circles in 1936 this was a powerful club to join.

The nature of the information shared in the '*notice'* undermines Guérin's determination described above to maintain the anonymity of his wife. The final sentence of the '*notice'* (''Vit actuellement à Bordeaux'), taken in conjunction with the multiple references to that city within the text, provide the beginnings of a framework of an autobiographical reading. Given that, in addition, both the '*notice'* and the text describe an individual with poor eyesight who used to play rugby and represented Racing Club during his time in Paris, the grounds for an autobiographical reception become stronger still. Following the Billy article, all of France had access to information that could easily have led via Guérin to Denyse, with further evidence provided by the detail in the text that the wife, like Denyse, had recently had her first book accepted for publication.

Like the adoption of the epistolary format with its pretend editor/addressee, Guérin's proclamation of discretion whilst maintaining absolute sincerity was a piece of intellectual posturing likely to break down as soon as it was scrutinised. Perhaps the lesson learned here provided the impetus towards the more autofictional approach of a decade later: real events, but embedded within a fictional framework. The treatment of the Zobain phase in *Parmi..* is markedly different even though, as the chapter on *Parmi…* will show, the text contains the very letters exchanged by Guérin and Denyse during their year-long courtship. As might be expected from a first work, *Zobain* is a mish-mash of conflicting intentions and contradictory influences.

A first set of clothes : *Zobain*, *sa correspondance*

In addition to the epistolarity which was indispensable to the emerging writer (see above), the work is composed in a style redolent of the influence of Gide. [113] This property of the text was recognised in some reviews,[114] and with a structure which to some extent mimics the format of the latter's *récits.* In the uncomprehending (self-)questioning there are certainly echoes of *La Symphonie Pastorale*, whilst Zobain is unaware of many aspects of himself in

[111] The review of *Zobain* by Etiemble included the phrase '*fait ses gammes'*, together with the information that this apprenticeship had lasted ten years. Both details appear to have been lifted directly from the *notice*, showing its reach and potential for impacting reviews, and as a consequence reception of the text.
[112] Letter Raymond Guérin to Jean Paulhan, 3/12/36. Fonds Guérin, BLJD.
[113] In *Entretiens avec Claude-Henri Rocquet*, this was emphasised by Guérin himself – 'Et avec ma facilité de pastiche, je devais me défendre pour ne pas écrire comme Gide. Il suffit de lire *Zobain* pour se rendre compte à quel point j'ai subi alors cette influence.*' Entretiens avec Claude-Henri Rocquet*. Text of interviews conducted by M. Rocquet with Raymond Guérin in 1955, seen by the author at M. Rocquet's residence, Paris, July 1987.
[114] René Etiemble, *Europe*, 15 juin 1937, pp. 282-83: **'**reprochons-lui d'achever ses phrases, parfois, sur des rythmes trop gidiens'.

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the same manner as Michel of *L'Immoraliste*. In addition to the influence of Gide, several critics also detected echoes of Proust.[115]

The language of *Zobain* is elevated, a feature acknowledged by a number of critics.[116] One example: bearing in mind the type of language used a decade later in *l'Apprenti* to describe the act of intercourse, the expression 'la traiter en vainqueur' (p. 197) is a model of delicacy.

The 'reality' of *Zobain*

Described by Marcel Arland as 'une œuvre lente, pleine et grave' [117] *Zobain* is a place of introspection, a world restricted to the contemplations of Zobain himself, those things immediately visible to him, and the things said or written to him. As a result, with the exception of two accounts of journeys, one undertaken (pp. 190-194) the other only contemplated (pp. 135-136), this is a text free of a sense of movement, static around the interior monologue (or pretend confidence) of the letter-writer, itself often a reflection on a reflection.

Notwithstanding the inclusion of identifiers of 'the real' – place names, specific dates and times, real railway itineraries, actual resorts and hotels – what is striking about *Zobain* is its irreality. So intense is the focus from Zobain on his own relationship and solitude that reality exists only as a type of otherness, experienced voyeuristically when, for example, he escapes his loneliness by following absolute strangers into unfamiliar parts of town. Kauffmann makes the point that a text so overtly rooted in the mid-1930s is free of any mention of the rise of Fascism. (Kauffmann, 2007, p. 64).

In terms of place, the use of identifiers of the real is mixed. The reader is offered much information as to the actual location of the letter-writer, Bordeaux, not only from the letter etiquette but also from the detailed accounts of the city and its impact on the psychology of the individual. On the other hand, the new residence of the wife, the city of T…, is not identified, although it is located on the Garonne and is close to the small town of B…(p. 40). The couple take their honeymoon in the town of R… in Normandy (p. 160). Not encrypted, however, are the details of the various sanatoria attended by the wife, nor the hotels in which Zobain stayed when he visited her. The pact apparently being offered to the reader is somewhat confusing. If this were an epistolary novel, a fiction, why the need for partial suppression? If this were a confessional text, how could suppression of any detail be justified?

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[115] *Charivari* 5/12/36 – Jean Robert: 'subtilité toute proustienne' ; *Gringoire* 27/11/36, p. 6 – Jean-Pierre Maxence: 'C'est l'histoire d'un couple, minutieusement analysée, si minutieusement même, que le livre rappelle, à un seul point de vue d'ailleurs, Marcel Proust' ; *Il Meridiano (Rome)* 13/8/39 – Ettore Settanni detects a Proustian 'ordre narratif' to the text'.

[116] *L'Action Française* January 1937, p. 3 – Robert Brasillach: 'la langue est d'une grande pureté. M. Guérin use d'un style simple et musical, assourdi par la passion, le regret, la douleur. Une aussi ombrageuse pudeur d'expression doit être tout d'abord notée, et respectée' *; Gringoire* 27/11/36, p. 6 – Jean-Pierre Maxence:'on ne peut nier les dons de lucidité et de finesse de M. Raymond Guérin.*'*

[117] Arland continued : 'Elle n'accepte *pas* une loi étrangère, mais se développe selon sa propre exigence. Elle peut déconcerter d'abord par son cours sinueux, ses caprices, ses arrêts, ses retours. Il faut en considérer l'ensemble pour reconnaître que pauses et méandres lui étaient nécessaires. Ce n'est certes pas une œuvre complaisante au public : il se peut même qu'elle ne le soit pas assez. Mais elle ne cherche jamais à déconcerter.' Marcel Arland, *La NRF*, n°280, janvier 1937, pp. 92-94.

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Time references are specific, and relate to a period immediately preceding publication. The last letter of a work published in 1936 was 'sent' only in July 1934, and the Editor's note added a year later. This increases the inclination of a reader away from a fictional reception, and towards identifying the persons of the text as connected to the real world of the present. As Kauffmann points out, Guérin's adherence to the chronology of his lived experience is fanatical, the date of the final letter coinciding precisely with the actual date of the real court proceedings.

Conclusion : first steps. A writer of promise, with technical questions to resolve

The fact of realising the dream of publishing a piece of writing was important to Guérin, not only in itself but more in the status that he believed it conferred upon him.[118] In a letter to Jean Paulhan (24/05/1938), he admitted to having experienced '*griserie'* after its publication: 'Zobain m'avait un peu tourné la tête'. With the appearance of *Zobain*, the writer has gone beyond the confines of the narrow literary world of Bordeaux and can now legitimately claim to have a presence on the national stage, albeit perhaps not to the degree of his imagination. The importance of *Zobain* resides largely in the epitext: the literary associates, the Gallimard contract, the positive reception from a gamut of critics. *Zobain* was a text that had to be written. It marks, as the editor/addressee asserts, the culmination of a '*crise'* in the mentality of the letter-writer, so at a personal level it enables the writer to evacuate, as Guérin might put it, the pus from some of his psychological spots.

The work itself, as we have seen, is flawed, bearing the impression of contradictory thinking and a naïve commitment to 'sincerity'. How to convey this 'sincerity' was a problem to which, up to this point, Guérin adopted a fairly primitive rationale. Insisting that there were two types of writing – the artificial and the natural – Guérin positioned himself firmly in the camp of the latter, in which lay epistolarity. He set out his thinking in a letter to Jean Grenier, dated 14th January 1936:

> C'est par instinct que je suis conduit à m'exprimer par lettre. Je ne saurais écrire une fiction, un roman, une pièce de théâtre, une nouvelle. Il me faut un interlocuteur, un correspondant plutôt. [...] Tout autre mode d'expression semble artificiel, convenu. J'ai de grands soucis de forme, de composition, d'esthétisme, et cependant pour rien au monde je ne voudrais être qualifié d'artiste, encore moins de littérateur, ou même d'écrivain, même homme de lettres.

Whilst considering the epistolary format the only 'natural' (his emphasis) form of writing, Guérin did allow that, if unpublished, the journal and memoir forms would also enter this category. Leaving aside the very arguable nature of the claims in the final sentence (bluster which in later correspondence Paulhan would flatten), the letter makes clear the extremely primitive conception of sincerity, of truth, and of the means to express them.

Importantly, the successful communication of truth depends on the ability to (fore-) see the reception of the message. As Guérin's work is published, he is faced with the predicament that this possibility is no longer available to him, in that the potential readership far exceeds his capacity to visualise it. It is one of the contentions of this thesis that, following this first immersion into the literary world, and especially observing the forces at

[118] Kauffmann reproduces part of a letter from Guérin to Grenier, reflecting this *orgueil* : 'Je ne fais plus partie de la foule des hommes ; je me suis rangé parmi les 4 ou 500 artistes qui ont la prétention d'avoir un cerveau spécial.*'* Kauffmann, 2007, p. 59.

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work in guiding reception of the text, Guérin came to understand the power at his disposal within the paratext, and sought to exploit it in subsequent books. The article by Billy would resonate in him for two decades.

The other facet of Guérin's rationale was its unvoiced attachment to the idea of the purity of the original manuscript. Letter, unpublished journal or memoir, all of these are documents in their pristine state, unrevised or abridged. Some of this mentality informed Guérin's correspondence with both Paulhan and Grenier, whose suggestions that the draft of *Zobain* might in some ways be amended was received with uncompromising hostility. [119] This fanaticism persisted throughout Guérin's career.

Zobain marks the end of the writer's devotion to epistolarity. To place a more positive construction on this, it could be argued – and indeed would have been by Guérin – that the mould of epistolarity, having been once used, now had to be discarded.

If *Zobain* is the measure, Guérin is to be believed when he declares himself incapable of invention.[120] Ten years later, there will be ample evidence that he has accommodated this disability, with experiments which are so radical and innovative that very few critics appreciate them, and none has the technical vocabulary to describe.

A text already written long before the conception of the '*espace automythologique*' inevitably became problematic when required to integrate into its tri-generic classification model. Not a *mythe*, not a *fiction*, a process of elimination caused it to become, in public, a '*confession'*, thereby undermining the effort made towards anonymisation through omission of certain details and a faux epistolary format. Etiemble's instinct that this choice was ill-judged is well founded. The treatment of the same events in a completely different manner in *Parmi…* shows that Guérin probably sensed this too.

Zobain was the first sortie onto a terrain which Guérin was to occupy for two decades, that of accommodating different types of writing without prejudicing truth or artistic integrity. Here, the attempt to express profound personal truths using the equipment of epistolary fiction is destined to fail, albeit elegantly. As we have seen, either injudicious use or lack of awareness of the power of the paratext – or indeed both - undermines the apparent disguise provided by simulating a fictional mode of writing, and the subsequent reclassification of the work as a 'confession' merely confirms what many had suspected.

The text leaves us with one final thought, an early deployment of the weapon of the 'throw-forward' that was to become a feature of later work. 'Mais qui ne s'invente pas?' the addressee concludes, the observation facing backwards and casting new uncertainty on the representation of the self just completed, whilst evoking the possibility of new ideas about the self still to emerge. The reader is left where Guérin wants: in a place of uncertainty.

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[119] 'Et je ne crois pas que je puisse jamais me plier aux prétentions soi-disant commerciales d'un éditeur'. Letter to Jean Grenier, 21/10/35. BN, Fonds Grenier.

[120] In the letter to Jean Grenier (14/1/36) already quoted, there is a seminal insight into his thinking at this time, and indeed into the whole project which was later to emerge. Guérin contends that writing and the self are intrinsically connected : 'Qui n'écrit pas pour dégager leur [sic] personnalité […] c'est l'homme enfin que je vois sous l'artiste... l'œuvre n'étant alors, vis-à-vis d'elle [la vie] que l'ébauche, que l'exercice, que le témoignage, le reflet ou l'outil'.

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Quand vient la fin – 'Un livre si singulier devait faire apparaitre des innovations d'écriture'.[121] What constituted the originality and challenge of this '*bombe atomique*'[122]?

Part I - The paratextual elements

If *Zobain* had to some extent stirred critical interest in Guérin, *Quand vient la fin*[123] established his status as a writer of merit. Initially published during Guérin's incarceration as a prisoner of war, its value was textual – the critical response to the book was overwhelmingly favourable[124] – and politically symbolic, a work of art from an individual currently deprived of his liberty. The book came to represent not just the struggle of Guérin himself, nor generally that of the artist in a barbaric world, but through its treatment at institutional levels that of the rejection of pre-defeat French cultural values in favour of the imposed values of the collaborationist regime.[125]

This is a work of remarkable innovation in two respects. First, in the dramatic weaponisation of the paratext, already powerful in 1941 but enhanced in 1945 with the addition of the *postface*. Second, despite its classification in 1945 amongst the '*confessions'* of the corpus list, and despite all the claims for it of cold, scientific quasi-naturalist objectivity, this is a work which whilst maintaining the appearance of a hybrid biography/*témoignage* is on closer inspection an '*autobiographie par procuration*'.[126]

The title *Quand vient la fin*

The title derives from its almost refrain-like appearance through the final pages of the text, totalising the narrator's impressions at the demise of the subject.

Taking the title literally and in isolation, a reader might speculate as to what is 'ending'. Human instinct associates the nouns '*fin'* and '*mort'* which produce the metonymic impact identified by Genette.[127] The titular phrase introduces a sense of teleology which the *récit* to a large degree embodies: this is the account of the unavoidable end of an individual pursuing a monomanic addiction to work. As we are reminded throughout the text, there is only one possible outcome, all that remains to be determined is its exact nature.

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[121] Joë Bosquet, *Confluences*, n°18, mars 1943, pp. 349-50.
[122] Morvan Lebesque, *Carrefour*, 2 novembre 1949, p. 8.
[123] Paris : Gallimard, 1941; republished 1945 with a *postface*, *Après la fin*. All page references to the main text will be to the original edition. Reference to the republished edition will be made when amendments or revisions are seen to change the original sense or possible reception of the text. Such instances will be signalled in the discussion. In this chapter, the names of the works will be abbreviated to *Quand…* and *Après…*
[124] Unpublished letter from Jean Paulhan to Guérin, received 7/9/41: 'La critique parle jusqu'ici de Quand … comme d'un grand chef-d'œuvre. Pas une dissonance. A la NRF on croit à un grand succès'. Guérin's wartime diary also records letters of appreciation from Jacques Chardonne, Gabriel Audisio, Jean Grenier, Marcel Arland, Henri Calet. Fonds Guérin, BLJD.
[125] *Quand…* was considered a very strong candidate for the 1941 Prix Goncourt but was ultimately overlooked. The Goncourt committee was heavily influenced by the Vichy Government and instructed to reject works which perpetuated what were perceived as the ethics of the defeated country.
[126] *Libération* 23/11/81 – 'Guérin et le Minotaure' by Nadine Vasseur.
[127] Genette, 1987, p. 88. Genette also suggests the title as a kind of banner held up by a writer as a marker to move towards in the production of meaning (Genette, 1987, p. 71). Such a description might fit well with the reader's experience of *Quand…*

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Introducing in to the title the notion of 'end' places *Quand…* at the opposite extreme to most texts of a biographical nature. As Daniel Madelénat observes, one of the stock titles of biographies is '*Vie de ...*' followed by the individual's name.[128] Two points therefore arise: the nomenclature (in this case, of the father) is entirely erased from the title thus eradicating any trace of the individual as an individual, also a feature as we will see of the overall text; and the emphasis is on the fate rather than the journey.

'*Du même auteur*'[129]

Other than within the *postface*, the corpus list is the only place in which the reader is informed that *Quand…* is presented as a 'confession'. Given the dramatic impact of the setting out of the corpus, it is curious that this detail – equally powerful - is barely stressed and that only an attentive reader would be alert to it. We may speculate that the conception of the *espace automythologique* in the first year of captivity was overtaken by the separate appearance of a text which Guérin had submitted to Gallimard in 1939 but which would require serious reformulation in order to comply with the new generic format.

Dedication to Jean Paulhan

First as early mentor, then as correspondent and constructive critic, as advocate within Gallimard, as intermediary with journalists, reviewers and fellow writers, Paulhan was integral to the career of Guérin throughout their near 20 year relationship. Guérin was signally aware of his debt, referring to Paulhan as '*Le Juge*' and openly expressing his intention to defer to Paulhan in all matters.[130]

The dedication also recognises the role played by Paulhan in bringing the text to publication. In Guérin's absence, Paulhan strongly advocated the merits of the work and secured the consent of Gaston Gallimard, liaised with censors, dealt with reviewers and conducted all of the tasks normally undertaken in the preparation of the published book by the writer – a process set out in *Après* p. 284. It could be said that Paulhan is another of the paratextual fathers that surround this text. In its draft form, the *postface Après…* explicitly referred to Paulhan, but this was removed at the request of Paulhan himself.[131]

Epigraphs

On the next liminary page the reader is presented with a number of epigraphs: six in the 1941 edition, of which three were dropped in 1945. The specific circumstances of 1941 explain the high number: when preparing a text, Guérin typically collated a large number of lines or short paragraphs with the potential to become epigraphs, from which one or more – but, as in *Zobain*, a maximum of three – were selected.[132] In preparing the book for publication, Paulhan worked faithfully to the original draft of *Quand…*

[128] Daniel Madelénat, *La biographie* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1984) p. 14.
[129] Please see the theoretical introduction to the thesis for a detailed account of this section.
[130] Letter Raymond Guérin – Jean Paulhan, 22/9/41 : 'Tout ce que je vous demande pour l'avenir, à vous en qui je mets toute ma confiance, qui êtes pour moi et mon maître et mon juge et à qui je dois déjà tout, c'est de ne plus me laisser rien publier qui ne vous paraisse vraiment digne de mon ambition. Je veux suivre en tous points vos conseils', Fonds Guérin, BLJD.
[131] Letter Jean Paulhan to Raymond Guérin, 1/4/44, Fonds Guérin, BLJD.
[132] Amongst Guérin's papers there is a draft of the opening page of *l'Apprenti Psychologue* – its working title – with six epigraphs. In the final version only one was retained.

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The three epigraphs retained for the 1945 edition reflect the writer's literary roots – Montaigne, Stendhal, Gide, precisely the same combination as that used in *Zobain*. Given the nature of some observations towards the end of *Quand*…, it is easy to construe the epigraphic line-up as a display of the writer's true genealogy, that the child at times depicted in *Quand…* as considering himself adopted is in fact the indirect progeny of literary greats.

More than this, the epigraphs permit a form of revenge.[133] The very act of writing enables a show of defiance towards the father whose mistrust and abhorrence for literature is total. Without his father's permission, Guérin takes the facts of his father's life and death, and wraps them in an envelope of the words he despised. Importantly, the text ends with another epigraph (p. 256). Several metaphors spring to mind at this point : the closing of the envelope, encasing the father for eternity in a literary prison; or the nailing down of the coffin. Rather than expressing grief or compassion, Guérin chooses to end the text with a gratuitous '*coup de grâce'*, a cowardly final blow to an already defenceless victim. The paratext has become an active space, weaponised in the creation of implied meaning, the final assertion of the superiority of one set of values over another.

The epigraphs are drawn from a tradition into which the writer unconsciously inserts himself. Other than one of the heroes of the Romantics, Shakespeare, all writers cited fall broadly within the current of French introspective writing.[134] Two quotations from Montaigne book-end the text; Stendhal and Gide are writers to whom Guérin's debt is widely acknowledged[135]; Valéry and Fargue are both near contemporaries of Guérin, the former – particularly his *Monsieur Teste* – especially admired. Again, it can be speculated that by adopting these epigraphs Guérin is making a statement about himself: these are my roots, this is my (intellectual) family. The relevance of this only becomes clear as the text elaborates questions of parentage, genealogy and inherited versus acquired traits.

Postface – Après la fin

In his survey of European literature, Genette is surprised to find very few examples of a *postface* (Genette, 1987, pp. 240, 241). His conclusions as to the motivations behind producing such a text are germane here: to add to the reader's understanding of the origins of the text, a desire to guide and correct reading, a wish to 'have a final say' on the text as a marker for posterity (Genette, 1987, p. 263).

In Guérin's case, the motivations are several and disparate. There was a sense of injustice on the part of the writer that *Quand…* was published in his absence and without his oversight, or – to use the metaphor of the overall work – that this was a text without a father. From the Spring of 1943, there is evidence of Guérin's desire to secure a right to revise and republish, a concession which was ultimately secured from the publisher in November 1943.

The idea of a postface, however, is absent from this correspondence, and only enters the conversation when the corrected manuscript is submitted for publication. Taken aback by

[133] In *Après…* Guérin dismisses revenge as a motivating force behind *Quand…*. (p. 293) This is duplicitous, as the reading of the text below will demonstrate.
[134] In *Après…*, Guérin implies that his work expresses the struggle for the liberty of the individual which had characterised a certain fraternity of French writers since the Eighteenth Century (p. 304).
[135] One example: Guérin's review of Gide's *Journal 1939-1942* in *Juin* magazine is eloquent of his devotion to Gide (*Chroniques*, 2015, pp. 94-100). The article alludes also to Stendhal, as do 11 of the other articles in the collection.

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the fact of its existence,[136] Paulhan acknowledged the merits of the draft postface, but was adamant that publication of it would be a mistake.[137] It is reasonable to ask why the text was so important to Guérin that he proceeded with publication against the advice of his literary protector, his '*Juge'*.

Its importance resided not only in its content. This was a first opportunity for Guérin to remind the reading public of his presence. It had been nine years since the appearance of *Zobain*, during which Guérin had been unable to speak directly, in his own voice, unmediated by editors. *Après…* constitutes an early warning for the public, a preparatory siren. Second, it permits a more controlled entry into the epitext. Following the André Billy article on *Zobain*, Guérin appears to have grasped the potential of the media in shaping perceptions of both himself personally and by extension his work. In *Après…* Guérin affords himself the right to speak, in his own voice, directly to the reader, to ensure that the reading public is offered an authoritative – in his view - account of his life and thought.

The *postface* itself is wide-ranging. It begins, reasonably enough, with an explanation to the reader of the motives behind the decision to republish. Genette (1987, p. 243) considers this a standard function of the postface. It could be argued, however, that if this were the primary and exclusive motive of the writer, that more logically this argument should precede the revised text itself in the form of a preface or *avant-propos*. That it does not indicates that it is only one of a number of statements which the writer wishes to share, which cannot justifiably be placed in front of and thus delay the reader's entry into the text itself.

The *postface* moves into a lengthy account of the writer's incarceration as a prisoner-of-war, the events surrounding the republication (including a self-mythologising account of the volume's mistreatment by the prison guards), before reporting the writer's initial reaction to the volume on seeing his text for the first time. 'Je ne cessais de comparer silencieusement mon récit à ce que j'avais souhaité qu'il fût.*'* (1945, p. 288).

At this point, Guérin opens up a report of a dialogue with an un-named critic,[138] 'le seul', he states, 'qui prit alors sur lui de m'attaquer ouvertement' (1945, p. 289). The critic, according to Guérin, had voiced two main objections:

> il s'étonnait tout d'abord que je n'aie pas maintenu jusqu'au bout de ma confession[139], l'humour affiché du début, et que je me sois laissé entraîner, avec une force qui pouvait ressembler à de la complaisance, dans l'horrible et objective description des cinquante dernières pages' (pp 289-290)

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[136] A letter from Guérin to Paulhan (20/1/44) explains in detail the nature of the ongoing revisions to the text of *Quand…*, but makes no mention at all of a *postface*.

[137] Letter Jean Paulhan to Raymond Guérin, (1/4/44) : 'Très précieuse, votre post-face. Très précieuse et, à mon sens, à garder pour vous. (Un homme vaut ce que valent ses secrets).*'* In a subsequent letter, welcoming Guérin's apparent acquiescence in this view, Paulhan observed : 'Vraiment content que vous soyez de mon avis. Cette postface vous eût fait du tort (je ne veux pas dire auprès des lecteurs, ce serait peu. Auprès de vous-même.)' Undated letter, replying '*jeudi'* to Guérin's letter of 10/4/44.

[138] Such a gambit is not uncommon in prefaces or postfaces (Genette, 1987, pp. 244-45). Repudiating or correcting the 'misreading' of early critics allows the writer better to prepare for a 'proper' reading, as (s)he might see it.

[139] This is the first description of *Quand…* as a '*confession'* anywhere other than in the corpus list.

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> Ce que mon critique me reprochait d'autre part, c'était d'avoir fait le silence le plus complet sur les rapports que j'entretins avec mon père (p. 292)

The first objection opens the way for Guérin to make a characteristically impassioned case on behalf of what he would perceive as sincerity. Forcefully rejecting any constraint on this, Guérin addresses the reader directly:

> je le demande aux lecteurs de bonne foi, ma peinture fût-elle hideuse, n'est-elle pas hideuse aussi, la vie, quand elle dévore l'homme avec cet appétit aveugle et laisse la maladie et la souffrance le déchiqueter en fin de compte comme elle a fait de mon modèle ? (p. 291)

This whole section, with its overt reference to 'ce que j'ai appelé depuis la mythologie de la réalité' (p. 291 - at this point, 1945, a concept completely unknown to any reader, other than as an unexplained title in the corpus list) prepares the environment for the battle to follow, over the censorship of the soon to be published *L'Apprenti* (1946). This is very much a manifesto statement.

The second criticism enables Guérin to fill the paratext with information, first about himself and his relationship with his father, then about himself as a writer. The foundations are being laid for a myth about the self, the miracle of the artist emerging against all the odds from a base and corrosive environment:

> Par quel hasard un père que l'auteur dépeignait comme si lamentablement enfoncé dans la matière, limité à l'argent, s'épuisant en besognes sordides […] avait-il pu donner naissance à ce même auteur ? Pouvait-il réellement sortir un écrivain du monde mercantile et borné où le père s'était complu ? (p. 292)

The very existence of the current text is proof of the resilience of the child in the face of parental pressure:

> Je ne songe jamais à ce passé sans être effaré de l'acharnement que mon père mit toujours, […] à faire de moi, non pas l'homme que je voulais être mais celui qu'il aurait voulu que je sois. S'il avait réussi, je n'aurais pas écrit... (p. 294)

Guérin further draws back the veil, as he puts it, on their relationship in a long section (pp. 294-298) in which he bitterly contrasts the intellectual and emotional deprivations of his own upbringing with

> ces jeunes princes arrogants des lettres ou de la politique, … A 20 ans (déjà !) pourvus de solides rentes, flattés par leurs condisciples... ils n'avaient plus qu'à s'avancer sur les routes faciles qui mènent au succès et à la célébrité. / Je l'avoue, tout autre fut mon lot. (p. 295)

The fact of the writer's emergence is a surprise to him: 'Comment sortir de là ? Oui, comment ai-je pu sortir de là ?' (p. 298)

Guérin adopts a further Romantic myth, his suspicion of having been adopted (p. 298), and confesses that it was only at the age of 20 that he was able to 'donner jour à mon être veritable. Il m'a fallu, en quelque sorte, naître une deuxième fois', (p. 298). The use of the term '*naître'* here almost implies an immaculate conception, and is at the very least vague and non-committal regarding paternity. Later, Guérin will struggle to define his '*être véritable'* – indeed he will identify an infinite number of them - but here he clearly intends this to be understood as his intellectual persona.

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At this point, the writer steps without protections into the glare of the reader's gaze to offer an open assessment of where his upbringing and life experiences have left him, today, 'en état d'infériorité sur tout jeune homme qui a eu un développement normal'.

The next section (pp. 299-301) develops this portrait of the writer re-emerging, following captivity, holding his work up to the scrutiny of the public. It is a harrowing and eviscerating self-evaluation, charting the inadequacies and insecurities of the self, conscious of the gulf separating him from 'ceux que, dans les Lettres, on place le plus haut' (p. 300) who nonetheless offer him their friendship. In a sentence pregnant with relevance to the current text, he states: *'[...] je ne rougis pas d'être le fils de mes œuvres pas plus que je n'ai à rougir d'être, en même temps, le fils d'un homme qui avait une conception si décevante de l'univers'* (p. 301). Curiously, under this model, the writer begets the text, of which he then, through its own adventure and the reputation it obtains, becomes the son.

He continues with an intense and highly introspective direct address to the reader:

> Mais, par pitié ! qu'on ne vienne pas me reprocher d'avoir caché mon atroce blessure [...] Qu'on ne me pousse pas à bout ! Qu'on ne me force pas à divulguer ce que j'ai caché jusqu'ici ! Oui, qu'on ne me force pas à le dire crûment, férocement, comme cela vaudrait d'être dit si je ne reculais justement devant l'injustice d'une situation à laquelle je dois peut-être ce sursaut volcanique de ma vocation d'écrivain mais à laquelle je dois aussi des stigmates que nul bonheur, nulle grandeur n'effaceront jamais tout à fait. (p. 301)

A reader of 1945 might be genuinely shocked at the violence of this outburst. It is, however, a tactical complement to the manifesto commitment to truth made above – this a damaged but pure spirit willing to say the unsayable about not just his intimate family but contemporary society in general. Writing is, for him, '*ma'* vocation, the possessive adjective underscoring his own sense of belonging in this environment – if not in his blood, as it were, then produced by the natural miracle of volcanic activity. Finally, despite the rhetorical flourish, literally no-one is pushing Guérin to reveal his secrets, a fact which his narcissism finds it difficult to assimilate. One of the motivating factors behind *Après…* would appear to be that of generating the attention about which he pre-emptively complains.

Guérin concludes this section with a highly duplicitous declaration of his respect for the independence of the already published text:

> Je compris en même temps qu'il était plus sage de se laisser inventer par ceux qui pourraient me lire. … On ferait fausse route en voulant transformer du tout au tout un livre qui a déjà acquis auprès de ses lecteurs une réputation qui n'est pas forcément celle qu'on imaginait en le composant, mais qui n'en est peut-être pas moins valable pour cela. (p. 302)

The current text stands as evidence of the insincerity on display here. Guérin's intuition that writing never fully reflects what was in the writer's head, and that a text may be capable of readings of which (s)he may not be fully aware, is a source of constant personal anxiety. It underpins the writer's attachment to the idea that a text is always only provisional, even once published, and that literature consists of the infinite rewriting of the same text – but only by the producing artist. For Guérin, the surprising element about the revision of *Quand…* would be not that it had happened, but that it had only happened once.

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The closing section of the postface (pp. 303-05) is an explicit declaration of the writer's personal credo ('homme qui une fois pour toutes, a décidé, au fond de son cœur, qu'il ne serait jamais, quoi qu'il arrive, du côté des oppresseurs contre les opprimés', p. 303). Casually introducing the names of Stendhal and Joyce, Dostoievski and Lawrence, Guérin allows himself quietly to be associated with the literary traditions of '*environ cent cinquante ans*' (p. 304). The text concludes with a rousing statement of the writer's state of mind as it stands, we learn, on 16th June 1945:

> Je suis le premier à souhaiter la venue du jour où je pourrai écrire une œuvre de clarté et de confiance en la vie, dans un monde qui connaîtrait enfin le règne de la dignité humaine. (p. 305)

This is an imposing statement from a returning exile, a bleak perspective for a reader of 1945 in a recently liberated albeit bruised France now about to be confronted with its own myths.

Après… is thus far more than mere commentary or reflection on *Quand…* It is a watershed text in the career of Guérin, a visceral proclamation of the writer's re-emergence into the public space. It looks backwards – setting out the context of the writer's meagre publication record to date – and prepares the terrain for the blur of activity which is to follow. At the time of *Après…*, and following three years of bitter wrangling with the censors, Guérin is already aware of the furore which will be provoked by *l'Apprenti*, whose appearance he knows to be imminent. This text is his first public intervention in that debate.

The text fills the public space with information about Guérin which cannot afterwards be unknown. For all that the next work is a '*fiction'*, it cannot be read exclusively as such, for the reader is now in possession of facts – asserted as such by the writer himself – that expose it to a form of autobiographical reception. Monsieur Papa of *l'Apprenti* is inevitably seen partly through the prism of *mon père* in *Quand….*

Après… represents a more sophisticated, 'media conscious' Guérin. Having observed the power of the written press in 1936, he now sought to control the messages, both textual and personal, surrounding his work. The paratext was to remain a place of experimentation for the rest of his career.

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Quand vient la fin

Part II – The published work

Quand… was greeted with considerable acclaim[140] on its publication in 1941, and enjoyed a similar reception on its republication. Critical reaction coalesced around a small number of themes: the effacement of the writer from his own text[141] ; the honesty of the writing[142] ; the entomological nature of some of the narration.[143] *Quand…* however is a much more complex text than the reviewers allowed. Through a cacophony of different voices the writer is never absent, and far from the objective, scientific study of critical reception, this text is informed throughout with the ideology of the writer. This chapter will substantiate the claim that *Quand…*, far from being a pseudo-biography [144], is an origin tale, a proxy autobiography that tells as much of a story about its narrator as it does about its subject. In this study, given the complex nature of this text, I propose to use the terms *scriptor* / *subject,* which are valid in both sections of the work: 'scriptor' to indicate the agent of the writing, 'subject' to denote the individual about whom the text is written. [145]

Quand… : a question of ownership and identity

Quand… is a work of appropriation. It seizes the identity of the subject, suppresses the subject's individuality and creates from it a mythological construct, a representation of the migration of the late nineteenth-century French peasant from the fields and into urban capitalism. These are the roots of the scriptor: *Quand…* is an account of genealogy and miracle, the prodigal (aesthetic) son returning to his mercantilist origins, bringing with him enlightenment in the form of the word.

The status of the scriptor vis à vis the subject of *Quand…* is ethically similar to that of the ghost writers of the autobiographies of what Philippe Lejeune calls '*ceux qui n'écrivent pas'.*[146] The methodology, however, is radically different. Lejeune describes a consensual process ('ces gens ont accepté de parler', 1980, p. 265) in which the writer, familiar with the subject (1980, p. 279) and perhaps imbued with a democratic ideal ('rendre la parole au peuple', 1980, p. 250) seeks to maintain as far as possible the authenticity of the testimony of the subject ('prendre la parole du modèle, non la lui donner', 1980, p. 267). The writer must be aware of the dangers of his social status – disposing of the power of writing makes him a member of 'la classe dominante' (Lejeune 1980, p. 268) – and thus ensure that the act of writing itself does not remove the narration from the ownership of the subject. Lejeune

[140] Maurice Rostand, *Paris-Midi*, 08 août 1941 : '…l'accent de vérité est si flagrant qu'il est permis d'en douter et c'est cet accent qui place si haut ce livre exceptionnel, ce livre comme on en écrit si peu par siècle !' ; Jean Rolland, *Lectures 40*, 1er septembre 1941: **'**Un chef-d'œuvre d'intelligence et de volonté'.

[141] See especially the articles by Marcel Arland, *Comoedia*, 9 août 1941, p. 2 and André Rousseaux, *Le Figaro* 4/10/41, p. 4.

[142] Louis Emié, *Cahiers du Sud*, mars 1942, pp. 238-40: 'Aucune concession, aucune tricherie, aucun excès…' ; Jacques Chardonne, *Comoedia,* 24/4/43, p. 1: 'La vérité dont ce roman me pénètre vient de l'intérieur. Elle est dans l'artiste'.

[143] In particular on this point, the articles by Maurice Saillet, *Le Rouge et le Bleu* 15/11/41; Émile Henriot, *Le Temps*, 4 novembre 1942, p. 3 ; Maurice Nadeau, *Gavroche* 14/3/46, p. 4.

[144] Amongst others the articles by Maurice Rostand, *Paris-Midi***,** 08 août 1941 and Joë Bosquet, *Confluences***,** mars 1943, pp. 349-50.

[145] There is a variety of terminology for this relationship in critical work on biography : *biographe* and *sujet biographé* (Dosse), *enquêteur* and *enquêté* (Bourdieu). In relation to the *témoignage* of the second part, in addition to using the two terms proposed by Bourdieu, Lejeune refers to *observateur* and *observé*.

[146] 'L'autobiographie de ceux qui n'écrivent pas' in Philippe Lejeune, *Je est un autre* (Paris : Seuil, 1980), pp. 232 – 316.

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emphasises in particular (1980, p. 304) the critical importance of engaging the subject during the proof-reading process in order to secure an authentic voice.

Other than the proximity of scriptor and subject, none of the criteria set out by Lejeune is discernible in the production of *Quand…* There is no record of consent on the part of the subject, and the missing of several opportunities to listen to the subject (pp. 12, 13) indicates that 'capter la voix' (Lejeune 1980, p. 248) is not the objective of this *enquêteur* (Lejeune's term). We must deduce that he is seeking to take not the '*parole'* of the subject 'pour en faire de la littérature' (Lejeune 1980, p. 229) but something more substantial: the individual's entire trajectory.

As we observe elsewhere, the presence of the actual language of the subject in the text is extremely limited, and partitioned away behind the punctuation marks. This is a version of the subject, not the subject himself. In Bourdieu's phrase, *Quand…* is a perfect example of a work in which 'les classes dominées ne parlent pas, elles sont parlées'.[147]

Another of the dangers identified by Lejeune is that of transplanting the subject's words and inserting them into a pre-existing vessel of literary form. Whilst this lacks any authenticity, 'les critiques professionnels eux-mêmes sont convaincus. Plus la transposition est poussée, plus ils sont frappés par le *naturel'* (1980, p. 303). Interestingly, the word '*naturel'* occurs in Kauffmann's description of *Quand…*[148], while Jacques Chardonne, in his personal letter to Guérin regarding *Quand…*, commended 'cette absence d'art d'un si grand art'. The scriptor and his critic speak the same language, both observing – on the other side of the hygienic screen provided by the language and the means of production – the peasant of the text.

Identity

The most striking feature of *Quand…* is the lack of reference to the subject by name. On only two occasions in the entire text (pp. 32 and 202) is the name used, and each time in the reported speech of another family member.[149] For the scriptor, the subject exists in only one dimension: '*mon père'*. Even in the account of the period leading up to the subject's birth, the subject is still referred to as '*mon père'*, a status he retains throughout the depiction of his childhood, early adulthood and marriages.

This has several implications. First, it establishes the subject as interesting exclusively by and because of his relationship to the scriptor. This point will be developed further below. Second, the absence of the name strips the subject at an institutional level of his very being as an individual. As Bourdieu points out, the proper name is the institutional badge of individuality, enshrining the possibility of transferring an individual from one setting to

[147] Pierre Bourdieu, 'La paysannerie, une classe objet', *Actes de la Recherche en sciences sociales*, 17-18 (1977), p. 4, quoted in Lejeune, 1980, p. 254.

[148] 'incroyable mélange de naturel, de démesure, de rêverie.' Kauffmann, 2007, p. 85.

[149] On the second occasion, the personal focus on the subject is immediately lost as the speaker, the subject's godmother, comments on the person accompanying him: 'Tu as un beau et grand fils !' [ie the scriptor] (p. 202).

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another whilst retaining his/her essence.[150] Removing that cipher is an expression of power, a denial by one entity to another of its right to self-determination.

Third, a corollary of the second, as the subject has become less than an individual, he is therefore ready to assume the type of mythological function that the scriptor has in mind for him. This illustrates one of the dangers perceived by Lejeune : 'L'anonymat […] impose au lecteur une distanciation. L'individu dont on cite le récit n'est qu'un cas parmi d'autres' (1980, p. 314). Without the proper name, this increases the likelihood of a reception which sees the individual as representative of a wider community, what Lejeune calls 'une valeur exemplaire et mythologique' (1980, p. 309).

The proper name, on the other hand, confers depth on, in this case, the (ghosted) autobiography:

> En effet, le nom propre est un élément essentiel du système du livre lui-même. Il exerce simultanément (et par cela même soude ensemble de manière indissoluble) une fonction référentielle et une fonction romanesque.
>
> Du côté référentiel, il produit une sorte d'*effet de réel*, à cause de son contingence.
>
> Le nom, d'autre part, dans la mesure où il figure dans le *titre* du livre, programme un certain type de lecture. Un nom comme ça, cela ne s'invente pas, qu'il soit banal ... ou bizarre.

The ethical considerations surrounding the production of *Quand…* are not radically different from those outlined here. Given that the name is absent from the title, and is used only twice within the text, we can suspect Guérin of falling (knowingly and willingly) in to the trap described here. He is not seeking an '*effet de réel'*, more an '*effet mythologique*'.

<u>An identity purloined: who begets whom?</u>

The notion of the subsidiarity or inferior status of the subject is central to a reading of *Quand…* This has two aspects, the first contributing to the second. As we have said, the reference to the subject consistently as '*mon père'* establishes the primacy of this relationship: the subject enjoys status only in so far as he is within the orbit of the scriptor, effectively not existing at all until illuminated by the scriptor's gaze. The subject permits, through his physical intercession, the scriptor: yet through the medium of writing the subject is in essence fathered by the scriptor. The roles of progenitor and progeny are reversed. In conjunction with the denial of individuality leading to mythology, this is a second example of identity theft.

As a portrait, *Quand…* functions through a series of steps: de-individualisation, reversal of parentage, mythologisation. What is left is a hollow construct which requires substance. Into this void steps the scriptor.

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[150] 'Par cette forme tout à fait singulière de nomination que constitue le nom propre, se trouve instituée une identité sociale constante et durable qui garantit l'identité de l'individu biologique dans tous les champs possibles où il intervient en tant qu'agent, c'est-à-dire dans toutes ses histoires de vie possibles'. Pierre Bourdieu : 'L'illusion biographique' in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*. Vol. 62-63, juin 1986, p. 70.

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The methodological conundrum

Quand… is a text of enormous contradictions. It is presented within the corpus list as a '*confession'*, thus placing it firmly within a referential context. The reader might enter the text with the expectation that the work will be sincere, evidence-based, and most likely homodiegetic. The first challenge to these expectations comes at the level of narration. *Quand…* is composed of two types of discourse. The major part of the work is a quasi-biography, in which the scriptor attempts a chronological reconstruction of the life of the subject, his father. Following a transition, in which, as the chronology changes, the witness function begins to assume primacy over the biographical entity, the final part of the text is a *témoignage*, an eye-witness account *au jour le jour* of the illness and death of the subject. The text concludes with several lyrical pages of reflection as the narrator strives to make sense of what he has observed.[151]

Quands… as biography. A theoretical overview

The erection of *Quand…* on two generic foundations is further complicated by the fact that biography, simulated here, is itself a hybrid form, a '*genre impur'* to use Dosse's phrase.[152] It moves from side to side on the continuum between the referential and the fictional, but is never fully anchored in one position.

The work of Lejeune on autobiography having been particularly influential,[153] Dosse perceives a move towards a *pacte biographique*. The previous liberties taken with the truth, and the tension between mimesis and the imaginary in the representation of the past, have been superseded: 'De nos jours, tout en admettant la part fictionnelle requise par l'écriture biographique, le genre implique un pacte de vérité.' (Dosse, 2011, p. 450)

This, however, is a contemporary model. Writing in the 1930s, Guérin was in the current of biography in the French tradition[154] exemplified in the work of André Maurois. Encapsulating the essence of Ricoeur's phrase ('un mixte instable entre fabulation et expérience vive'),[155] as Dosse recognises, (2011, p. 57), a recourse to fiction is inevitable in so far as it is impossible to reconstitute the richness and complexity of life. Whilst Maurois advocates the greatest rigour in the use of documentation[156], he recognises the handicap felt by the biographer compared with the novelist: the former cannot evoke the inner life of his/her subject, the latter can allow his/her imagination to run free. In order to make the life

[151] Theoretical issues relating to *témoignage* will be considered below. This text contains mainly elements of similarity with *Victor Hugo Raconté,* a work which in the words of Philippe Lejeune 'emprunte les formes mélangées de la biographie et du témoignage'. 'Biographie, Témoignage, Autobiographie: Le cas de Victor Hugo raconté' in Philippe Lejeune, *Je est un autre (*Paris : Seuil, 1980) pp. 60 – 102, p. 70. Whilst in the case of *Quand…* the two forms of writing are consecutive rather than meshed, the study by Lejeune will be helpful in describing its narrative strategies.

[152] François Dosse, *Le pari biographique. Ecrire une vie* (Paris : Editions La découverte, 2005, 2011)

[153] Quoting p. 26 of '*Le Pacte Autobiographique'*, Dosse declares that biography et autobiography are members of 'le même pacte référentiel, par opposition à la fiction … 'ils prétendent apporter une information sur une 'réalité' extérieure au texte, et donc se soumettre à une épreuve de vérification.' Dosse, 2011, p. 102.

[154] 'la biographie à la française est moins ambitieuse en terme d'informations, mais elle se rapproche de la fiction par son écriture littéraire ; plus enlevé, elle assume un parti pris, une vision partielle et partiale de la figure biographiée'. Dosse, 2011, p. 10.

[155] Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre'*, cited in Dosse, 2011, p. 57.

[156] André Maurois: *Aspects de la biographie*, p. 112. Cited by Dosse, 2011, p. 61.

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accessible, states Maurois, the tropes of the novelist must be adopted: 'toute biographie est romancée et ne peut pas ne pas l'être'. (Dosse, 2011, p. 72). The assertion of referentiality implicit in the word 'confession' is beginning to look a little fragile.

In the eyes of Daniel Madelénat,[157] internal focalisation is optional, a tool available to the biographer, but which exists purely as a complement to the depiction of the 'historic' figure and must be derived from what is known about that figure's world view. The divide here with fiction is sharp.

Guérin as biographer: *Quand…* and its '*pacte biographique*'

The scriptor of *Quand…* is not remote from the subject, either in time or space.[158] The biography as such is composed in the presence of the subject, first during the subject's life, then – through the *témoignage* - in the company of its deceased corpse.[159] The former state offers the '*biographe interviewer*',[160] every opportunity to obtain the testimony of the subject.

The simulated '*pacte biographique'* of the opening pages outlines the urgency of the project. There are fundamental questions which have been preoccupying the scriptor about the subject, his curiosity causing him considerable '*malaise'* (p. 12).

> Ce qui me conduit, je le sens à mesure que j'avance, c'est bien uniquement la curiosité. Quel homme est mon père ? Quel homme a-t-il été ou n'a-t-il pas été ? Qu'a-t-il espéré, exigé de la vie ? Qu'a-t-il réalisé ? (p. 12)

He is sceptical as to his chances of success ('Je ne sais pas encore si je parviendrai à résoudre tous ces énigmes'), but simulating the manner of a detective[161] the scriptor has a number of hypotheses about the subject which the research for the current work may enable him to resolve (p. 12). He knows the task will be difficult, as there are obstacles of two kinds between himself and the primary source, the subject. The first is the subject himself, and the nature of information which can be gleaned from him directly:

> A plusieurs reprises, j'ai formé le dessein de le questionner, de provoquer ses confidences. Je n'ai réussi *qu'à obtenir des faits*, qu'à entendre des regrets, qu'à subir des anecdotes sans prix. Jamais rien qui puisse me laisser croire que cet homme a réfléchi sur sa vie. (p. 12)

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[157] Daniel Madelénat, *La biographie* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1984).

[158] This means that *Quand…* fails to satisfy the principal condition of what Lejeune calls '*la biographie pure'*: 'Le narrateur n'a pas connu le modèle – ou, du moins, fait comme s'il ne l'avait pas connu. Il travaille à partir de textes déjà publiés, de documents intimes mis à sa disposition par l'entourage du modèle, ou de témoignages qu'il a recueillis.' Lejeune, 1980, p. 70.

[159] Proximity to the deceased when composing the work is unusual, but writing about the dead is one of the most common features of the genre: Dosse, 2011, p. 123, cites the observation of Chaunu, that 'la plupart de gens dont on fait la biographie sont morts. Ils vous apprennent, en quelque sorte, à mourir…' But those deaths are typically viewed retrospectively, rather than witnessed and reported. The notion that the subject's death constitutes a learning experience, one which complements any lesson from his literary fathers, might be unpalatable to the scriptor of *Quand…* but is nonetheless present.

[160] Lejeune, 1980, p. 82.

[161] Bernard Pudal, 'Du biographique entre science et fiction', *Politix* 27, 1994, p. 24 contends that the writer of biographies offers hypotheses, accompanying the reader on the same path of investigation without ever revealing the enigma (summarised in Dosse, 2011, p. 72). This is very much at odds with the approach of the scriptor of *Quand…*

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The second barrier has been created by the subject's illness. This has served to sharpen the curiosity of the scriptor, whilst at the same time introducing an impediment – discretion, an instinct to protect the subject from the reality of his condition (p. 13).

Given these difficulties – and certainly not in the manner of a detective - the scriptor's hypotheses begin to take on the appearance of pre-emptive conclusions: '[..] on dirait toujours qu'il n'a eu qu'un souci : se fuir ; qu'une ambition : s'enrichir.*'* (p. 12)

In terms of sources, other than the primary source – the subject himself – the scriptor confesses that there are few. The information obtained from the primary source is, as we explain below, of limited value:

> De tous ces interrogatoires maladroits il me reste un canevas plein de lacunes où les grands événements ressortent mais où manque la moitié des dates, des prénoms et des noms de famille ; où restent les noms des villes mais où ne figurent plus que quelques noms de rues et presque aucun paysage. Ce que furent l'école, le service militaire, l'apprentissage, les mariages, les divorces et les deuils je l'ai recueilli, mais pour toujours sont perdues les conversations entre amis, les réflexions de telle grand'tante, les couleurs de telle journée. (pp. 12-13)

The '*pacte biographique'* is redolent of an indifference to discharging properly the responsibilities of the documentarist. This is compounded (p. 12) with the admission that the scriptor fails, almost chooses not, to benefit from the 'mémoire prodigieuse' of his subject:

> Quant aux paroles directement rapportées par lui […] je les oublie instantanément et je n'ai pas assez de cruauté, malgré mes apparences, pour lui demander la permission de les noter. J'ai conservé dans mon cerveau, l'esprit et la couleur, mais les mots mêmes ont fui. (p. 12)

Later, the scriptor shares the manner in which he obtained much of the evidence on which the text is based:

> Là, où vraiment j'ai pu l'interroger, c'est au cours d'un voyage que nous avons fait ensemble en auto il y a peu de temps. Je conduisais. Il était assis près de moi, désœuvré. Il parlait. […] Grâce à [la] monotonie du parcours, malgré ma faible mémoire, aidé de plus en plus par ce que je possédais déjà, j'ai fini par ordonner un assez grand nombre de faits, de situations, et d'épisodes et d'images qui sont sa vie que je vais dire. (p. 13)

In terms of establishing the scriptor's credentials as a researcher, this appears almost performative, the lapses of the scriptor ('ma faible mémoire') foregrounded as if to undermine the importance of capturing the very words of the subject. Rather than convincing the reader of the veracity of the *récit*, this opening section in fact does the opposite.

The half-hearted assurances given in the '*pacte'* are perpetuated in the text. The work of the *biographe archiviste*[162] is referred to in places: the discovery in his own loft of 'factures, menus, lettres, programmes de théâtre, vieux journaux, photographies, jouets, qui m'ont permis de préciser tel moment de mon enfance et donc tel aspect de la vie de mon père*'* (p. 44) ; the portrait of his grandmother which informs his description of her (p. 62); and several photographs, some exclusively of the subject (p. 122), those which depict the family unit including the scriptor himself (p. 96), and importantly the scriptor in the company of the subject (p. 97).

[162] Lejeune, 1980, p. 81.

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These documents form the basis of the narration which follows the reference to them. That is, they stimulate the free play of the scriptor's imagination, initially in acts of reconstruction but subsequently into areas of pure speculation. These are all based on evidence which presents a fixed and immutable view of one small aspect of the subject's life.

By contrast, where the opportunity to document the narration does exist, the scriptor appears reluctant to seize it. The best source is obviously the subject himself, but throughout the text, the quotation of the actual words of the subject is extremely limited. The manner of their introduction is also interesting: as might a social historian, the scriptor presents the statements with a gloss, such as 'comme il le disait' (p. 95), or locutions which suggest that the views expressed form part of a value system which is at odds with that of everyone else ('au dire de mon père', p. 19; 'à l'entendre', p. 50). Despite the subject's acknowledged capacity and thirst for self-narration (p. 169) remarkably little of his actual speech is incorporated within the narrative. Assisted by the typographical barrier of the quotation marks[163], it is as if these words are fenced off from the rest of the narrative, retained for their ornamental rather than functional value behind museum-like hygienic screens to prevent their contaminating the text. This is a tool in the process of de-individualising the subject.

Quand…: a referential work?

Perhaps the template for the later study of Diogenes, the subject of *Quand…* is an empty receptacle, a perfect vehicle for a reconstruction using not just the imaginative flourishes of fiction, but also material from or about the self. Gaps may be filled by speculations, themselves projections based on the lived experience of the scriptor, sometimes declared, sometimes not, or derived from the scraps of evidence that the scriptor has been able to compile.

At points the narrator is explicit about the speculative nature of his narration. The text is punctuated with sentences which begin with utterances such as 'je gage que' (pp. 140, 141), 'je présume que' (pp. 14, 37), 'il est à présumer que' (p. 109) which advertise the imaginative play, the fictional nature, of the writing. These, however, may be, consciously or unconsciously, an attempt to mislead: speculation can never be entirely pure, that is uninformed by experience or knowledge from elsewhere.

Speculation about the sexual activity of the subject is one such instance. The reader knows, because the narrator openly states, that the topic of sexual relations was never discussed between subject and scriptor (pp. 50-51, p.149). It is therefore reasonable to assume that all of the references to this aspect of the subject's life are unevidenced. These are multiple: through asides from inscribed narrator to inscribed narratee ('Et au lit, avouons-le, ce n'est pas un homme à principes', p. 66) to commentary on the physical relationships between the subject and his first wife (p. 69) – a theme refreshed on page 109 as the narrator imagines the subject's infidelity with Maria to his second wife - and later the unsupported assertion of the subject's continued sexual activity in his maturity (p. 141). In each instance, the reader is entitled to wonder how the narrator knows what is being stated.

[163] In *Signs in the Text: The Role of Epigraphs, Footnotes and Typography in Clarifying the Narrator-character Relationship in Stendhal's Le Rouge et le noir* (London: Routledge, 2000), David Scott comments on the function of typographical devices used in the text. Capitalisation, italicisation and so on, he argues, are used as tools to attract the attention of the reader to specific points.

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At other times, the speculation appears founded on the experiences of the scriptor, repackaged to form the biography of another. In terms again of the subject's sexuality, the summary of the subject's liaisons during his young career in Paris bear a resemblance with that of the apprentice of *L'Apprenti*, itself an autofictional projection of the scriptor: 'Il économisait. Et passait sa vie en se réservant une seule volupté, celle de plaire aux femmes et de jouir égoïstement, rapidement et fréquemment d'elles. [...]On le trouvait très joli garçon, galant, adroit. Il avait un nombre incalculable de succès qui le flattaient*'* (pp. 76-77).

At certain points the connection between the scriptor's real life experience and the development of the portrait is established overtly, for example in the narration of the subject's early childhood: 'Si je veux donc retrouver mon père enfant, il faut que je suppose une similitude à peu près parfaite entre son enfance et la mienne telle que je l'ai vécue auprès de ma grand'mère. Sans doute venait-elle pareillement contre son lit le matin, l'hiver .. Sans doute, l'été, voyait-il de son lit etc' (p. 16). Later, the scriptor enters the text to address the reader directly:

> J'ai su moi-même quel pouvait être actuellement l'apprentissage d'un jeune homme qui se destine à la carrière hôtelière pour apprécier à quel point mon père devait être favorisé en débutant chez un oncle qui l'aimait au lieu de débuter sous les ordres de gens étrangers. (p. 35)

What follows may easily be construed as a description of those experiences: the unreasonable demands of the customers (p. 36), the despotism of the middle-managers (p. 37) and the petty acts of revenge by the serving staff (p. 38). At an intra-textual level, their status as a projection of the scriptor depends on the combination of two elements: the detail of the description, yet an already acknowledged lack of testimony from the subject. At an extra-textual level, the commonality of these episodes between *Quand…* and *L'Apprenti* reinforces the point.

This process of 'transference' is discernible in other areas of the narrative: in the reconstructed scene (p. 75) of the period in which the subject lives in Paris and spends weekends with his uncle (an episode also paralleled in *L'Apprenti*), in which the scriptor again makes detailed claims about the sexual appetite of the subject; in the account of daily life in the military barracks (pp. 46-53); in the reconstruction of typical café scenes (p. 87 – again, corresponding to similar episodes in *L'Apprenti*). Equally, the imagined account of the divorce proceedings (p. 72) contains extra-textual echoes of an equivalent event in *Zobain* (1936). Personal experience enables the scriptor not only accurately to reconstruct the procedures of the courtroom but also informs his speculations as to the interior processing of the litigants.

In one instance, the subject entirely disappears from the narrative, which then becomes a personal reminiscence on the part of the scriptor. Pages 155 to 157 contain an account of the daily tasks undertaken by the scriptor as an adolescent in the family café in Poitiers.

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The scriptor within the text: the voices of narration

The narrative voice, as such, is a coalescence of voices: common maxims, experiences common to the reader and the scriptor presented as discourse, the novelisation of experience to imply universality. Underlying all of this is the progressive imposition of the ideology of the scriptor on to the narration, until all attention to the subject is forfeited to the declamation of the world view of the scriptor.

The picture of the subject is developed through an appeal to shared experience or common parlance. The account of the wedding night of the subject and his second wife derives from commonly-held beliefs about such events (p. 64) which are then reformulated as the presumed experience of the couple. The behaviour and attitudes of the subject are made intelligible to the reader by invoking the latter's awareness of stereotypes such as 'les coléreux' (p. 68), 'les ambitieux' (p. 122), 'les hommes déformés par le mariage' (p. 190), 'les vieillards' (p. 191) and so on. This further de-individualises the subject: his actions are no longer his own, but merely re-exteriorise the social norms of his own or, in places, any time.

Conventional wisdom or common experiences ('il en advint ce qui advient toujours en pareil cas', p. 46) are used throughout the text to build confidence in the reception. The narrator appeals, ostensibly on behalf of the subject, to the reader's own experience of attending radiological appointments:

> Ces gens – les radiologues comme les médecins ou les chirurgiens… Ils vous convoquent à des heures où l'on préfère rester dans son lit à se reposer [...] plusieurs malades à la même heure de façon à ce que leur précieux temps ne soit quand même pas perdu, si l'un fait défaut. Puis il faut se déshabiller […] l'on doit s'étendre sur la plaque métallique… C'est sans la moindre considération pour votre âge, pour votre personnalité ou même votre pudeur ou votre bonne volonté qu'il vous tourne et vous retourne sur sa plaque comme fait le cuisinier d'une escalope dans sa poêle. (pp. 185-186)

Distilling the spirit of shared experiences is the stuff of fiction, and especially its near relative mythology. A recourse to the tropes of fiction is an acknowledged tool of the biographer[164], invaluable in circumstances in which documentary evidence is scarce. For a work described as 'entomological', the writing is at times heavily imbued with tropes. One example, this personification of the progress of the subject's illness:

> Mais le mal, quand il a pris la décision – dirait-on – de harceler un homme [..] devient Protée pour venir hanter […] les jours et les nuits du patient. On lui ferme la porte, il pénètre par la fenêtre. On l'attend du côté de la nuque… et il apparaît dans les artères. (p. 178)

Illness ironically attacks the body of a subject who – it could be argued – exists more as a mythological construct, the expression of an overwhelming universal force: work, agitation for agitation's sake, 'le travail pour le travail' (p. 120). Introduced as a working hypothesis (p. 12), through the steady accumulation of narratorial assertion the impression has been created by the time the illness announces itself that this is the inevitable (human) consequence of acquiescing in the urge to self-advancement through labour. At the age of 12 'promu esclave sans en avoir conscience' (p. 22), the subject maintained an unthinking work

[164] Dosse, 2011, p. 57.

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ethic throughout his adult life : ‘Ce qu’il aimait, c’était l’entreprise pour elle-même, l’étourdissement que donne un surcroît d’activité, l’agitation qui empêche de penser’ (p. 131). This excess causes him to fail to care properly for the ‘equipment’ at his disposal :

> on peut s’étonner que cet homme… ne parût pas davantage préoccupé par la nécessité de posséder une machine et une mécanique bien réglées. […] on aurait dit qu’il multipliait les occasions de surmener et de briser ces poumons, cet estomac, ces intestins, ces artères qui lui étaient cependant si utiles. (pp. 140 - 141)

It is here that the mythological status of the subject is reaffirmed. His struggle, detailed in the final fifty pages, is emblematic, the punishment of all mortals naively seduced by the mercantilist forces of the time. This is the slaying of an ideal.

Permeating through, and at times drowning out, the narratorial voices outlined above is that of the scriptor. This is a text which addresses its reader directly. It is overtly anti-militarist and anti-mercantilist. In tone, it can make its points jauntily[165], sardonically [166] and bitterly.[167]

At times the expression of unattributed opinion completely obscures the principal objective outlined in the opening section: to unravel the enigma that is the subject. The long invective contained on pages 127 – 28 is an excellent example of this. The passage ends as follows: ‘On prétend qu’autrefois quand les voleurs exigeaient la bourse en menaçant la vie, ils obtenaient souvent la bourse. Aujourd’hui, les voleurs sont remplacés par les gouvernements. Mais ceux-ci obtiennent plus facilement la vie des gens que leur bourse’ (pp. 127-28). The reference to ‘*aujourd’hui*’ isolates this as the voice of the scriptor: this is a comment on attitudes contemporary to the writing which in no way enhances our understanding of the subject.

That the content of this outburst, written in 1939, remained the position of the scriptor after the experience of captivity is reflected in one small but significant addition to the text in 1945. To the original concluding sentence (‘Il ne saurait donc être question de la [ie la guerre] prendre tout à fait au sérieux tant qu’elle se bornera à tuer quelques millions de jeunes hommes alors que sont préservés dans leur existence et dans leurs aises tant et tant de millions de vieillards ou de demi-vieillards, de femmes ou d’enfants’ p. 127) the scriptor appended a further sentence of re-affirmation : ‘Lieu commun dont il ne faut pas avoir honte’. This petty act is a measure of the bitterness and frustration which were so abundant in Guérin in the period after his release: however strident the 1939 expression of what remained his view had been, he could not resist the opportunity to ram the point home further by releasing into the text some of his overwhelming sense of injustice. It is this view that prevails in what seeks to be the representation of the subject.

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[165] ‘La guerre tuait. Et elle tuait d’abord les hommes jeunes. De moins jeunes les remplaçaient’, p. 122.
[166] ‘Peut-être le bon peuple de Paris, si friand d’exhibitions semblables, eut-il mieux fait d’aller surprendre ses héros avant Versailles, en pleine campagne. Il les aurait vus se traînant en désordre, le fusil en bandoulière, cherchant les bordures d’herbe pour y poser leurs pieds brûlés ou sanglants. [...] Ils ne remarquent pas que le régiment a fait sa toilette avant d’entrer dans la ville, qu’on a fait monter dans les voitures ceux qui sont trop mal en point et qu’on a exigé des autres pour le défilé ce sursaut d’amour-propre qui fait illusion’. (pp. 41-42)
[167] ‘Il n’a donc rien su des horreurs des guerres et c’est sans doute pourquoi, bien que cela ne suffise pas à l’expliquer, il fut toujours du côté de ceux qui trouvent du plaisir à se battre, du côté de ce qui se croient déshonorés aussi longtemps qu’ils n’ont pas pris de revanche et qui arborent en signe de défi des cocardes’, (p. 42) ; ‘Tout tricolore à l’extérieur et à l’intérieur tout pâle, comme beaucoup dans son cas’, (p. 118).

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The scriptor in the text – the growing presence of *témoignage*

With the passage of chronological time in the life of the subject, the nature of the presence of the scriptor evolves. Whereas in the early sections of the text narration is by a confection of speculation, projections made on the basis of common or personal experience, or by the liberal use of the tools of fiction, as it reaches the point at which the scriptor is naturally an active participant in the events described narration is partly informed by his witness testimony. As a participant, the scriptor later acquires a further identity as a member of '*nous'*, the family group. (pp 153-55; 170) The transition towards the final part of the text, which is exclusively in the form of *témoignage*, is thus gradual.

At first, the perspective of the witness-scriptor quite naturally illuminates events at which he was present. For example, he describes the behaviour first of the subject during a marital dispute (p. 113), with the scriptor's participation in the event highlighted 'Les jours suivant, tous les deux, devant moi, restaient muets, honteux de s'être si mal dominés' (p. 113).

The witness-scriptor is in some instances present yet detaches himself from the events observed to become almost a by-stander. One such moment is when he accompanies the subject on the occasion of his mother's burial, and simply stands back and watches (p. 147).

Unlike other biographers, this scriptor is able to give the reader a sense of the physique of the subject. The teeth of the subject do not have to be imagined, they are 'admirables de santé et de blancheur encore que je ne l'ai jamais vu de ma vie les laver' (p. 141). We are provided not just with the bald statistics ('Quant à l'apparence la voici : 1m 70, poids oscilla souvent aux environs de 100 kilos', p. 142) but the impression of that physicality in real life: 'il pétait et éructait abondamment', (p. 142).

Later, the presence of the witness-scriptor enables the reader to experience directly the manifestation of the subject's illness to those around him:

> J'ai dit qu'il se grattait. Or, il se grattait tant, il se grattait si longtemps et si souvent, qu'il en arrivait à une sorte de jouissance, qu'il poussait dans les cabinets de véritables cris de volupté, qu'il émettait des râles, des soupirs qui duraient, qui duraient au point que ma mère était parfois obligée d'aller taper à la porte pour lui recommander qu'il fasse moins de bruit, afin que la bonne n'entende pas. (p. 181)

Témoignage

The reliance on *témoignage* in the closing section of the text introduces a new methodological challenge for the reader. Lejeune (1980, p. 70) identifies two types of *témoignage*:

> Témoignage avec prétention à la biographie – le narrateur a connu le modèle et fournit son témoignage … mais aussi cherche déjà à construire une première version de cette biographie. Témoignage pur – le narrateur a connu le modèle et livre simplement son témoignage, sans prétendre le moins du monde reconstruire sa vie.

The final section of *Quand…* clearly falls into the first of these categories. The observer function is evident throughout and his presence is felt especially in the moments and

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hours following the subject's death, as the witness inspects the corpse and attempts to decipher its messages:

> Dans la soirée, son visage retrouva sa beauté et son calme. Aucun rictus, aucun pli. Rien qui marquât la douleur, la torture physique ou le désespoir. Au contraire, il semblait sourire avec cette amabilité courtoise qui, dans la vie, avait été un de ses meilleurs atouts. [..] Sa peau était lisse, un peu pâle mais très fine.. (p. 244)

The witness-scriptor remains a participant within the events he is describing. In fact, he is at times the principal participant alongside the subject, the verb of narration ('il fallait..') recalling the passage cited above on the subject's role within the café (pp. 155-57) which also depended on this construction: 'Il fallait nettoyer mon père, le changer, refaire le lit, et pendant ce temps il geignait, honteux… *'* (p. 227).

The nature of the detail introduced at this juncture is uncompromising[168]:

> Comme il ne pouvait plus bouger, il fallait le nettoyer plusieurs fois par jour. […] Il se dégageait de ce lit depuis deux ou trois jours une odeur étrange. Cela ne sentait pas une odeur humaine. Cela ne puait pas le ventre et la garde-robe d'un malade, d'un fiévreux. Mais cela sentait exactement l'odeur suffocante d'une porcherie. Oui, cela sentait le porc qui s'était roulé dans sa matière. Il fallait vaincre sa répugnance et tripoter, pendant que mon père gisait presque couché sur le ventre, ces fesses molles, ces pâles testicules vides. Il fallait avec l'éponge laver ces cuisses maigres et flasques, ces longs poils indécents. (p. 237)

In keeping with the mode of *témoignage*, the writing is more or less synchronous with the events described. Partly, this complements the specific identity of *témoignage* which, in contrast with biography in which the editorial direction is already fixed at the point of departure, is an evolving document in which reflection on the discourse itself is part of the text. *'*Avant d'aller plus loin, dans mon récit, je veux essayer de me souvenir de l'attitude que mon père durant ce mois de novembre..*'* comments the witness-scriptor (p. 217 – a line omitted in the 1945 version).

The scriptor realises that the pace of events will of necessity require him to adapt his methodology : 'A partir de là, il me faut presque noter au jour le jour. La maladie faisait des progrès effrayants,' (p. 221). 'Le 14 décembre.. le mal revint' he observes, (p. 231), whilst in the final moments of the subject's life we are with the witness-scriptor at the bedside:

> Une minute encore peut-être. Et durant cette minute, durant ces terribles secondes, si courtes et si longues, mon père fut tout de même un être vivant, semblable à nous qui l'entourions et tel, capable, eût-il semblé, de nous entendre, de nous parler, de nous sourire, de nous étreindre, de se réveiller, de crier, de revivre. Mais après que cette minute fut passée, il fut un homme mort. Devant nous, et une fois sans ostentation, sans grandiloquence, il avait accompli son dernier geste, celui qui d'un seul coup, simplement, comme qui plonge, comme qui

[168] This was the cause of much of the negative commentary on *Quand…* at the time of its publication. In *Le Temps* 4/11/42, p. 3, Emile Henriot described *Quand*… as 'affreux', 'un document exemplaire sur l'irrespect et l'impudeur spirituelle de l'époque'. He dismisses the témoignage section as an 'ignoble tableau'. In *Construire*, 1941, p. 249, Jacques de Bellaing viewed *Quand…* as 'un récit qu'il faudrait espérer fictif*'* – it was not right, in his view, for a son to comment like that on a father.

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> tranche un câble, comme qui appuie sur un déclic, l'avait rejeté [here, in the 1945 version, the addition of the phrase '*à tout jamais'*] du monde des vivants. (p. 244)

The salient feature of *témoignage* is the exclusivity it confers on the scriptor. Since it is a personal account, there is no expectation that the impressions generated will be cross-referenced against those of others – subjectivity is enshrined in the narration. These judgements are first about the subject specifically ('J'ai rarement vu un être aussi démuni devant la souffrance physique' p. 217). The witness-scriptor attempts to provide a measure of the impact on the subject of illness and death:

> Ainsi, tout ce qui avait le mieux valu en lui, se détruisait sous les yeux des vivants. Il avait été le plus actif [1945 '*vivant'*] des êtres et il n'était plus qu'un impotent [1945 '*moribond'*]. Il avait été lucide et aimable et il n'était plus rien qu'un vieux gâteux ridicule et navrant. (p. 245)

At this point, the frustration explicit in some of the observations openly betrays the ideological position of the scriptor, now unwilling to conceal or suspend from the narrative his rejection of the values of the subject :

> je ne l'entendis pas une seule fois, durant ces jours et ces nuits, faire un retour sur soi-même. Pas le moindre regret, pas le moindre apitoiement, pas le moindre cri. Il ne disait pas : « [...] Je vais mourir et je voulais vivre encore.» Non, il ne disait rien de tout cela. Ce qu'il disait était inspiré par l'instant immédiat, et l'on a vu quel était le thème de ses propos. (p. 240).

Second, the judgements evaluate the struggle of the subject in so far as it is that of all humans. Here, the scriptor permits himself to address the reader directly:

> Peut-on imaginer cela ? Peut-on croire qu'un être aussi vivant, aussi réel que mon père avait été, ait pu, sous l'action du mal, devenir ce pitoyable, ridicule et horrible pantin […] Non seulement mon père se transformait au point de ressembler, dans sa décrépitude, au bébé vagissant qu'il avait été, mais encore, […] il se transformait au point de ressembler au singe ancestral. (p. 224-25)

In the conclusion to *Quand…*, the scriptor totalises the lessons of the life recently elapsed, evaluating his own assertions presented as facts. *Témoignage* gives him the cover to do this.

The privilege of life over death gives the scriptor hegemony over the narrative of the subject, even though – as he confesses (p. 250) – the fact of living with the subject for nearly thirty years has not prevented doubt surrounding every sentence of the text he has produced. Value judgements inform each of the succeeding paragraphs which include the phrase that gives the book its title:

> Mais tout de même, quand vient la fin, c'est là qu'on mesure à quel point tant et tant de perceptions, de visions, d'émotions, de sensations restèrent étrangères à mon père. Il s'est ruiné la santé, il s'est tué de travail, il a toujours vécu comme un malheureux, comme un paria, comme un esclave, et tout cela pour aboutir à quoi ? à cette faillite totale, à cette chute dans le trou sans fond d'une atroce maladie mortelle. [..] Il ne se reconnaissait pas le droit d'avoir un grand amour idéalisé, de songer à l'art… de voyager, de préparer son esprit aux jeux d'idées, d'exiger de la vie tout ce qu'elle avait de plus rare etc.. (p. 251)

The judgements are based on the privileging of one set of values (those of the scriptor) over another (those of the subject). There is no objective measure of '*faillite'*; nor is

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the desire to travel, or to open oneself to the delights of ideas, necessarily a guarantee of happiness. Ironically, the extra-textual circumstances of the scriptor are evidence of that.

Whose responsibility is the '*faillite'* identified? The inclinations of the self, in the eyes of the scriptor the monomanic pursuit of enrichment through endeavour, are of course to be regretted (p. 251) but perhaps the fuller responsibility lies elsewhere, with 'la société mangeuse d'hommes' (p. 252). The scriptor then goes through the motions of objectivity: 'Mais rien n'est sûr !' (p. 252).

The closing pages of the work contain the full articulation of the motivation underlying the project. At face value, the passage reads as a declaration of devotion, from human to human rather than son to father, in which the former uses his talent in order to encapsulate for eternity the essence of the latter:

> Toutefois, il me semble qu'il y a encore une dernière chose à faire quand vient la fin d'un homme. […] Est-ce qu'il ne serait pas heureux, touché, comblé, s'il pouvait savoir qu'à la manière des plus grands types humains il a été, *tel Diogène ou tel Empédocle* [my italics : this omitted in the 1945 version] raconté par un qui l'aimait [1945 version : *l'avait vu vivre*] et qu'ainsi, […] il vivra dans l'esprit des vivants par ce récit où il est contenu, sinon tout entier, du moins avec la totalité des images [1945 version : *apparences*] qu'il a laissé prendre de lui. (pp. 254 - 255)

This is the manifesto declaring the supremacy of art over labour, that is the unspoken validation of the value system of the scriptor. The conjecture as to the reaction of the subject ('touché, comblé') is disingenuous: the scriptor has already acquainted the reader with the reality of the subject's feelings about writers and other artists (p. 137). The passage reinforces the de-individualised treatment of the subject, now no longer even '*mon père'* but one of [les]'grands types humains'. Excised in the 1945 text, this paragraph not only throws forward to other elements of Guérin's oeuvre (Diogène, Empédocle), but places the subject in the same mythological context.

The penultimate paragraph of the text was completely rewritten for the 1945 republication. In 1941, its focus lay on the commitment to unexpurgated truth, and defended in advance against the anticipated hostility to the choices of topic and the language. The 1945 version is strengthened, and displays clear evidence of the writer's responding to the reviews of the first version – it promotes a reception of the text which was completely absent from the first round of criticism.

> Lui, qui, par une obscure mythomanie, est toujours resté tellement étranger à lui-même et s'est si farouchement détruit sans s'en douter, voilà qu'il se perpétue d'une façon qu'il n'avait pas prévue. Ce qui lui arrive l'aurait surpris, certes ! Il n'aurait jamais pu deviner, de son vivant, que son personnage allait ressusciter sous la plume de celui en lequel il désespérait de ne pouvoir se reconnaître. […] C'est en vain qu'il aurait voulu contrarier les ambitions et les rêves de celui que ni l'hérédité ni l'éducation n'avaient pu faire semblable à lui-même. Tout ce qu'il avait nié, vomi, sali, se retourne vers lui pour l'aider à se continuer dans ces pages. (1945 version, pp 278-79).

Here, the relationship of father – son is reintroduced, with the proviso that this is the son that the father did not wish to have: the aesthete, the intellectual. Reminding us that it was only a '*mythomanie'* which prevented his father from becoming himself (one wonders what exactly), the son – in these terms equally the victim of '*mythomanie'*, in his case literary

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success – brings his mystical power, the gift of writing, to deliver the subject from the '*fatras'* of his life. We are informed for the first time that the subject actively militated against the dreams and ambitions of the scriptor. Here also is introduced the idea that the power of heredity was inadequate in the battle to contain literature, a further twist in the meditation on paternity.

The concluding paragraph offers a pretence at filial gratitude, the scriptor recognising that the current text is one further element of his debt:

> Sans doute a-t-il [mon père] voulu me donner la dernière chose qu'il ait possédée et la plus valable, ce personnage qu'il était, afin que je puisse écrire ce récit et ainsi il me sert encore, il m'oblige, au-delà de sa vie. Mais par ce don suprême, il m'a permis de lui rendre d'un coup tout ce qu'il avait fait pour moi.

Here the age-old biographical conundrum of ownership – whose life is it : the subject's or the teller's? – is aired with absolute duplicity. The '*sans doute'* of the opening sentence indicates a lack of commitment to the sincerity of the utterance to follow. What the scriptor goes on to call '*ce don suprême'* is claimed to be at the volition of the subject ('*a-t-il voulu'*), but there is no record, within the text, of consent and none of the habitual procedures of collaboration is present. In this respect, the actions of the scriptor are essentially theft: the scriptor has helped himself to the subject, using as an alibi the claim that it has been gifted to him '*afin que je puisse écrire ce récit'*. Further, the de-individualisation of the subject is maintained in the use of the term '*personnage'* in place of '*personne'*. The subject is of interest only in as much as he exteriorises the mythomania postulated by the scriptor.

The text concludes :

> Et bien j'ai le sentiment qu'en traçant ces dernières lignes, j'ai enfin couronné dignement une destinée envers laquelle les hommes et la société ne furent pas toujours favorables, mais dont j'ai compris petit à petit les raisons et les grandeurs [1945 version : *folies*], les patiences et les erreurs. Il est bon de le redire et de l'écrire, en toute simplicité, quand vient la fin.

In terms of 'understanding' the subject, the scriptor remains in exactly the same state as he was in the opening section: lacking in empathy and unable or unwilling to penetrate the surface of the subject's persona. He is still literally staring at the face of the dead man and asking it questions. De-individualisation is again apparent in the choice of the term '*destinée'* rather than '*vie'*: the subject is merely the expression of the force that is held to occupy him. Finally, the attribution of merit to the self – 'j'ai couronné dignement' – is a further restatement of the primacy of the scriptor's values, and of the final nature of the appropriation of the subject's identity. *Quand…* is a brutal and vengeful expression of power.

<u>The scriptor in the text</u>

Thus far, we have examined the various ways in which the text of *Quand…* obliquely, indirectly, quietly or manifestly reflects its creator. Into this last category we must place an important feature of the text, the scriptor's ongoing commentary on the process of creation itself.

The concept of a biography which at the same time illuminates the person of the biographer is neither unique nor new (Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, for example). The opening section opens a window on to the processes of the work's creation. The book begins with

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intense focus on the scriptor (p. 11) which is not fully dissolved by the tone of the start of the next section: 'Mais ce n'est pas de moi qu'il est question ce soir, c'est de mon père' (p. 13). Our attention is redirected towards the subject, but purely as a function of the scriptor, the temporary focus of the scriptor's gaze and identified solely in the context of the scriptor's network of relationships. This is not a work in which a biographer will disappear behind his/her inscribed narrator, but one in which the scriptor will remain conspicuous. [169]

The scriptor soon intervenes again in his own voice to explain factors influencing the creative process. He has been obliged to suspend the *récit* for a few weeks 'pour déménager puis pour voyager,' (p. 44) although the interval has been doubly beneficial: access to documentation uncovered in moving has clarified his thinking (p.44), whilst the power of changing location too is considerable. The brilliant light of the Mediterranean island that the scriptor temporarily occupies sharpens his perception of the subject:

> Quant au voyage, grâce au recul qu'il permet, grâce au fossé qu'il creuse, il a lui aussi contribué à prêter à la figure de mon père des contours plus nets. Je le vois mieux de si loin. […] Il est bien que je puisse intensifier mon souvenir, car là où j'en étais resté, je butais… (p. 45)

This intervention re-asserts the impression that the tense, the time of the text, is the present of the scriptor ('cette île où je séjourne') not that of the subject. The act of confiding in the reader, the performative sharing of the pain of the artist's struggle for veracity, is highly political. It suggests an openness of mind and a willingness to explore nuance that are pointedly lacking in much of the narration, and implicates the reader as an accomplice in this conceit. Finally, the intervention permits the scriptor to underscore his own social position: house ownership, international travel, the freedom and economic means to be able to make the intellectual commitment to write. The contrast with the peasant of the text is marked.

On page 121, the scriptor explains that there has been a gap of some months in his composition of the *récit* (without offering reasons), but that this has been of some benefit to him: 'Suivre un canevas n'est pas mon fort. J'accepte qu'à la rigueur, au fur et à mesure, la vie de mon père finisse par s'ordonner à peu près' (pp. 121-22).

The reader might speculate as to the exact meaning of the second sentence. 'Life' in which sense – the lived one, or the written one ? – and thus in which sense 's'ordonner'? The difficulty in producing the canvas is that 'life' around the artist – which includes, still, the subject – is not static, and in addition 'life' is not as linear and predictable as an ordered,

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[169] This presence of the scriptor within the biographical section is less compatible with the genre, a point made by Lejeune (1980, p. 79) in his remarks on '*les « je » du biographe'*: 'La biographie est en principe rédigée par un historien extérieur à l'histoire racontée (voix « hétérodiégétique ») qui travaille à partir de documents. […] Si le biographe intervient comme narrateur dans son récit, c'est pour commenter idéologiquement les 'topois' présentés ci-dessus [ie la légende familiale, le récit de vocation, l'exemple, l'apologie, la petite histoire], soit pour préciser ses sources d'information et pour conduire son récit.*'* Boswell's *Johnson* is thus an exception. The ongoing meditation on the nature of the biographical processes themselves is not unique. Dosse, 2011, p. vi, refers to the work of Benoît Peeters, who published simultaneously his biography of Derrida and the *carnets de notes* from which it was produced, to some extent the authentic version of the simulated evidence-gathering by the scriptor of *Quand…*. Unlike in the case of the '*biographe'* of Lejeune, the insertion of these reflections within *Quand...* is compatible with a work which reveals its own uncertainties with every utterance.

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retrospective work might suggest. The birth pains of the parent-scriptor are exposed to full scrutiny.

There are other places within the text in which the scriptor appears, only just distinct from what could be construed as an inscribed narratorial entity. 'Heureusement pour ce récit' he observes (p. 129), and shortly after he glosses a term used in his narration in order to guard against an undesired reception: 'Quand j'écris: bien pensant, je ne veux pas dire : catholique, mais qui pensent « bien ».' (p. 138). He appears overtly again, to contextualise his commentary on his subject-father's lack of attention to personal hygiene: 'J'en parle seulement pour mieux situer mon personnage'. (p. 142) Similarly, the scriptor expresses surprise at the adaptability of his parents [sic] in accepting student habits (pp. 162-3), whilst (p. 195) he identifies 'un trait favorable à mon sens' displayed by the subject. The values are those of the scriptor, not an inscribed narrator: it is hard to argue that an internal textual cipher can hold such opinions.

The present of the scriptor intrudes directly into the text again on page 175. 'A partir de 1929, jusqu'au moment où j'ai commencé de rédiger ces pages, soit pendant plus de dix ans, mon père ne cessa plus de prospecter..' The passage of chronological time towards the writing present continues to be stressed: 'En réalité jusqu'en 1933..' (p. 175); 'En 1934 il fallut bien se rendre à l'évidence..' (p. 176). The locus and time of narration is explicitly that of the scriptor, which implies that the '*je'* and '*moi'* of utterances such as 'Je le lui accorde, quant à moi..' (p. 176) can only be the scriptor himself.

The most striking intervention by the scriptor is located towards the end of the biographical section. In advance – setting out the ideological basis of the decisions which inform its narration – it prepares the reader for *témoignage* which follows.

> A partir de là je me sens dans l'obligation de tout dire et je suis bien décidé à me moquer à l'avance des mines effarouchées de ceux et de celles qui ne veulent pas qu'on décrive les choses du corps quand elles prennent un caractère clinique ou répugnant. Il me paraît en effet utile de jeter tout de même sur une peinture à mon insu pleine d'ombres et du moment que j'ai l'occasion d'en disposer, quelques traits de lumière qui permettront, il me semble, autant aux autres qu'à moi-même, d'apercevoir si possible telles couleurs du portrait de ce personnage mystérieux et indéchiffrable que demeura mon père. (p. 180).

This address introduces possible future receptions into the text itself, and stands as a manifesto – years in advance of the publication of a similar argument in *Après…*, and then more widely in the debate surrounding *L'Apprenti* – of the '*droit de tout dire'* which was so fundamental to Guérin. The manifesto declares also that, in order to relate everything, a biographical text should also explore the subject's physiology, moving the genre in a direction which took the critics by surprise.[170]

[170] The originality of this approach may be appreciated by the fact that it was not until the work of Alain Buisine, working in the 1990s, that the concept of '*la biographie corpographique'* was formulated. See Dosse, 2011, pp. 343-44, for his observations on Buisine's *Verlaine. Histoire d'un corps*.

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Conclusion – '*une autobiographie par procuration'*

The distinctive feature of *Quand…* is its impulsiveness. This is pure first draft, imbued with the energy and spirit of unfiltered spontaneity.[171] By contrast, *Après…* - premeditated, overthought, self-indulgent - shows the danger of having time to reflect. *Quand…* marks the first public expression of the '*droit de tout dire'*; the introduction into the literary text of the physiological, later such a hallmark of the oeuvre; the first tacit flirtation with mythology, with which Guérin had become fascinated following his visits to Greece of the pre-war years. In marking such a significant shift away from the style and spirit of *Zobain*, *Quand…* engendered amongst readers a reaction which was to become familiar: incomprehension.[172]

In another respect, *Quand…* marks an important learning step. In common with some of the critics – most notably Joë Bosquet[173] – Guérin perceived on reading the published text that he could have done more with the characters, notably the principal, whom he declares to be lacking '*une poétique'*.[174] This recognition that truths can be equally well, if not better, expressed in a fictional manner is significant in the progression of the writer towards the autofictional project of *Ebauche*.

At an extra-textual level, *Quand…* was instrumental in promoting Guérin as a figure within the literary world. Given the allusions in the printed media to his circumstances[175] the fact of his rejection – seen as unfair by many informed critics – for the Prix Goncourt for *Quand…* sharpened the public's engagement with his plight. In the public mind, Guérin became for a time the unique figure he wished and proclaimed himself to be: the only intellectual in captivity.

To summarise the argument of this chapter, we may say that this confession / biography / *témoignage*, despite its supposed focus on the subject, has provided a vehicle for a story about the scriptor. The text appears to suggest that the emergence of writing at all from such circumstances is a miracle. Both the text and the paratext show that there are several ways to exploit the status that the gift of writing offers, some less ethical than others.

Dominique Viart states that this is an inevitable corollary of biography : 'si le vrai du biographique est dans le témoignage, il ne témoigne de rien sinon de la vérité de qui écrit, non de ce qui est écrit.'[176] This may be a truism, but one which *Quand…* substantiates, albeit

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[171] Undated letter from Jean Paulhan, received by Guérin 19/9/41 : 'Mais les améliorations dont vous me parlez [pour *Quand…*] l'eussent gâté ; il fallait cette sécheresse … *'.* Fonds Guérin, BLJD.

[172] Letter from Henri Calet to Raymond Guérin, dated 15/5/43: 'j'aime beaucoup Quand…. C'est très fort ; votre personnage est inoubliable. Mais où placer ce livre dans votre œuvre : un commencement, un écart? Après Zobain, on est surpris.' *Calet, Guérin, Correspondance*, 2005 p. 72.

[173] *Confluences*, mai 1943, pp. 349-50. Guérin called the article 'un des meilleurs, le plus intelligent peut-être et pour moi le plus fructueux et le plus instructif.' (*Le Temps de la Sottise* p. 212) When Bosquet describes *Quand…* as '*fade'*, Guérin energetically agrees : 'les 200 pages du début me semblent toujours lourdes, vulgaires, écrites sans finesse de style ou d'analyse. Si seulement j'avais la plume vive, fulgurante, d'hirondelle de Stendhal'. Fonds Guérin, BLJD.

[174] Letter to Jean Paulhan, 25/8/41. A point reiterated in a letter to Calet, dated 21/10/41 : 'Si j'avais été libre, c'est un livre tout différent que j'eusse publié. Mon héros s'y serait montré non point tout nu mais dans un concret poétique qui l'aurait sublimé'. *Henri Calet, Raymond Guérin, Correspondance*, 2005, pp. 62-63.

[175] At least two articles on *Quand…* referred to the status of the writer in captivity: Arland (*Comoedia*, 9/8/41, p. 2) and Jacques Chardonne (*Comoedia*, 24/4/43, p. 1).

[176] Dominique Viart : *Dis-moi qui te hante*, p. 16. Cited by Dosse, 2011, p. 72.

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in a slightly different manner from the one implied by Viart. In conceptual terms, *Quand..* has established an original template, to be developed in the *mythes* published later: the borrowing of elements of one narrative to tell an entirely different story.

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Section 3 – '*Fictions*'

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‘*Fictions’* - Raymond Guérin and a theory of fiction

In his article on *Les Poulpes* [177] Pierre Lartigue makes the following seminal observation:

> Soulignons du moins que ce roman, qui ne prétend conduire aucun récit, se donne comme fiction. Le choix de ce terme, placé en sous-titre, devrait éveiller la curiosité des chercheurs car, ici, pour la première fois, il désigne un genre.

Indeed. Lartigue is unique amongst critics and reviewers to have highlighted this salient point. ‘*Fiction’*, a modal term, is here given equivalence to ‘*mythe’* and ‘*confession’*, nouns which denote constituents of a mode rather than the mode itself. ‘*Fiction’* is thus ambiguous, standing for ‘the fictional’ and yet at the same time a synonym for ‘*roman’*.

‘*Roman’* was a genre which to the apprentice writer Guérin felt alien. Writing to Jean Grenier at the time of the publication of *Zobain* (1936), he declared [178] ‘C’est par instinct que je suis conduit à m’exprimer par lettre. Je ne saurais écrire une fiction, un roman, une pièce de théâtre, une nouvelle.’ Here then it is a question of disposition. Guérin was careful to maintain the public distance between his name and the term ‘*roman’*. In 1941, he insisted that the term ‘*roman’* be omitted from the liminary pages of *Quand vient la fin :* ‘*Quand vient la fin* n’est pas plus un roman que *Zobain’* [179]

It was a theme he returned to in a letter to Grenier (4/5/1943), although this time with the recognition that resistance to the label was becoming futile, owing to the tendency of readers and critics to apply it to him. ‘J’ai toujours eu une profonde aversion pour le genre ‘roman’, je m’étais toujours promis de n’en jamais écrire, et je vois bien que je suis condamné, si je dois être quelque chose, à n’être jamais qu’un romancier.’

As a proponent of the imaginary

The essence of ‘*fiction’,* as defined in the dictionaries, is that it is an act of imagining. For Guérin at the start of his career, this was a locked door. In a letter (9/9/1936) to Jean Grenier, Guérin said of *Zobain*: ‘mon livre est une confession, dans laquelle je n’ai rien truqué[..] Je vous l’ai dit que je ne suis pas romancier, que je n’ai pas d’imagination.*’*

He declared the same in his correspondence with Paulhan regarding *Zobain*, adding : ‘..vous ne trouveriez dans mes papiers ni un seul vers, ni un conte, ni un roman (Zobain n’est pas un roman, c’est un récit, du moins je le tiens pour tel.’[180] Echoes of the writer’s intrinsic dependence on real events were still present two decades later in *Entretiens avec Claude-Henri Rocquet*. Discussing the cinema, Guérin declared: ‘je ne suis pas capable d’écrire un scénario ; je ne sais pas inventer une histoire, et ne saurais m’y faire ...’ [181]

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[177] ‘Le retour du Grand Dab’ in *Révolution* no. 195, 26/11/83.
[178] Unpublished letter, 14/1/36; BN, Fonds Grenier.
[179] Letter to Sonia Raymond Guérin (27/3/41), in *Raymond Guérin : Lettres à Sonia,* 2005, p. 117.
[180] Unpublished letter, 23/07/35. Fonds Guérin, BLJD.
[181] *Entretiens avec Claude-Henri Rocquet*. Text of interviews conducted by M. Rocquet with Raymond Guérin in 1955, seen by the author at M. Rocquet’s residence, Paris, July 1987.

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A developing skill set

Over the decade that separates the publication of *Zobain* (1936) and that of *L'Apprenti* (1946), Guérin's reluctance to enter the terrain of the imaginary evaporated. Many factors may have influenced this change of mindset: experience; captivity; exposure through reading to a wide variety of novelistic approaches; personal interaction with editorial and creative teams at Gallimard; and the slow development within Guérin of a perception that there existed an approach to the novel ('*fiction'*) that was discernibly and uniquely his own. In an interview thirty years after the writer's death, his fellow wartime prisoner Henri Cartier-Bresson commented: 'Et quand une autre fois je lui ai demandé pourquoi il n'écrivait pas de vraie fiction, même s'il remettait les choses en forme, il m'a dit : 'La seule chose qui m'intéresse, c'est de m'analyser moi-même'. [182] '*Fiction'* in this context is beginning to look already like '*autonarration'*.

Guérin – 'romancier'

The title of the 1948 text, *Un Romancier dit son mot*,[183] with its explicit reference to '*romancier'* as opposed to '*écrivain',* was Guérin's first public association of this label with himself. In using it, as always with Guérin, there is an element of posturing or self-promotion. The label '*romancier'* was culturally helpful for two reasons. First, it appears a less political and engaged title in a time of suspicion towards intellectuals (and Guérin's consciousness of himself as '*écrivain'*, as elite, is overpowering, especially in the wartime correspondence with his wife). Second, in a period of increasing attention to the novel form in France, both through indigenous writing and especially the influence of American novelists who were becoming well known to French readers through the 1930s and 1940s, Faulkner, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Miller, it establishes Guérin as a member of the dominant cultural group.[184] Up to this point, he was prepared only in private to use the label '*roman'* to describe some of his texts.[185] Now he appeared to have crossed a rubicon, even though, for the consumption of the public, the product of the '*romancier'* was '*fiction'* rather than '*roman'*.

Contre une terreur des faits

The essay *'*Contre une terreur des faits' (1948) [186] was composed expressly by Guérin as a means of clarifying his own thinking on fiction. Guérin later stated that a version of this text could easily form the basis of an introduction to *Ebauche*.[187] This discussion of its ideas

[182] *Guérin par Cartier-Bresson* (propos recueillis par Christian Caujolle), part of article *Les Poulpes du prisonnier Guérin* (Daniel Rondeau) *Libération*, 6/10/83.
[183] Paris: Corrêa (1948).
[184] An early use by Guérin of the term '*romancier',* in connection with himself, comes in a letter to Jean Grenier, dated 20th October 1943 : 'Mais au diable les livres ! ce qui me manque ici, c'est de ne pouvoir renouveler ma vision du monde et des êtres. Pour un romancier, quel drame !' This exclamation is interesting, not just in terms of the title accorded to the self, but also the link implied between fiction and reality which will be developed in the 1948 essay.
[185] The personal dedication to Paul Gadenne of *L'Apprenti*, which Guérin describes as '*mon premier vrai roman'*; his reference in his letter of presentation of the first draft of *L'Apprenti*, to Marcel Arland and Jean Paulhan, as 'mon premier roman'; his correspondence with Calet in which he referred to *Parmi tant d'autres feux* as 'ce roman d'amour'; in the letter to Grenier dated 4th May 1943: 'Si L'Apprenti n'est pas grand roman, tranchant sur le reste de la production et dominant le lot, inutile de le publier.'
[186] One of the essays in *Un Romancier dit son mot*, pp 87 – 134, hereafter referred to as *Contre…*
[187] Letter (4/3/45) to Jean Paulhan: '*Contre* …. Si je voulais écrire une préface à mon Ebauche, cette étude pourrait en constituer un des fragments.' Fonds Guérin, BLJD.

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is enriched by the article *Roman et Réalité* (1948)[188], references to Guérin's reviews in *Juin* and extracts from correspondence.

Initially, Guérin commends the novel as a versatile medium able to satisfy the requirements of writers and readers alike :

> il reste le mode d'expression à la fois le plus sûr et le plus riche (par ses immenses possibilités) de la pensée et de la sensibilité de chacun, le moule où, de plus en plus, l'homme du XXe siècle cherche à couler son destin, ses passions et ses angoisses.' (p. 88)

The goal of the '*romancier'*, he states, is not to be the judge of the characters he/she creates, but to explore why they do the things they do, and especially the conflicting pressures on them: 'cette diversité qui fait qu'ils sont presque toujours cruellement déchirés entre leur désir d'absolu et les relativités de l'existence, entre les rêves et les actes, entre la fiction et la réalité' (p. 88). The two last terms are the subject of further exposition. A balance needs to be obtained between them: 'La fiction, soit. A condition qu'elle ne cesse d'être justifiée et alimentée par la contexture des faits' (p. 90).

The novel, states Guérin, must reflect the reality[189] from which it is drawn, albeit in a transposed form. This transposition must be carefully managed, neither too naturalistic, nor too fantastic. Guérin cautions against treating fiction as a form of escapism: it needs to embody the common experience of writer and reader, that is subjection to the implacable forces of society and its institutions, of regimes and conditions imposed upon them. (pp 91-92).

Guérin's general view of the reading public is contemptuous. He typifies it as seeking the same blandishments, non-threatening worlds, same plot lines and reassuring maxims, in short a confirmation of order. As a result, the novel is in a state of paralysis, formulaic writing meeting the needs of a conditioned and unadventurous readership.

Meeting this expectation is the work of writers such as Balzac, identified by Guérin as the very antithesis of his own approach to the novel. Guérin's animus towards Balzac, which extends over two pages here, is a habitual tick.[190] Broadly, Guérin argues that to see Balzac as a 'realist' is to misconstrue either his writing or reality or both. It is important, he states, to recognise the 'visionary' creative talent of Balzac in building a world, but equally to remember that this is Balzac's world, a formidable feat of imagination, and not reality.

A further misconception on the part of the reader, he continues, is that writers in presenting a world are defending or justifying this world and its characters. Instead, the writer's ambition, according to Guérin, is to offer the reader '*un témoignage'*:

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[188] Text of a paper given by Guérin at the Colloque de Royaumont in October, 1948; first published in *Synthèses* (Bruxelles) No 10, 1949, full text republished as an appendix to *Calet, Guérin Correspondance*, 2005, pp 309 – 21.

[189] In *Roman et Réalité*, Guérin mocks the anti-Realist critical lobby: 'Parbleu ! comment se passerait-on, en effet, de la réalité ? [...] La réalité est partout dans leurs romans (fût-ce à leur corps défendant !). Il leur faut bien des personnages qui sont des hommes, comme vous et moi, ou qui sont des bêtes semblables à celles que nous accueillons près de nous tous les jours', p. 310.

[190] It is expressed loudly in correspondence with Paulhan (undated letter September-October 1945) : 'Fou-rire en lisant La Cousine Bette – la redondance du style, la jactance grandissante, le formalisme pompier ou odieux de la pensée…' In his article on Miller's *Tropique du Capricorne* in *Juin* magazine, Guérin began by quoting the opening lines from five of Balzac's novels as evidence of the strait jacket into which Balzac had placed the genre (*Chronique*, 2015, p. 77).

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> voyez notre peinture ; voilà des êtres, des passions, des caractères, des situations qui ont leur vérité puisqu'ils ont leurs racines dans la réalité ; ce n'est pas beau, certes ! mais nous ne vous demandons pas d'y voir un modèle à suivre. (p. 98)

The main obstacle, in Guérin's construction, to the reader's ability to respond appropriately and understand what he calls the '*desseins de ces romanciers*' comes from the former's reluctance to admit that 'l'art n'est pas seulement un reflet, une captation ou une transposition de la réalité. S'il en était ainsi, ils ne parviendraient pas à creuser à leur gré la figure des choses et même ils finiraient par oublier sur quelle énorme illusion repose la réalité des choses.*'* (p. 98) What underpins or even maintains this illusion is mythology.

> [La] réalité est tributaire d'un ensemble de phénomènes d'essence mythologique.... tout est mythe, depuis qu'il y a des cerveaux pour prêter un sens spécieux aux mots, des pensées pour donner corps à ces interprétations et des faits pour les illustrer. (pp. 98-99)

Where the ancients feared the Gods of their legends, continues Guérin, contemporary man both fears and solicits 'les fatalités du réel'. The accidents of reality are in fact determined by laws, modes, routines and impulses which are located within him and all his peers, and which thus acquire a universal character. These common traits are the basis of myth, which is stimulated by the 'pensées machinales' de la collectivité'. 'Nous ne réfléchissons plus. Nous allons d'instinct dans le sens que la société aura décidé. Le mythe, insensiblement, est devenu souverain' (p. 100).

It is the consequences of this process which '*fiction'* must explore, and through fiction we can obtain an understanding of the influences to whose '*caprices'* we are subject:

> S'attacher à la connaissance et l'explication de cette capricieuse mythologie de la réalité, définir, analyser, mettre en chantier (dans une œuvre d'imagination ou de confession) une mythologie de la réalité propre à soi, c'est donc vouloir replacer l'homme en face des fatalités qui l'écrasent ou le grandissent, le situer dans ses rapports avec la société, de même que les anciens étaient soumis au fatum par leurs dieux. (p. 101)

The writer must exercise complete freedom of expression, escape from the constraints of Realism or even worse Naturalism [191] in order to produce a mythological recreation of reality. This, and here Guérin's self-commendation is overwhelming, requires a writer of particular determination, resilience, commitment to truth, one who is prepared to adopt the language that is required, however unpalatable some of the terms may be. The fact that readers encounter in print the very words they use in real life [192] and the same dilemmas they endure is a challenge, and one to which many respond with negativity, rejection or even hostility. Nonetheless, the role of the writer is to ask what Guérin declares to be the essential questions, without necessarily hoping to resolve them:

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[191] *Roman et Réalité* p. 317 is especially critical: *'*Un réalisme ainsi compris reste banalement plaqué, extérieur à la profonde réalité et avant tout arbitraire. Appliquer au roman, comme l'ont tenté les naturalistes, les méthodes de la science, de la médecine et de l'examen clinique, ne pouvait qu'accentuer la confusion'.

[192] Letter to Henri Calet (27/1/44) : 'Ce que j'admire chez vous, c'est ce don que vous avez – non pas de peindre – de recréer les paroles mêmes, entendues. Cela donne un incomparable accent de vérité.*' Calet, Guérin Correspondance,* 2005, pp 90–91.

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> Qu'est-ce que la vie ? Qu'est-ce que l'homme ? Que peut un homme ? Quel sens un homme peut-il donner à sa vie ? Et cet homme, comment le concevoir, comment l'animer ? Où est le faux, en lui ? Où est le vrai ? (p. 105)

Literature is always coloured by ideologies (religious, metaphysical) and the contemporary novel, with its concentration on the absurd, is no different. What the reader needs, in Guérin's view, is to have reflected in literature the permanence of dilemma. This 'imperfection' is crucial to the concept of '*alternance'* which fiction must embody: 'Rien ne peut se développer sans son contraire. La vie ne serait pas la vie si elle n'était ce mélange du meilleur et du pire. [..] Pourquoi refuserions-nous à cette alternance?' (p. 108).

It is the '*permanence du conflit'* (p. 109) within man, between his highest aspirations and saddest realisations, that enables man to live. This '*alternance'*, this '*conflit'* must form the basis of any created world:

> Un art à la fois idéaliste et réaliste ; poétique sans poésie formelle ; quand ce serait même fascinant dans l'abjection ; psychologiquement et physiologiquement curieux de la diversité et de l'étrangeté des réactions de la créature ; et n'hésitant pas (dût-il à la rigueur décourager les lecteurs trop bien habitués aux ouvrages d'une seule veine, d'un seul ton ou d'une seule sensibilité) à juxtaposer les éclats les plus disparates.
>
> Ce serait enfin, pour ce romancier protée, l'occasion tant attendue de revêtir la tunique de l'Arlequin et de se glisser froidement dans la peau du caméléon. (pp. 109-110)

Given Guérin's attachment to Stendhal, he is surprisingly critical of the writer for failing to match his willingness to draw fully upon himself as a source as he does in his biographical works (*Brulard*, *Journal*, *Souvenirs d'Egotisme*) when depicting the characters of his novels. If, in his *Journal*, he refers for example to 'quelque pratique solitaire' (p. 113), then why should this not also find its way into the novels? Such '*alternance'* is at the heart of Guérin's *mythologie de la réalité*.

Some writers (again, it is to be assumed that Guérin includes himself) have experienced what life has to offer 'de multiple et d'excessif' (p. 116). Inevitably, their works reflect this, in ways which equally inevitably attract the disapproval of '*tartufes'* and '*gros-jeans'* ready to take offence at any undermining of the codes of '*bienséance'*. Rejecting the compromises made by writers of the past, Guérin commits himself to 'se presser le pus de la plaie', using whatever words are required to express the ideas and feelings he wishes to express. In a passage which is seminal for his own approach to literature, Guérin continues:

> Dominés qu'ils sont par la nécessité de leur sincérité, prenant n'importe quel individu pour modèle, et dans n'importe quelles circonstances […] ils rendront alors tangibles : la stupidité du destin que cet individu est appelé à subir ou à se choisir ; la dérision des efforts qu'il pourrait tenter pour y échapper ; l'application avec laquelle il les tentera, cependant ; voire, l'aspiration, si noble en lui, à une condition humaine supérieure ; et, en même temps, l'impossibilité où il se trouvera d'y atteindre jamais. (p. 125)

As a thematic description of the '*fiction'* that is *Ebauche*, this is comprehensive.

In order to conduct what Guérin calls 'une dissection impitoyable' the writer will require 'des innovations ou des rénovations d'écriture' (p. 127), all with the goal of showing 'non plus un être déterminé ou une société particulière mais l'Etre lui-même tout entier dans la Société qui le retient à jamais prisonnier.' (p. 127) The envisaged scale of the project is thus immense. On the other hand, in its determination to represent reality in the most faithful

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of ways, it also consciously risks leaving the work open to the mundane, the banal. 'C'est admettre, d'emblée, l'éventualité d'une vie où […] enfin, les ressorts classiques de la fiction pourraient venir à manquer' (p. 127). [193]

Within this new fictional space, Guérin proposes to accommodate ideas previously excluded. Less moralising than entirely free of moral judgement, refusing to attach responsibility to individuals, neither judging nor condemning, and especially taking into account the senses, 'les gestes, les paroles ; […] ce qui a pu germer au fond des cerveaux : les pensées, les désirs.' (p. 128) Indeed, this last point opens out into an extensive (and quite original) argument on the need for the novel to account for the physiological.

> Depuis les balbutiements de la psychologie élémentaire […] peut-être est-il devenu plus évident que rien ne serait tout de même expliqué si l'on s'entêtait à tenir ces psychologies à l'écart … de leur indispensable complément physiologique. […] Jusqu'à un certain point la créature n'est rien que par ses viscères. (p. 130)

When Guérin refers to *l'Etre*, he means in its entirety: in the actions of its body, and in its subjection to illness or trauma.

Whilst placing the aesthetic that he is advocating firmly within a particular lineage of thinkers / writers whom he especially admires ('une nécessité de tout dire dont Diogène reste l'ancêtre, dont le premier maître aurait été Montaigne et dont, aujourd'hui, Proust et Joyce furent les représentants les plus émouvants', p. 131) Guérin asserts that he is taking fiction beyond boundaries previously set for it. On behalf of art in general and the writer in particular, he demands complete liberty in the face of contemporary principles. Fiction is an act of liberation, an unmasking of the forces which maintain individuals in a state of servitude and which thus permits the individual freely to transform his own destiny.

Guérin explains how this plays out in the literary artefact: 's'attacher en revanche à ces incidences, à ces rapports, à ces éclairages qui situent plus particulièrement et plus impitoyablement la créature dans le milieu social et mental où elle est appelée à évoluer' (p. 132).

The individual in his setting. To capture the real is to show the forces which have created the individual, those that assail him in the course of his days, and the interior (psychological and physiological) forces which influence him.

Guérin acknowledges the dangers of vulgarisation. He is also wary of the critique of posterity, that the cultures of the future may not be as indulgent towards his brand of sincerity as some corners of contemporary literary society.

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[193] This was the first point made by Guérin in the note he left for Claude-Henri Rocquet : 'Note pour Claude / Insister sur l'absurdité de ceux qui ont vu en moi un romancier réaliste. / Montrer que je suis justement tout le contraire d'un réaliste.' Text seen by the author during visit to M. Rocquet's residence, Paris, July 1987. This echoes a statement made in *Fragment Testamentaire* (p. 11) : 'Quels niais [...] ceux qui voient en moi un réaliste, pis, et un naturaliste ! […] Ils n'ont pas su voir que j'étais épris d'absolu, un idéaliste de la plus haute lignée'.

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Guérin concludes with an energetic summary of his position:

> On souhaite donc justement pouvoir dissiper les mirages enfantés par les mythologies de la réalité. Imaginer un art qui saurait confondre et réduire à l'impuissance les mythes modernes à force de précision et de lucidité, un art qui saurait conserver au texte toute sa beauté formelle et toute son intelligence sans que cela soit aux dépens de sa nouveauté ou de son étrangeté…

Guérin's conception of 'fiction' – a summary

Liberty. Truth and sincerity. '*Alternance'*. The physiological. Social and cultural conditioning or 'myths'. The uninhibited use of appropriate language. A work of imagination rooted in reality. Dreams and the unconscious. All of these are integral to Guérin's *mythologie de la réalité*.

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Guérin's *Ebauche d'une mythologie de la réalité* : an Introduction

Guérin explained the thinking behind the overall project of *Ebauche* to Jean Paulhan and his wife in the Autumn of 1943. 'Il [Paulhan] parut passionné – sa femme aussi – par l'idée que j'avais d'une vaste entreprise comme celle-ci, l'affabulation étant évidemment indispensable – même si je reste fidèle aux faits – puisque je suis appelé à y engager d'autres êtres que moi.'[194]

Two of the critical elements of autofiction ('*affabulation'*, '*fidèle aux faits'*) are present. Others (invention of new forms of expression, a commitment to psychoanalysis or the workings of the unconscious, a reflection of contemporary societal issues) will emerge as the drafts of each volume are shared. In this section, I show that *Ebauche* is ground-breaking, a truly autofictional project with a mythological dimension.

Exploring the title

Ebauche is a five-volume project, of which only the first three volumes – *L'Apprenti, Parmi tant d'autres feux, Les Poulpes* – were ever published. It embodies *'la mythologie de la réalité'*, Guérin's conception of fiction, as adumbrated in several places, most notably *Contre une Terreur des Faits*.[195] The third element of the title, '*Mythologie',* should be seen within the context of Guérin's belief that society is a construct of overwhelming forces – *des mythologies modernes* - which shape the individual. The text must reflect this. In his review of *Les Poulpes*[196], Yves-Marie Lucot summarises the project as follows: '[...] au travers du roman […] il [Guérin] se fixa le vécu, la vérité crue du vécu comme traces essentielles de l'illustration de l'inéluctable défaite de l'individu contre les rouages administratifs, judiciaires, politiques, policiers, culturels de la société.*'*

The origins of *Ebauche*

Ebauche did not begin fully-formed as a project in itself, but emerged from the writer's developing clarity about his own approach to the novel. It is not the articulation of a 'system'.[197] *Ebauche* was an idea which slowly formed during Guérin's captivity. The individual texts which comprise *Ebauche* were drafted separately from one another, but Guérin afterwards perceived that there was an architecture within which the texts sat, to which each text in its radically different way contributed, and from which each gleaned an extra dimension through its affiliation to the whole.

Guérin's wartime diary *Le Temps de la Sottise*[198] reflects this developing sense. In a seminal entry (Volume VIII, pp. 346-347) the writer describes his vision that *L'Apprenti,*

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[194] Raymond Guérin*, Retour de Barbarie* (Bordeaux: Finitude, 2005) p. 120.
[195] See above, my general introduction to '*Fictions*'.
[196] *L'Aisne Nouvelle,* 14/01/82.
[197] Guérin was impressed and intimidated by the monolithic corpus of his contemporaries Sartre and Camus. *Retour de Barbarie* records his conversations with the two writers during a visit to Paris in late 1943. First, with Camus: 'Mais que j'aie été incapable jusqu'ici de transcender, dans mes confessions ou mes fictions, une conception du monde dominée par quelque chose comme les phénomènes de l'existence ou l'absurde, c'est en cela que je me sens inférieur.' (*Retour*, pp 121-22) Then, with Sartre : 'Lui aussi attache plus de prix à la création proprement dite qu'au jargon philosophique qui sert à la mettre en système**.'** (pp. 124-25).
[198] Fonds Guérin, BLJD.

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Parmi tant d'autres feux, Les Poulpes, Je est un autre and a fifth text (here with its original name, *Que de soi la contrainte …*) become volumes of unique book with a single hero. The main characters of the first three texts 'Léonide Hermès, Sébastien Cartier et Bernard Marinoli ne sont qu'un seul et même personnage. Peut-être Léonide Hermès sera-t-il le nom de ce lourd et léger héros ?' He perceives that the same possibility could apply equally to the female characters of the drafts: 'Peut-être Olga Molinier et Delphine Rollin se confondront.*'* On this basis, Guérin envisages the possibility of a 'vaste œuvre' covering twenty years, under the provisional title '*sur les traces de soi'*.[199]

The writer is not without uncertainties. First, titles: '*L'Apprenti'* he considers potentially too direct, and entertains the idea of replacing it with '*Comme une bulle ..*'; he wonders if the titles *Les Poulpes* and *Je est un autre* are not a little too transparent, but after some deliberation is satisfied. Second, the nature of the transposition: should the hero of *Les Poulpes* remain as a painter, 'ou deviendrait-il écrivain ? Voilà ce que je ne sais pas encore.*'* [200] Third, the narrative standpoint of *Je est un autre* : *'*sans doute le verrai-je assez comme une sorte de Journal-Confession de ma vie conjugale avec S… après mon retour, où le héros prendrait directement la parole'. Guérin has considerable ambition for this part of the project : *'*Par l'accent que je compte lui imprimer, par l'étrangeté de l'analyse, par l'acuïté des notations, j'en souhaite faire un ouvrage sans precedent.*'*[201] It is significant that the commitment to linguistic and stylistic experimentation, such a feature of autofiction, is intrinsic to his reflections here.

How exactly to handle the project was a matter of considerable soul-searching. This is an autonarrational project, but Guérin remained uncertain for some time on whether the fictional or the confessional mode should predominate: 'N'aurais-je pas dû notamment prendre à mon compte sous forme d'une réelle confession tout ce que je fais endosser à Monsieur Hermès, le héros de L'Apprenti ?' (*Le Temps de la Sottise*, VIII, 165). Guérin regrets the fact that this '*concession'* will not spare him the hostility ('*rebuffades'*) of the public, but believes the choice to be worthwhile if it allows him to express himself more freely and with greater strength. 'Malgré le paravent de Monsieur Hermès, l'Apprenti n'est pas autre chose que le résultat de cette transposition de la réalité par le souvenir.*'*

The issue continues to preoccupy him. He returns to it a little later, copying into his diary a section of a letter (21/4/43) sent to his friend René Lascaud (*Le Temps de la Sottise* VIII, 249). In this, he expresses some frustration with early versions of *l'Apprenti*, because ' je ne suis pas allé jusqu'au bout de mon personnage, peut-être justement à cause de l'affabulation que je lui ai imposée'.

A letter received from Marcel Arland, parts of which Guérin copied into his diary, further muddies the waters. Arland equivocates, agreeing that it may have been judicious to

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[199] Later, this working title became *Cheminements.*

[200] This question casts interesting light on the creative decisions taken by Guérin. His commitment to defamiliarize is clear. That the intended 'painter' became instead a 'writer' was principally on the advice of Marcel Arland after the latter's reading of the first draft, a revision which was later endorsed by Jean Paulhan in the November 1943 conversation. This project was clearly not conceived either as a generalised romantic study of an individual's awakening to literature, or as a fictional autobiography about Guérin's own path into writing.

[201] Guérin adds his own footnote to this comment : *'*quel ingénu je fais …*'*. It is possible that Guérin was referring to a text, later published as *La Main Passe*, in which he experiments with a stream of consciousness style first person confession – described by Guérin as '*une pérégrination mentale'* - inspired by his reading of contemporary American writing, especially Faulkner.

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have remained 'sur le plan confessionnel', but adds 'ou bien alors vous lancer résolument sur un plan fictif, mais il me semble que ce n'est pas là votre voie. Votre livre souffre peut-être du mélange des deux plans et de là, l'impression de longueur dans la deuxième partie qu'il m'a parfois donné.' Again, there is recognition of the twin forces at play within the project, this time from an external source. At this point Guérin lays out for himself the logic behind his decision:

> Fiction or confessionnel ? Si j'ai conçu *l'Apprenti, Parmi tant d'autres feux, Les Poulpes,* sous forme de fictions, c'était parce que j'avais à y engager d'autres caractères que le mien. Si la confession permet d'aller plus loin dans l'analyse et l'étude de son propre 'moi', elle peut être gênante dès qu'il faut analyser d'autres êtres ou sonder d'autres caractères. Au contraire, la fiction permet de prendre plus de libertés avec les personnages que l'on crée. L'inconvénient alors, c'est de livrer à fond, dans la fiction, des émotions, des sentiments, ou des pensées que l'on a pu avoir. (*Le Temps de la Sottise* VIII, pp. 251-52)

Both forms have their advantages. The goal of the writer is to retain them both. To achieve this, he must find an artistic solution which encapsulates all of the identified aspects of a *'mythologie de la réalité'*, that is a coalescence of a number of types of text. The crux of the argument is sincerity, and the possibility of injury to others. 'Faut-il se montrer aussi courageux que l'on a été avec soi et aussi impitoyable et aussi lucide ? Alors ?' (*Le Temps de la Sottise* VIII, p. 252)

By late 1943 and his release from captivity, Guérin's thinking was fully formed, albeit still capable of revision. In the published extracts from his diary,[202] Guérin records the manner in which he outlined successively to Marcel Arland, Jean Paulhan, Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre *'les grandes lignes de l'œuvre romanesque qui était née dans ma tête durant ma captivité'* (p. 61).

> C'était, depuis des années, un grand drame pour moi que d'osciller toujours sans trouver de solution entre la confession et la fiction. Si j'avais pu suivre ma pente, il est certain qu'une œuvre confessionnelle m'aurait particulièrement attiré. Non seulement par désir foncier de sincérité, mais parce que je n'ai aucune sorte d'imagination romanesque. Mon rêve, c'était toujours *les Essais* de Montaigne, *la vie de Henri Brûlard*, *Si le grain ne meurt*…, *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*.
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> Toutefois, si j'étais libre de m'engager tout entier et si je n'avais pas honte – tout pénibles que me fussent sans doute les aveux poussés que j'avais à faire – j'étais moins libre, me semblait-il, d'engager pareillement autrui. […] J'étais donc plein de scrupules devant les personnages que j'aurais pu mettre en cause dans mes confessions. C'était pourquoi j'avais songé à une fiction. Incapable comme je l'étais d'imaginer les faits, j'avais résolu de m'en tenir au canevas de mon propre existence, au respect des événements auxquels j'avais été mêlé, mais de me cacher sous un pseudonyme et de donner en même temps une fausse identité aux personnages comme a fait Proust. [*Retour de Barbarie*, pp. 61-62]

This, then, is the nature of *Ebauche*, a transposed reality, rooted in the real experiences of the writer but defamiliarized and enhanced by a mythological dimension. This is an autofictional project *avant la lettre*, embedded within a mythological framework. The following chapters describe the various solutions tested by Guérin to realise his twin objectives: the coverage of twenty years in a vast work, together with the creation of a

[202] Retour de Barbarie.

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‘*mythologie de la réalité’* which embodies his own theoretical ideas. Common across all three texts is the notion of ‘*cheminement’*, the passage of a single individual through the overwhelming forces of society.

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‘Il me semble, enfin, que j’ai trouvé mon ton.’[203] *L’Apprenti* – a groundbreaking autonarrational experiment, a work of contemporary mythology

L’Apprenti[204] was a project which according to Guérin was 20 years in gestation and informed by the experiences of the writer during his own *stage* in a Paris hotel. That these experiences were known to a wider audience before publication is evident in the letter which accompanied the draft[205] and after publication in some of the early reviews.[206] Ignoring cautions about the dangers of such a practice by Philippe Lejeune[207], Kauffmann in composing his biography treats the detail of *L’Apprenti* as referential fact, basing the whole of his prelude on the account towards the end of the novel of the circumstances of the apprentice’s dismissal from employment (Kauffmann 2007, pp. 9-10). What distinguishes this text, however, is its exploitation of personal details purely as a starting point for the development of a wider fictional project. Rather than an individual odyssey, *L’Apprenti* describes the journey of the everyman central character Monsieur Hermès through the overwhelming social, political and economic forces which combine to create him. This is a mythology of the time.

L’Apprenti – a myth within a myth

Fundamental to the automythology of the text – an extra-textual counterpart to the autonarration of the book – is the myth created around it. The myth of *l’Apprenti* began well before its publication. On the front page of its edition of April 24th, 1943, *Comoedia* carried an article on *Quand…* by Jacques Chardonne. The sub-editorial gloss, provided presumably by Marcel Arland who was editing the revue at the time but unattributed, included the following: ‘Raymond Guérin est prisonnier : il a écrit en captivité plusieurs ouvrages, dont nous souhaitons la publication prochaine, entre autres *l’Apprenti-Psychologue*, qui est un des témoignages les plus courageux que nous connaissons sur l’adolescence’.

The fact that the text was being scrutinised by Censors was widely known in literary circles in the period 1943-45, and it was common knowledge that certain printing companies had refused to produce the book as a consequence of its reported content.[208] This history, the

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[203] Letter to Jean Paulhan, 26/6/44. Fonds Guérin, BLJD.

[204] Paris: Gallimard, 1946. All references will be to this original and censored edition of the text.

[205] Letter dated 4/8/42 ‘Pour Jean Paulhan et Marcel Arland’ : ‘Mes chers amis, voici tout de même cet ‘Apprenti Psychologue’ que je portais en moi, je crois, depuis près de vingt ans et que tous ceux à qui j’en avais parlé autrefois, m’avaient souvent pressé d’écrire.’ Fonds Guérin, BLJD.

[206] ‘L’auteur de « Quand vient la fin » ne nous donne plus ici une « confession » mais une « fiction ». Il semble vouloir éviter surtout le mot « roman » et, par un simple chavirement d’étiquette, orienter l’esprit du lecteur. *L’Apprenti* n’en demeure pas moins un livre inspiré par l’expérience vécue. M. Hermès est un portrait de l’auteur jeune, amplifié par la révolte, déformé par les lois de récriture’. André Bay, *Carrefour*, 17 octobre 1946

[207] In *Le Pacte autobiographique* pp. 194-195, Lejeune describes ‘*l’illusion biographique’*, that is the use of elements of the autobiographical work *Si le grain ne meurt* as facts to be rewritten in the third person and presented as biography. Using the elements of a ‘*fiction’* as certified fact is equally hazardous.

[208] In a letter to Jean Paulhan (22/1/46), Guérin expresses, or perhaps feigns, outrage: ‘L’Apprenti est en composition. Il paraît que plusieurs imprimeurs l’ont refusé, ne voulant pas imposer sa lecture à leur personnel – de peur sans doute qu’ils en perdent la vue. Non ? Croyez-vous ! Où la bêtise va-t-elle se nicher ? Après tout, ils finissent par m’agacer tous ces gens qui se font un épouvantail de cet Apprenti. Allons ! il n’est pas terrible. On dirait que les gens se sont mis dans la tête de s’indigner à son propos et qu’ils ne savent plus comment faire autrement ...’ Fonds Guérin, BLJD.

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peritextual elements of *L'Apprenti* itself, and the obvious wounds the published text bore from the act of censorship all contributed to the myth about the text on its appearance in 1946.

The peritext of *L'Apprenti*

The liminary pages are a disorderly amalgam of two types of text: short texts which, in a conventional sense, immersively ease the reader into the main work – a dedication to Marcel Arland, a corpus list - and a second group which appears to seek to engage the reader in a wider debate external to the work but generated around it.

Title

We have all been apprentices, the paratexts asserts, and *l'Apprenti* - the story of a 19 year old serving an apprenticeship in Paris - is therefore the story of us all. This is an emblematic apprenticeship, within which coincidentally an actual apprenticeship is embedded.

Epigraph

The epigraph is taken from Stendhal's '*Rome, Naples et Florence'*.

Il est dur de se dire à 20 ans 'Tout ce que je sais m'a été enseigné par des gens qui avaient le plus pressant intérêt à me tromper. Il faut refaire mes idées sur tout.'

Since we are all apprentices, as the *prière d'insérer* has asserted, the journey of this eponymous apprentice is representative of our own. The contention is clear: apprenticeship is the loss of imposed blindness, the overcoming of falsehood or distorted perspectives through (possibly bitter - '*dur'*) experience. As Monsieur Hermès emerges from childhood, his learning (or 'refaire mes idées') is emblematic of a process we should all have undertaken.

There is then an open address from the writer to the reader:

> Au Lecteur :
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> 'Il paraît que certains passages, et certaines expressions de ce livre risquaient de tomber sous le coup de la loi. J'ai dû procéder à quelques coupures, et introduire des blancs, qui viennent, ici et là, mutiler le texte.
>
> L'auteur en demande pardon au lecteur courageux.'

Outside of the boundaries of the text, the reader is being personally addressed by an entity describing itself as '*l'auteur*'. Throughout the work the reader will remain conscious of his/her status as such, and treat the written work both intrinsically and extrinsically, with the regular '*blancs'* of the censor serving as a reminder. The fact of this is further underscored in the final sentence of the *notice*.

The phrase '*certains passages, et certaines expressions'* suggests that the content of the text is in several places controversial, or that the reader should expect to find an approach to language which is at or indeed tests the limits of the permitted. The fact that these may '*tomber sous le coup de la loi'* may serve to increase the text's appeal. It places the text in a context which is beyond the purely artistic: it is now established as having an existence in a sphere beyond itself, through its very being and publication.

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'J'ai dû procéder à quelques coupures, et introduire des blancs, qui viennent, ici et là, mutiler le texte.'

The process has not after all been voluntary ('*J'ai dû'*).[209] Clearly the text has been the locus of a battle of ideals in which the author has had to yield. This submission is visible in the inflammatory term '*coupures'*: the text presented is not the full text of the author's design, but a mutilated version (and the choice of the verb '*mutiler'* is wantonly inflammatory). The published text is thus evidence of the forces of censorship and control against which the author is aligned. The decision to highlight rather than camouflage the mutilated areas, leaving spaces ('*blancs'*) which display the wounds the text has sustained, is a calculated one. These '*blancs'* are a running reminder of the text's defiled status.[210]

L'auteur en demande pardon au lecteur courageux.

The writer concludes with an overt attempt to develop an alliance with the reader. In this very act, however, there is a conspicuous dishonesty: ownership of the text is being forcibly retained by the author, but responsibility for its implications slyly shared. Choosing to read this text has become an active political statement. The reader is not allowed to forget this or pretend otherwise.

The *'notice'* is the most overt sign that a myth about the text is in the process of being generated, that it exists as a cultural entity. It requires the reader to be aware of his/her status as a consumer of the text within a society whose values are being brought into question, and it inserts the reader in to that debate on the side of the writer whose book the reader has chosen to buy. The writer knows that this choice is likely to have been conscious, informed. Through the epitext, few consumers will have arrived at this text unaware of its contents. The writer is therefore addressing someone who has in all likelihood elected to become a fellow traveller, on whose indulgence the writer can depend. If, however, the reader has no prior knowledge of the work, this *notice* openly attempts to recruit him/her.

The published version of '*au lecteur'* was a much shorter version of the original text submitted by Guérin, a powerful manifesto of *this* writer as *the* champion of free speech. In standing up for his principles, Guérin states, he is prepared to return to captivity for another two years. The publication of *L'Apprenti* appears to be a statement, a serious intervention into a national debate rather than simply a text in itself.

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[209] Any lack of clarity on this point is dispelled in the epitextual *Juin* article, in which Guérin states : 'Toutefois, mis à part ceux qui ont lu le livre distraitement ou trop rapidement (mais ils sont plus nombreux qu'on pense) et qui, de ce fait, ont été surtout obsédés par ces malheureux blancs (dont j'ai dû à mon corps défendant subir l'introduction', (p. 159).

[210] This point is substantiated by the contents of a letter sent by Guérin to Louis-Daniel Hirsch, *directeur commercial* at Gallimard, on 6th April 1946. Complaining about the nature of the 'blancs' used, Guérin states: *'*je ne peux que vous répéter ce qui a été convenu de tout temps entre Gaston Gallimard, lui-même, et moi, au sujet de cette édition. Il a été convenu, en effet qu'il ne s'agissait en réalité que de points de détail, un mot ou deux par-ci par-là, tantôt une ligne tantôt encore un passage à supprimer. Il a été convenu d'autre part que ces mots, ces lignes ou ces passages supprimés seraient laissés en blanc dans la composition, de façon à ce que le public comprenne bien à quel point le livre a pu être mutilé par les exigences d'une morale rétrograde.*'* Unpublished letter seen by the writer amongst author's papers, Bordeaux, 1987; now in Fonds Guérin, BLJD.

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Author's note

The final peritextual element, at the end of the text (p. 386), informs the reader that the work was composed 'en captivité 1940-1944'. This irruption of authorial reality onto the same page as the fictional world again provokes a (con)fusion of the two. Inferences may be made as to the characters within the text and their fate in the subsequent volumes – the culturally aware reader will easily have understood that the action of *l'Apprenti* occurs in the mid-1920s - and to the fate of the writer himself in the light of the epigraph at the start of the book. These remain as inferences, for the moment, in the absence of context.

What's in a name? : the nomenclature of *L'Apprenti*

The name of the central character is composed of two elements which together create a sense of contemporary mythology. The use of '*Monsieur'* is de-individualising and locates the character within the contemporary environment. The removal of the first name, whilst airbrushing away any personal history, idiosyncracies, tastes and so on, places the character within the administrative machinery of society. In this way, deposited within the individual are society's collective memory as well as implied responsibility for the course of its development. Irrespective of the wish of the subject, a process of *embourgeoisement* occurs, but more importantly with '*Monsieur'* the character becomes an everyman, his individual experiences have a value beyond themselves.

Hermes was a figure of huge importance to Guérin.[211] Of specific relevance to *L'Apprenti* are the God's associations with theft, the desire, not yet fully formed but visible from the first chapter, not to respect boundaries, athletic prowess, language and masturbation.[212] In terms of the overall project of *Ebauche,* the myth that Hermes could move freely between worlds, and was thus able to enter and return from the Underworld, is pertinent. The environments of Volumes II and III are far removed from that of I, and III could very easily be held to be a representation of a contemporary Hades.

In terms of the other characters, de-individualised nomination extends only to 'Monsieur Papa' and 'Madame Mère'. This asserts not just the conventional distance of their relationship with their adolescent child, reinforced by the physical distance of his exile from the family home on an apprenticeship in Paris. Parental action is one of the major constraints on the individual, and in the absence of any other dimension the parents of Monsieur Hermès are seen solely as instruments of repression, purveyors of mercantilist values which are at odds with his and frustrate his ambitions.

Setting the scene

In the opening chapter, the reader is introduced to a degree zero human, stripped back to its essential functions.[213] The little biographical detail we are given about the central

[211] Asked if he was a Christian, Guérin replied : 'non, je suis surtout un douteur, donc indécis… j'ai plus de sympathie pour Hermès, le personnage à double visage..'. *Entretiens avec C-H Rocquet.* Kauffmann is of the opinion that it is the '*part insaisissable'* of Hermès with which he most identified. Kauffmann, 2007, p. 53.
[212] Diogenes the Cynic claimed that Hermes revealed to Pan the secret of masturbation, in order to relieve the pain caused by Pan's unrequited pining for Echo.
[213] 'Petit bonhomme encore informe et borné, gamin grossier et scatalogique, quasiment fier de ses écarts et il n'est pas sans rappeler tant de ces adolescents boutonneux et orduriers que nous avons rencontrés ou que nous

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character is in the form of asides : 'Dans trois semaines son anniversaire. Dix-neuf ans' (p. 13); 'Il était pour ainsi dire fâché avec eux [ses parents]. Ça s'était fait quand ils l'avaient arraché à ses études pour le placer en stage dans cet horrible hôtel' (p. 14) ; 'Lui qui avait voulu préparer Polytechnique, commis de restaurant !' (p. 16). The first chapter, rather than 'establishing' the character, instead peels away and examines the layers of influence on him, as Monsieur Hermès attempts to understand how the individual with his name and for whose actions society holds him responsible has been created.

That this is a basic template is evident in the primitive enjoyment of simple bodily functions (already to some extent intellectualised : the more deferred the better), although the apprentice has learnt too that even these can potentially result in judgements about him:

> Il avait besoin d'uriner.. Il allait encore mouiller son caleçon. Mais il aimait se retenir. Sûr, ça ferait une petite tache jaune de plus. Qu'est-ce qu'elle devait penser la blanchisseuse ? .. Y en a qui prétendent que ça fait du mal de se retenir. Des bêtas ! Se retenir de chier, ça c'était autre chose. Ça constipait. Pourtant Monsieur Hermès aimait ça aussi. Quand il sentait que l'envie le prenait, il la prolongeait. […] Il s'enferma dans les cabinets, urina. Un grand bien-être l'envahit.' (p. 15)

The apprentice's naïve enjoyment of his own body extends to its products.

> Il […] mit ses pieds nus. Ils étaient gonflés, rougeâtres, marqués de traces noires surtout autour des ongles. Il y passa ses doigts. Il sentait, sous leur pression, les traces s'agglutiner en corpuscules graisseux qui tombaient à mesure sur le plancher. Après ça, ses doigts furent imprégnés d'une forte odeur acide. C'était une mauvaise odeur mais il ne pouvait pas renoncer à la respirer.' (p. 16)
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> Il s'extirpa une morve gluante du nez, la roula dans ses doigts jusqu'à ce qu'elle eût acquis une certaine consistance et pris la forme d'une boulette. (p. 22)

In addition to this primitive self-awareness, the apprentice begins to recognise the impact that experiences have on him physiologically. He attributes the pain in his neck muscles to his 'position fatigante de voyeur' (p. 27), and at the same time as he witnesses the scene in the bedroom feels the physical response within himself ('Monsieur Hermès sentait la moiteur de ses paumes sur les genoux de son pantalon de pyjama', p. 27).

He is also beginning to sense and account intellectually or emotionally for the evolution in himself. Whereas previously his tiredness was that of the contented sportsman enjoying a post-match shower, now his exhaustion is of a completely different order: 'C'était la même lassitude, le même plaisir à s'affaisser sur soi-même, à se dire que c'était fini. Mais maintenant, toute cette lassitude, tout ce plaisir étaient poissé d'angoisse.' (p. 17).

Nonetheless, as Guérin declared[214], 'Au moment où je prends mon héros, ce n'est encore qu'un tout petit bonhomme élémentaire.' *L'Apprenti* will chart the progression (or to

avons pu être'. 'Revue Journal 4', *Supplément à la revue du Théâtre de la Commune, Centre Dramatique National, Aubervilliers*, p. 11.

[214] Letter to Jean Paulhan, 1/6/45. Fonds Guérin, BLJD.

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use Guérin's preferred term '*cheminement'*) of this entity through contemporary society, that is a representation of the trajectory of 'tout homme, avant de ressembler à ce qu'il sera'.[215]

'Monsieur Hermès' the construct

Inevitably the major influence on the emerging 'Monsieur Hermès' is parental. This is in many forms. The physiognomy of Monsieur Hermès, despite his efforts to disguise the fact, reflects his inheritance: 'Il a mon nez, disait Madame Mère. Elle était fière de son nez. Monsieur Hermès avait tout fait pour abîmer le sien. Il le prenait entre ses doigts et le collait sur sa lèvre supérieure …' (pp. 20-21). Conscious of the effect his poor eyesight has on possible receptions of him ('l'air bête et la vue basse', p. 14), Monsieur Hermès knows where to apportion the blame: 'Quelle misère que sa vue fût si mauvaise ! Ses parents n'avaient rien fait pour le faire soigner.' (p. 21) This has the double benefit of implying an inherited characteristic and neglectful upbringing.

The vestiges of parental pressure are seen also in his wardrobe. Linked in to his recollection of a failed courtship of Alice Elvas is her judgement on him ('Elle l'avait pris pour un fils à papa', p. 18). Perhaps with good reason, as the text suggests : 'Sa garce de mère, on aurait dit qu'elle s'ingéniait à le déguiser. Combien de temps encore le contraindrait-elle à porter les vieilleries, à finir d'user les costumes et les caleçons de M. Papa ?' (p. 18). Monsieur Hermès' entire wardrobe, of which the inherited clothing is a significant part, is transported in a trunk which is labelled with his parents' names.

The clothing of employment is a further constraint on the individual. Aspects of the uniform are acceptable ('Oui, pas mal, ce costar bleu à filets rouges', p. 13) but other elements expose the apprentice potentially to the irony of others by influencing his gestures ('Ce qui l'agaçait, c'était ce faux col qui remontait tout le temps. Tous les dix mètres il était obligé d'y porter la main. On aurait dit un tic d'idiot. … Il n'en avait que trop conscience', p. 14). Employment impinges further on the development of the individual, through basic exhaustion or through its insidious introduction into the individual of mechanistic responses or gestures in particular situations. Even in Chapter One Monsieur Hermès bears its scars :

> Monsieur Hermès se déchaussa … Ses pauvres pieds ! Les mains toutes brûlées, la chemise toujours mouillée, et les pieds en marmelade. Oh ! oui, surtout les pieds … par endroits ses chairs étaient à vif. T'as la peau trop tendre, disait Simpson. Et cette vache de Palisseau : 'T'avais qu'à commencer à douze ans, comme moi. Te frappe pas. C'est le métier qui entre !' (p. 16)

Receiving and resisting the imprint of society – competing mythologies

Through his employment, Monsieur Hermès is formally inducted into the society which will shape him. Donning the uniform represents the end of the individual's status as individual (p. 196) as well as his assimilation into a hierarchical system (p. 201) but the power of employment extends further. It affects the very life choices of the individual, not

[215] Phrase used on the inside cover of the published work, and extracted from the full '*notice au lecteur'* submitted by Guérin. Reproduced in *Revue Journal 4* (full reference, see footnote 208).

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just by causing a deterioration in his health (p. 221) but also through its denial of self-determination.[216]

Ineluctably, the entity 'Monsieur Hermès' is remodelled, the base purity of the individual overtaken by a reprogramming which then becomes internalised. He loses control of his spontaneous reactions, learns deference, ceases to empathise with others. He becomes a slave, dehumanised, and vulnerable to the punishments to which the naïve are subject, symbolised by the Venereal Disease he contracts from a colleague. Given his minority, so restricted are his options that, at the end of the text, he elects to begin his period of military service, thus submitting himself to the wider impositions of the state, one that in this case removes not only his individuality but also prepares him as fodder to be offered up on its behalf.

In opposition to the social myths which overwhelm him, Monsieur Hermès invokes two personal mythologies – the myth of his own origins and, a concomitant of the first, the myth of the miracle of writing. In these instances, the autonarrational nature of the text becomes more overt. Published less than nine months before *L'Apprenti*, *Après la fin* had placed into the public domain Guérin's feelings on these two points, expressed in stark terms.[217] In terms of his own origins, Guérin had observed:

> Durant mon adolescence, j'ai maintes fois pensé que je n'étais peut-être qu'un enfant adoptif et que j'avais eu, à mon insu, d'autres parents. […] Et depuis, je dois l'avouer, la plupart des gens qui m'ont approché ont été [sic] frappés par l'abîme qui existait entre ma famille et moi et n'ont pas manqué de me poser cette question redoutable : Comment pouvez-vous être leur fils ? (Guérin, 1945, p. 298)

Manifesting itself despite overwhelming resistance, the emergence of literature from the parental 'monde mercantile et borné' (1945, p. 292) was seen as a 'miracle' (1945, p. 295): 'Comment sortir de là ? Oui, comment ai-je pu sortir de là ?' (1945, p. 298).

The same questions inform the reflections of Monsieur Hermès. Despite acknowledging his physical inheritance from his parents (see above), and despite catching himself on three occasions uttering phrases which he recognises to be ones habitually used by his father (pp. 199, 208 and 249), Monsieur Hermès considers that he must belong to them only as a result of some commercial transaction ('Madame Mère donnait l'impression de l'avoir acheté dans un magasin, en effet,' p. 302). He conceives with some euphoria the liberation that this would provide: 'Il n'avait strictement rien d'eux. [..] parents adoptifs. Une sorte d'orphelin, voilà ce qu'il était au fond. Né de mère et de père inconnus,' (p. 302).

Nonetheless, the legal machinery of society prevails and, illegitimate or not, the apprentice must bend to his parents' will and return to Portville when instructed to.

Creativity is first an act of resistance to parents, and then a protective shield against society in general. The creative arts are a source of constant antagonism between Monsieur Hermès and his parents. The reaction of Monsieur Papa to the music and painting lessons of

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[216] 'invité à jouer avec le club en Angleterre, il aurait joué à Twickenham Il s'en était fait une telle fête à l'avance. Mais il avait dû refuser. Impossible d'obtenir la permission. Le Chef du Personnel n'avait rien voulu savoir, la brute. Il lui conservait une de ces dents, rien qu'à cause de ça ! Mais c'était tout ce qu'il pouvait faire. Il fallait s'incliner' (p. 221).

[217] *Après la fin* published 20/12/45, *L'Apprenti* 15/09/46.

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his son was characteristic of the difference between them: 'Monsieur Papa avait été beaucoup plus lucide. Il avait toujours proclamé que tout ça c'était de l'argent foutu par les fenêtres' (p. 148).

The apprentice sees his experimentation with drama as an expression of this difference, a statement of independence, a form of revenge. Indeed, not only does the action of the text itself incorporate this ('Son troisième acte était mauvais. Il n'aurait pas dû montrer son héros pardonnant à ses parents, mais au contraire, restant inflexible,' p. 311) but the very act of publication is represented as a gesture of defiance on the part of the defeated and retreating apprentice:

> Monsieur Hermès préférait garder toute sa rancœur au fond de lui. .. Ça lui faisait du mal, et ça lui faisait du bien en même temps. Qu'il était un sans cœur, un sans entrailles, un ingrat, un fils indigne. .. Il attendrait sa revanche aussi longtemps qu'il faudrait. Mais il la souhaitait éclatante. Qu'on joue seulement *La Joie du Cœur* ! (p. 353)

Writing confers on the self a value that others have overlooked, and thus enables the individual to cause society to reassess its treatment of him. In his interior monologues the apprentice imagines with relish the reaction of colleagues :

> S'élever au-dessus de ses semblables. […] Comme il les méprisait les salauds de l'Hôtel, qui le tenaient en tutelle. [...] Un jour, aussi, sa pièce, serait jouée. […] Paris à ses pieds. Son nom dans les journaux, célèbre du jour au lendemain. Les uns et les autres l'avaient toujours pris pour une merde. Eh bien, ils verraient ! Quelle revanche que la sienne ! (p. 110)

It enables him also to recover some of the dignity lost to those to whom he must be professionally subservient, although as he is aware his dream is awash with bad faith:

> Les femmes trouveraient ça follement excitant. Un garçon d'étage, ma chère, croyez-vous ! C'est d'un romanesque ! Et qui a écrit une pièce d'une audace inouïe ! On croirait jamais que c'était Monsieur Papa qui l'avait placé dans l'hôtellerie.. Non, sa légende serait vite bâtie. Ce serait par caprice que Monsieur Hermès aurait fait ça. [...] Pensez donc ! Dans un palace ! Quel merveilleux poste d'observation pour un dramaturge, pour un analyste du cœur humain. Rien que ça, c'était une idée de génie ! Il est charmant, n'est-ce pas ? Et si simple! (p. 275)

Towards the end of the text, the unlikely endorsement of this myth by the famous playwright Jacques Delorme is evidence that the power of society might be resisted, an idea potentially – the reader of 1946 might infer - to be developed in the subsequent volumes of *Ebauche*.

Language and narration in *L'Apprenti*

In linguistic terms, the novel attempts to embody its own premise: a representation of the life and work of an adolescent in the Paris of the 1920s. Its extensive use of interior monologue naturally allows the credible introduction of contemporary slang, and through the intermediary of free indirect speech this then finds its way into the narrative itself. No compromise is made with the vocabulary, which actually selects itself: the basic, scatological, sexually curious prototype must express himself as such. [218]

[218] This was a position already articulated in correspondence with Paulhan. In an unpublished letter (1/6/45), Fonds Guérin, BLJD, Guérin wrote: 'Je lui [ie Monsieur Hermès] ai […] prêté une psychologie, un langage, des mœurs, un caractère, des fréquentations, un comportement, des réactions à son échelle. Tout ce qu'il fait, tout ce

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In his article in *Juin*, Guérin defends the nature of the language used within *L'Apprenti* as relevant and appropriate, and not the declaration of a philosophical position:

> Je n'ai pas voulu justifier dans l'Apprenti une certaine littérature, ni même un certain langage, qu'on en soit bien persuadé. Si les 'événements' du livre, la façon dont ils sont dépeints et les mots, même, qui les expriment, sont tels, c'est seulement parce qu'ils se trouvèrent ainsi réaliser mieux le climat du héros et son univers.' [219]

The language of the novel is therefore uncompromising.[220] Guérin's argument is that, if such words exist and they are appropriate, then there is no reason not to use them [221]. Like Stendhal, Lawrence and Joyce before him, he intends to exploit the full range of expressive options available to him, in good faith. [*Optique*, p. 171]

Critical reaction to this artistic choice was mixed, with a number reproaching Guérin for the 'obscenity' of the text. Guérin's defence was not simply the one outlined above, but a more subtle argument which turned on the idea of '*alternance'*. He contended that whilst critics had concentrated on the 'filth' of the text they had ignored the capacity for purity and beauty on the part of both central character and narration. Certainly, within *l'Apprenti*, there are sections of elevated and poetic language, symbolically confined to the rêverie of the apprentice. Dream represents sanctuary, a place of empowerment in which the mind is unfettered by the constraints of society and everything is possible, broadly an emulation of the state which Monsieur Hermès imagines Lamartine to have occupied during the composition of *Jocelyn*.

> Pourquoi un poète comme Lamartine avait-il écrit *Jocelyn* ? …Plus que n'importe qui, peut-être, Monsieur Hermès aurait voulu pouvoir s'incarner dans un monde comparable à celui de *Jocelyn*. Il ne le pouvait pas. Dès qu'il sortait de son rêve intérieur pour se mettre à vivre, il se sentit requis immédiatement par des forces qui lui interdisaient l'accès de ce monde enchanté. (p. 341)

The language of Monsieur Hermès' dreams reflects this desire, notably the long interior monologue on the imaginary visit of the Comtessa/Nita construct to Bagatelle, but in Monsieur Hermès' musings in general. For example, his *rêverie* as a *promeneur solitaire* through Paris, which begins : *'*O, exquise angoisse de se sentir perdu, de tourner et de tourner, autour d'étranges pâtes de maisons…' (p. 80).

In a letter to Jean Paulhan dated 7th October 1946, Guérin regretted that critics had simply not detected the 'alternance' at play in the text:

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qu'il dit, tout ce qu'il pense est mûrement accordé à ses possibilités. Ainsi, il est vrai. […] Des petits bonhommes dans son genre j'en ai approché, fréquenté, des milliers. Les nier, c'est nier l'humanité. Pourquoi donc s'effaroucher ?'

[219] 'Les égarements de la critique', *Juin* No 40, 19 novembre 1946; text reproduced in *Chroniques*, 2015, p. 163.

[220] Two examples : 'A quoi bon tenter quelque chose? Tout était voué à l'échec. Merde, merde, et merde. Rien ne se passait jamais comme on l'aurait souhaité,' (p. 104) ; 'Où est ce qu'elles apprenaient des trucs comme ça ? des fainéantes, voilà ce qu'elles étaient. Tu gagneras ton pain à la sueur de ton cul. [BLANC] / Il pleuvait comme vache qui pisse, à c't'heure. […] Il avait envie de pisser. Une pissotière en vue. Il s'y précipita. […] Monsieur Hermès sortit son zob d'une main et tint son pan de chemise avec l'autre' (p. 193).

[221] 'D'une optique de l'indécence', in *Un Romancier dit son mot* (Paris: Corrêa, 1948) pp. 166 -73.

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> Je crains bien que les critiques ne comprennent pas grand'chose de *l'Apprenti*.. Ce n'est pas le reproche d'obscénité qui risque de me toucher. Mais il faut bien avouer que personne jusqu'ici n'a su dire, ni sur la forme et l'expression du livre, ni sur le sens profond de mon entreprise (et ses prolongements et ses ambivalences : grossièreté, pureté) ce qui méritait d'être dit.

The narrative style of l'Apprenti

The narration of *L'Apprenti* is fluid. Save in a few instances there is a general lack of punctuation marks[222] and attribution ('*pensa Monsieur Hermès'*; '*dit Pactot'*), which means that a paragraph may contain a multiplicity of narrative sources: the thoughts of Monsieur Hermès, the utterances of Monsieur Hermès in the form of free indirect speech, the utterances (or indeed thoughts) of other characters in the form of free indirect speech, and the observations of a narrator figure who appears at times in the text. As an adjunct to the narration, there is an ongoing bodily narration. The text accounts for the performance of the body (and not just that of Monsieur Hermès), which occasionally speaks in its own right.

The presence of colloquial speech colours sentence construction (for example, the omission of personal pronouns and negative particles: 'Avait fait l'indigné, Monsieur Hermès, cachant son jeu. Et posant des petites questions curieuses, de l'air de pas y toucher. Tiens, tiens, tiens, n'était donc pas le seul à cultiver sa spécialité?', pp 227 – 28) as well as the very language itself. When Monsieur Hermès hesitates to clear the plates of Anna Pavlova the famous dancer, the simile which describes him is redolent of his own lexis: 'Tandis qu'il restait là, piqué, comme un zob, Le Marin passant près de lui, en vitesse..', (p. 130). The consequences of Venereal Disease are expressed in apprentice-speak: 'Du moins, ça ne le brûlait plus quand il pissait. Sauf s'il redressait trop sa verge. …*'* (p. 290)

The language of the text is exposed to other influences, some of which are contemporary cultural in nature. Narration might be by the adverts inside the *pissotière* (p. 193), by popular saying (p. 242, p. 284 – the later example subject to the coarse revision of the apprentice!) or received idea integrated into the text as statement ('les policiers de Paris sont les meilleurs du monde'; 'les bons s'en vont, les mauvais restent,' p. 226). It is often by the noises within the environment: the 'Drinn! Drinn!' of the çonneries (sic) of the hotel's telephones (pp 214, 236) or 'Vhvhvhvhvhvh ! L'ascenseur,' (p. 230), part of the sensory immersion undergone by the apprentice. Narration in many instances becomes stream of consciousness word association, within the unattributed interior monologue of the apprentice:

> Bonsoir ! Parlaient français. Langue d'échange. Langue des changes. Langue, langue, fais-moi une langue. Langue fourrée. (p. 230)

> et il leur avait appris leurs noms. Ça lui était resté. Pourquoi cette association d'idées ? Labrador. Magellan. Carolin. Caroline. Chambellan. Le Bras d'Or. Le Chambellan tient le

[222] In the preparation of the physical drafts by the printers, Guérin was forced to intervene to ensure that this was maintained. In an unpublished letter (5/1/46) to Festy, print production manager at Gallimard, Guérin identifies a long list of problems to be corrected, including: '9ème: Question des tirets et des guillemets // Je ne sais pourquoi on s'est permis, avec une fantaisie d'ailleurs capricieuse, de farcir mon texte, par moments, de guillemets et de tirets. Pourquoi n'a-t-on pas suivi mon manuscrit qui n'en comportait pas ? // Je ne veux à aucun prix voir figurer dans mon livre ni le moindre tiret, ni, surtout, le moindre guillemet. // Notez donc des suppressions de guillemets à effectuer aux pages suivantes : Pages 14, […] 365.*'* Seen amongst the author's papers, Paris, 1987. Now in Fonds Guérin, BLJD.

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> bras d'or de Caroline. La chambre de la belle Caroline aux bras d'or. Les champs d'or dans Caroline's bar. Car Line chante la belle du Labrador. On brade alors le caraco du chat bêlant. Allait-il devenir fou ? (p. 277)
>
> La ligne de ses jambes... pas de poils superflus, ni de duvets disgracieux. La peau lisse. La police. Des mœurs. Oh ! avec ou sans mœurs ! (p. 308)

Almost Surrealist in its spontaneity[223], narration of this type reminds us that we are experiencing directly the interior intellectual workings of the developing prototype. This is a human in formation.

In *L'Apprenti*, the interior monologue of the central character fulfils several functions: a conventional reverie; a retrospective, consisting either of a review of events[224] or musing - sometimes with nostalgia, at others with anger or frustration - over the true meaning of events in the more distant past; and as a point of vision, allowing the reader to see how the narrator totalises the events he is living/observing, which in turn facilitates judgements to be made on how the prototype is responding to its initial immersion into society.

Interior monologue and its cousin free indirect speech merge to create moments of extremely dramatic narration. One instance is in the cowardly action taken by the apprentice to end his relationship with Angélique. Monsieur Hermès is conscious of the appalling nature of what he is doing, and the narration is imbued with this guilt:

> Occasionner le moins de bruit possible. Oui, mais pas facile. Trop énervé. Ses gestes étaient saccadés. Eviter. Eviter Angélique. Eviter ceci, éviter cela... [..] Restait le procédé. Pour dire ce qui est, il n'était pas très élégant, le procédé. Ni très loyal. Se raconter à soi-même que ça lui ferait moins de peine ainsi, à la petite, c'était la triche, du laïus pour essayer de se mettre en règle. Mais en fait, il était un beau dégueulasse. (p. 254)

The urgency of the situation is reflected in the text. Short sentences; sentences containing only an infinitive; the awareness of the body's response, and the nouns of self-recrimination (*voleur, la triche, un beau dégueulasse*), all expressing the guilt felt, ironically by someone breaking into his own bedroom and retrieving his own belongings.

In a text as free of narrative boundaries as *L'Apprenti*, there is access to the interior monologues of other characters. At certain points, narration is in the hands of an overlapping plurality of voices. Immediately following the above extract, the reader is admitted to the interior monologue of Angélique:

> Depuis quelque temps, Angélique vivait dans une crainte perpétuelle.. [fenêtre] C'est de là qu'elle l'avait vu se dissimuler gauchement. Elle avait retenu ses larmes. Quelle absurdité ! Ce n'était donc pas assez qu'il la lâche ? Pourquoi se cacher ? Pourquoi agir de la sorte ? (p. 255)

The physiology of the individual is insistent and must be given its voice through the narration. Already, shortly before the final separation with Angélique, Monsieur Hermès is alerted to some discomfort in his groin: 'Il sentait une puce... celle-ci, notamment, connaissait

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[223] Precisely the claim Guérin will later make about *Les Poulpes*.

[224] Much of the narrative is retrospective: new sections begin with time having elapsed (p. 111 'depuis quelques jours'; p. 197 'depuis huit jours'; p. 347 'voilà huit jours que ça durait') and the course of the following interior monologues is one of assimilation and evaluation.

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le travail. S'attaquait aux parties les plus tendres de son individu' (p. 252). During the rupture scene itself the interior monologue of Angélique becomes a physical one:

> Ça lui avait donné envie de faire pipi. Mais les vataires de l'étage étaient occupés. Tant pis ! Elle garderait ça jusqu'à tout à l'heure. Comme elle marchait vite, un petit pet tranquille partit tout seul. Le couloir était désert, heureusement. […] A cause de l'odeur possible. Le petit pet lui fit lâcher quelques gouttes d'urine dans son pantalon. Elle serra les cuisses. Elle sentit que ça cuisait légèrement. (p. 255)

Other voices enter the text. That of a young girl in the street who observes Monsieur Hermès rearranging himself is colourfully imagined by the apprentice (p. 194), those too of the guests at the hotel on discovering his talent as a dramatist. During the morning shift (p. 199) the narrative is in the form of the telephone calls of the hotel guests and the responses of the serving staff; at the Olympics it is in the form of the meshed unattributed chatter of the spectators at the Olympics (p. 101) and at the market in that of the stall holders. (p. 85)

A further voice is that of a narrator of sorts, an entity that appears intermittently, has information which exceeds that available to the characters and permits itself value judgements on the individual and the nature of his choices.

Whilst the narrator on occasions addresses the reader through brief asides[225] this is not the conventional narrator of the novel of adolescence maintaining a knowing and satirical pseudo-dialogue with an inscribed reader of experience. The narrator does intervene at certain points as a corrective. He has a sharper insight into the true motivation of the apprentice (p. 161: 'Mais il ne disait pas toute la vérité'), and is able to introduce a more accurate perspective when the apprentice feels inadequate amongst his team mates for financial reasons: ('Il faisait un peu parent pauvre parmi eux. Du moins, c'était lui qui se faisait cette idée. En réalité, ils étaient tout ce qu'il y avait de chouette avec lui,' p. 220).

The narration at times takes on the appearance of the nineteenth-century realist or even naturalist novel, exposing the writer to a critique with which he was duly attacked but placing the work within a specific intellectual framework. Whilst expressly denying such a claim [226] through its intertextual positioning, *Ebauche* sets itself to be considered in the same context as *la Comédie Humaine* or *les Rougon-Macquart*, that is as an encompassing architecture which expresses what it is to be an individual in the society of the period.

The beginnings of each chapter are the main locus for this type of intertextual nudge[227] but within the text there are numerous elements which inflect the reader in this direction. There are glimpses in the language chosen, for example, description by personality

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[225] '*Il* [Monsieur Hermès] l'admirait [Fragonard] parce qu'il portait des pardessus excentriques (vous savez, de ces très longs pardessus à 3 boutons…)', p. 96 ; 'Ceci, notez bien, non par attitude arbitraire, non par obstination stupide, mais le plus sincèrement du monde' (p. 295).

[226] Guérin's letter to Paulhan and Arland was adamant on this point : 'Je n'ai pas entrepris de peindre un monde ou une époque, ni même de faire simultanément un grand nombre de personnages. Une seule âme hante ces pages. Une seule âme durement enfiévrée par son cheminement souterrain.' Unpublished letter, 4/1/42. Fonds Guérin, BLJD.

[227] Part I Chapter III: 'Vers le milieu de l'après-midi, Monsieur Hermès ayant repris son apparence petite-bourgeoise et anonyme, franchit la porte de service de l'Hôtel et revit le jour sur Paris' (p. 59) ; Part II Chapter I : 'Des semaines et des semaines avaient passé. Le torride et fugace été parisien avait fait place au ciel couvert de l'automne,' (p. 139). Part II Chapter III : 'Tout en descendant la rue de Rome, Monsieur Hermès, contrairement à son habitude, marchait d'un pas allègre et se sentait gai,' (p. 183) ; Part III, Chapter I 'En ces journées de février, subitement, la neige avait recouvert Paris' (p. 263).

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type: 'Fragonard était de cette catégorie d'individus qui savent se servir,' (p. 96) ; an almost satirical quotation of realist narrative technique : 'Quand Monsieur Hermès franchit le seuil de la Maison Meublée presque en face de la gare du pont Cardinet, dans la rue Dulong, il regarda sa montre … Il était près de dix heures' (p. 14); and in the symbolic representation of the social environment. Echoes of the mines of *Germinal*, and their dehumanising, de-individualising impact on the people within them, are contained in the description of the hotel in which Monsieur Hermès works:

> L'Hôtel était un effrayant labyrinthe dont Monsieur Hermès était loin de connaître tous les détours. … Ces sous-sols ressemblaient à des soutes.. Partout des hommes travaillaient. Et sous les lampes électriques leurs visages paraissaient maladivement blafards. … On aurait dit un tunnel, une galerie de mine. Du noir, partout, avec de parcimonieuses ampoules de loin en loin. [...] Une dizaine d'employés s'affairaient comme des fourmis dans cet étroit espace (pp. 40-41)

The apprentice's vision of the refectory is no less apocalyptic:

> Une véritable étuve. Contre la chaufferie qu'ils l'avaient installé, ces canailles ! C'était une telle fournaise qu'il fallait s'y mettre torse nu. Le sol, revêtu d'un carrelage fatigué était recouvert par des traînées de sciure mouillée et souillée. Les murs étaient lépreux. Une sorte de cerbère gardait ces lieux infernaux. C'était un homme énorme et brutal…' (p. 55)

If the reader needed support to grasp the symbolic point being made, the introduction into the narrative of the mythological guards of Hades provides it.[228]

The status of the individual is reflected in the imposing scale of the modern mythological world. After a day off, Monsieur Hermès returns to work: 'A mesure qu'il s'approchait de la gare St Lazare il se sentait enfoncer dans un autre monde. C'était ça le pire : il y allait de son plein gré vers sa prison. .. l'énorme masse grise, charbonneuse de l'Hôtel s'imposa à lui, prête à l'absorber. Sa prison !' (p. 82). Later, the hotel is described almost as a modern technological living organism, in which the human finds a role: 'Presque sans arrêt, le va-et-vient des ascenseurs créait une trépidation, un martèlement, un glissement de machinerie. L'Hôtel n'était-il pas une sorte de steamer énorme ?.. Lui, il était un steward,' (pp. 206-07).

It is not only the imposing nature of the place of work that intimidates the apprentice, but also that of the general infrastructure of society: 'De la bouche du métro devant laquelle il passait, une haleine suffocante, empestée, poussiéreuse, une haleine venue du centre de la terre prit Monsieur Hermès à la gorge,' (p. 39). The same is true of the cinema. Monsieur Hermès and Angélique stand in front of its entrance : 'Telle la gueule de quelque dragon géant, elle absorbait une foule noire et pressée. […] cet antre où des glaces impitoyables […] renvoyaient son image avachie et traquée,' (p. 170).

As an individual, Monsieur Hermès is conscious of the serial nature of his existence. *L'Apprenti* contains a number of 'crowd scenes' – the Olympics, the cinema, the theatre, a number of crowded street pavements – in which what is most evident is a sense of the

[228] In *Juin*, Guérin rejected criticisms of the mythological prism through which the real is viewed. 'Tel autre m'a cherché une mauvaise querelle sur mon intention d'ébaucher une mythologie de la réalité comme si le réel, avec ses forces mauvaises (ou ses délices, à l'occasion) n'agissait pas sur les êtres à la manière et avec l'efficacité des mythes antiques'. In 'Les égarements de la critique' *(Chroniques,* 2015, p. 162).

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masses, an amorphous, unconnected and uncommunicating swarm of competing and self-determining individuals:

> Comment communiquer avec cette foule ? Tant de gens qu'il aurait pu connaître. Qu'il aurait peut-être été amusant de connaître. Tant de destins inconnus ! Savoir ce qu'il y avait dans tous ces crânes. [...] Comme des somnambules, se dit-il. Vivre ? … Comment pouvait-on dire qu'on vivait. Pour vivre, il aurait fallu pouvoir, en toute occasion, participer à l'existence d'autrui. (p. 61)

Crowds at the Olympics provide a shelter for the insecure ('.. Ce sentiment de l'anonymat. Personne ne savait qui il était,' (p. 102) but at the cost of the forfeiting of individuality and the ability to think autonomously ('Trente mille personnes entassées .. comme un bloc. Formant un tout,' p. 97).

The 'world' of *L'Apprenti*

What is the 'reality' of *L'Apprenti*? The picture is complex. It contains a Paris which is recognisable, yet a provincial town ('Portville') which is fictional albeit clearly derived from and referring to a French city which any French reader could identify.[229] Character names indicate the 'unreality' of the individual (Monsieur Hermès, Le Père Rigal, Roudoudou, and there is no famous dramatist called Jacques Delorme), yet these entities live in the same space as Nurmi, Anna Pavlova, Carpentier etc, and in the case of Monsieur Hermès actually come into contact with them. Monsieur Hermès represents the rugby club of the imaginary Portville, but on moving to Paris joins the very real Racing Club and dons its famous jersey. *L'Apprenti* resembles almost a modern soap in that the micro world of a set of imaginary characters is embedded within a contemporary temporal setting, and the characters interact directly or indirectly with that society (either by personal contact or, for example, consumption of the actual cultural products of that society – magazines, music, drama and so on).

Paris as a city has its own protected mythological status. As identified by Caillois,[230] there is a myth of Paris created in nineteenth century literature: Paris as Babylon, the modern epitome of the large, bustling, diverse city, which became in literature the locus of opportunity for an arriving (usually young) provincial. Therefore, by extension, Paris as the source of worldly wisdom, the finishing school for the adolescent.

So ingrained is the notion of Paris, that care has to be taken to preserve its mythological status. The writer cannot take liberties with the civic geography of the city - ironically, this mythological space must be described with absolute precision, in terms of street names, the location of amenities and monuments and the names and numbers of the transport infrastructure. If the individual of the fiction goes to Paris, this must be the actual and verifiable Paris of common knowledge and consent. Any introduction of doubt on this score into the reader's mind would be potentially catastrophic to the reality-illusion. This tacit injunction was one felt by Guérin himself. In his letter to Arland which accompanied the first draft of the text he referred to these anxieties:

> Sachez seulement que j'ai écrit sans avoir eu à ma disposition un seul de ces ouvrages de technique littéraire, dictionnaires ou manuels qui sont comme les outils de l'écrivain, sans

[229] The train on its journey to Portville passes through towns on the Bordeaux line!
[230] Roger Caillois, 'Paris, Mythe Moderne' in *Le Mythe et l'Homme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), pp. 150-71.

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> avoir pu me référer à aucun document, sans avoir pu revoir ni les lieux où je situais mon action, ni les êtres qui eussent rafraîchi mes souvenirs, sans rien de plus que ma mémoire pourtant déjà pas si brillante. [231]

To what extent is it thereafter important that the reality of the novel bear factual scrutiny? By referring to the Olympics of Paris and naming a number of the runners involved, Guérin is conferring on the novel a precise timeframe. There was only one games in Paris in which the runner Nurmi participated, so we are therefore in the summer of 1924, and if the stamp of reality is to be convincing there must be precision in the enumeration of the culture of that time. To some extent, this is true. Guérin accurately accounts for the events of the Olympics themselves (pp. 59-60, 92), summarising the results (including times) of the runners concerned. Within an interior monologue, Monsieur Hermès mulls over the boxers of the time:

> Monsieur Hermès avait vu boxer Ledoux, Criqui, Carpentier. Monsieur Papa lui avait raconté que Carpentier l'aurait fait sauter sur ses genoux, un soir de victoire au Tivoli-Wauxhall. Depuis, il y croyait ferme. C'était en dix. [ie 1910]. Il avait 5 ans. Même que Carpentier avait voulu lui faire tremper les lèvres dans sa coupe de champagne. Garanti ! Un petit voyou, disait Monsieur Papa. Ça ne faisait rien. Pour Monsieur Hermès, Carpentier était une véritable idole. Sa défaite du 2 juillet 1921 devant Jack Dempsey n'avait en rien altéré son admiration, pas plus que sa défaite stupide devant Battling Siki à Buffalo en 1922, ou que celle, fameuse d'ailleurs et toute récente, devant le nouveau champion du monde Gene Tunney au Polo Grounds. (p. 102)

This extract is interesting on several grounds. First, there is a commitment to the reality of the reader (the inclusion of the actual date of the Dempsey fight, which is as necessary or unnecessary to the narrative as the actual times of the Olympics 400m race). The 'défaite [...] toute récente' to Gene Tunney took place on 24th July 1924, thirteen days after the final of the Olympic 400m, which adds further precision. This is the Paris of late July 1924, even though that date is never mentioned in the novel.

Second, at the same time we see the irruption into this reality of the imaginary characters of the novel. The imaginary Monsieur Hermès was bounced on the knee of the real Carpentier, about whom the imaginary Monsieur Papa has a negative opinion.[232] Later, the imaginary Monsieur Hermès will wait at the table of the real Anna Pavlova (p. 126). Ms. Pavlova was certainly in Paris in the early 1920s (one documented appearance in 1921, and one undated photograph of her taken in Paris) and her presence in the world of this novel would thus be credible. The coalescence in a single space of the two worlds of the text creates an enhanced reality, a sense of the real as being more real because it is being experienced by an individual.

This is the world of *L'Apprenti*: a precisely defined yet mythological space; a complementary if at times inexact[233] cultural reality; a cast of real and mythological personae, interacting without impediment.

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[231] Unpublished letter from Raymond Guérin to Jean Paulhan / Marcel Arland, Fonds Guérin, BLJD.
[232] Readers of *Quand vient la fin* will recall the same anecdote, this time related in a referential context. (Guérin, 1941, pp. 89-90) The inclusion of this detail within the *fiction* less than 9 months after the republished *confession* is evidence of the autonarrational nature of the whole project.
[233] There are several minor errors of detail regarding the Tour de France, and doubt as to the production of *Jean-Gabriel Borkmann*.

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Conclusion : *L'Apprenti* as a model of invention and originality

As a literary product *L'Apprenti* introduced into the novel elements which were new, either to a French readership or to the literary world in general. Other contemporary novels reflected the influence of English-language, mainly American, literature (for example, Sartre's *Le Sursis*), but Guérin's inclination to pursue the same lines as D.H. Lawrence (morally) and Henry Miller (linguistically and conceptually) provided the French-speaking reader of 1946 with an original artistic experience. In addition, the Cartesian commitment to incorporating into the narrative the functions of the body, not original, as Paulhan observed in a letter to Guérin[234], was more faithfully followed here than before.

This is only the first volume of a multi-volume project. As Guérin states in a letter to Paulhan, a reading of *L'Apprenti* in isolation is not only possible but can be very productive, [235] but the following and very diverse volumes will show that this is only one of the several fruitful approaches to the *mythologie de la réalité*. The furore over *L'Apprenti* having now long subsided, the text has become something of a historical document, a source for social historians seeking contemporary source material on life in 1920s Paris or an exposé on life in a hotel.[236] This is to be regretted. For once, Guérin's own view, irrespective of the grating lack of modesty, is well-founded.[237] This is a book which undoubtedly deserves renewed critical attention, embodying as it does a unique approach to fiction / autonarration, and standing as a forerunner to the autofictional projects of three decades later. The mould, however, would be immediately abandoned after publication, and the second volume of *Ebauche*, *Parmi tant d'autres feux*, would demonstrate a completely new and innovative conception of the *mythologie de la réalité*.

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[234] Letter, Jean Paulhan to Raymond Guérin (1/5/45): 'l'extraordinaire passage de la Terreur des Faits (par ailleurs si juste, si finement exacte) où vous affirmez tout à coup (sans la moindre preuve) que le psychologique ne s'explique à coup sûr que par le physiologique. Moi je veux bien. C'a été l'opinion de braves gens que j'estime, depuis Descartes, La Mettrie et Taine. Mais enfin de quoi vous mêlez-vous, et d'où vient votre autorité là-dessus ?' Fonds Guérin, BLJD.

[235] Letter, Raymond Guérin – Jean Paulhan (1/6/45): 'Du reste, mon héros ne manquera pas de tomber à son tour dans les troquenards du sublime. Dans Parmi Tant d'Autres Feux, je peux dire qu'il pataugera à plaisir dans la suavité comme, dans L'Apprenti, il a pu patauger dans sa boue et sa vulgarité. Les véristes me chercheront-ils alors la même querelle que me cherchent aujourd'hui les puristes ? Ce serait pareillement ridicule. / Bien sûr, on n'a pas à me juger sur mes intentions mais sur ce que j'ai fait. Or, je prétends que L'Apprenti (même privé des livres qui lui feront suite) est suffisamment significatif par lui-même. Je ne crois pas qu'il soit malin, en le lisant, d'aller un peu au-delà des mots et des apparences'. Fonds Guérin, BLJD.

[236] This process was already under way little more than a decade after publication. Letter from Chardonne to Nimier : 'M. Anfrère m'a dit hier : 'la vie d'un hôtel, quel sujet de roman'. Il n'avait pas lu l'Apprenti de Raymond Guérin que je lui ai recommandé*'* in *Jacques Chardonne : Lettres à Roger Nimier et quelques réponses de Roger Nimier* (Paris : Grasset, 1954) p. 127.

[237] Letter Raymond Guérin - Henri Calet, 3/10/46, 'C'est un livre où j'ai mis tant de choses … un livre comme on ne peut sans doute en écrire beaucoup dans sa vie', in *Calet, Guérin Correspondance,* 2005, p. 201; unpublished letter from Raymond Guérin to Gaston Gallimard (7/2/47) : 'Il est bien entendu que je n'écris pas pour l'argent. Mais on n'écrit pas un livre comme celui-là tous les ans'. Fonds Guérin, BLJD.

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‘Parmi tant d’autres feux : ‘Une sorte de révolution dans la technique du roman.’ Was it and, if so, how ?

Parmi tant d’autres feux[238] was a work about which Guérin expressed unqualified satisfaction.[239] At times, he went further still. Writing to Jean Grenier[240], Guérin stated that in *Parmi..*, ‘[..] j’ai tenté une gageure qui ne sera, je crois, complètement déchiffrée que plus tard.’ It was a text he described as ‘le livre le plus révolutionnaire, peut-être, de tous ceux que j’ai écrit, et donc resté incompris’,[241] an idea he had expressed also in letter to Anne Heurgon: ‘C’est un livre qui ne sera compris que bien plus tard. Je crois bien, de plus en plus, qu’il est une sorte de révolution dans la technique du roman’.[242] In this chapter, I will explain how, in this case, Guérin’s hubris is warranted, and show why *Parmi…* is innovatory in its conception and stylistic experimentation.

Concealing the preparations for the revolution

A considerable effort is made through the paratext to conceal the imminent revolution. Labelled three times a ‘fiction’ in the liminary pages, the text’s membership of the imaginary is underlined by a peculiar address directly to the reader:

> *Les personnages et les situations de cette fiction sont purement imaginaires. Toute ressemblance avec des faits ou des personnes privées que l'on pourrait y apercevoir serait entièrement fortuite et indépendante de la volonté de l'auteur.*

If in the first sentence the use of the terms ‘*personnages’* and ‘*situations’* attempts to place the work firmly within a fictional framework, a declaration of this nature is nonetheless unsettling. Why is it necessary at all, if this is a ‘*fiction”*? The statement introduces by denying it the possibility that there may be ‘*ressemblance’*. The critic of *Le Petit Marocain*, J.C., considered the address itself evidence that *Parmi..* may be a *roman à clefs*. It expressed, in his view, a powerlessness in front of the truth and a desire to conceal it ‘*pour des raisons opportunes ou artistiques’*.[243] Indeed, this notice by no means excludes ‘*ressemblance’*, it merely attempts to forestall the legal repercussions.

The major effect of the address is to alert the reader to the possibility that despite all reassurances the text’s status is potentially problematic. Or perhaps that, after all, is its purpose.

Looking for a revolution

A clue to what the ‘revolution’ might consist of is to be found in Calet’s unpublished ‘*prière d’insérer’*[244]*:*

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[238] Paris: Gallimard, 1948. All references will be to this edition. Hereafter referred to as *Parmi…*
[239] Letter to Jean Paulhan, early October, 1951: ‘Il est bien évident que ce livre est, de loin, de très loin, supérieur à tout ce que j’ai écrit jusqu’ici’. Fonds Guérin, BLJD.
[240] Letter (30/1/50), BN, Fonds Grenier.
[241] *Entretiens avec Claude-Henri Rocquet.* Text of interviews conducted by M. Rocquet with Raymond Guérin in 1955, seen by the author at M. Rocquet’s residence, Paris, July 1987.
[242] Letter quoted by Kauffmann, 2007, p. 263.
[243] *Le Petit Marocain,* 20/12/49 – J.C.
[244] Unpublished *prière d’insérer*, annex to *Calet, Guérin Correspondance*, 2005, p. 307

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> Est-ce un roman (ou une fiction)? Je ne le crois pas. Il s'agirait plutôt d'une sorte de biographie minutieuse, minutée, d'un Monsieur Hermès que nous connaissons déjà. J'ai été sur le point d'écrire : une autobiographie d'un « Monsieur-Hermès-Guérin » ... Mais il n'importe.

Calet is correct in identifying the fault line of the text as the intersection of the referential and the fictional. This is a line which *Parmi…* straddles.

The possibility that the work might be rooted in personal experience was detected by several contemporary critics. Placing the text firmly within the referential sphere, André Thérive [245] saw *Parmi...* as merely the continuation of what he called the 'obscénité affolante de *L'Apprenti*': 'le livre ressemble donc à des Mémoires privés, écrit par un maniaque et un exhibitionniste.' Writing in the January-February edition of *Rhin et Danube*, Maurice Toesca commented that 'l'histoire de Monsieur Hermès [est] marquée du sceau de la confidence, ou plus exactement de la confession.' On reading *Parmi…*, he says, 'je n'ai pas pu m'empêcher de penser à quelque moderne Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Car, ici, Guérin a essayé de donner à sa confession un tour de style…' Given the intimacy of the Toesca and Guérin households – the Toescas were regular guests of the Guérins – this insight is particularly helpful.

Most striking in these articles is the list of generic terms applied to *Parmi…* which are at odds with the fictional: *mémoires*, *confidences*, *confession*. This is a work at the boundaries of the referential and the fictional, so how is a critic of 1949/50 to describe it?

The 'revolution' – beyond the experimentation with narratival forms and language which will be explored below - lies in the innovatory integration of lived experience as the basis of an original work of fiction. Using experiences to inspire a work of imagination is nothing new; transposing or repurposing the elements of a life in order to create a work which is entirely fictional, that was new.

Already discernible in *L'Apprenti*, this experiment becomes bolder in *Parmi...* The correspondence in Part II of Monsieur Hermès and Caroline reproduces verbatim the letters exchanged by Guérin and Denise Montauriol in the course of their own courtship[246]; the journeys undertaken by the Gibert and Monsieur Hermès in Part IV are those of Guérin and either Sonia or Jean El-Khalidy in the late 1930s; the letter received by Monsieur Hermès in Part IV informing him that his text has been accepted for publication by the major Paris publisher *Million* incorporates the contents of the letter received by Guérin on holiday in Italy announcing the imminent publication of *Zobain*.[247] And so on.

Parmi... is the locus of an autofictional experiment, the elaboration of a work of fiction on the ossature of real events, which have been faithfully reproduced but repurposed in order to generate an artefact which is entirely unreal, within a *mythologie de la réalité*.

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[245] *Paroles Françaises*, 16/12/49.

[246] Kauffmann, 2007, p. 262

[247] A letter from Raymond Guérin to Jean Grenier, dated 23/07/35, and written in Naples, expressed the delight of the writer on receiving letters from both Grenier himself and Marcel Arland announcing the acceptance of *Zobain* by Gallimard. On the letter from Arland, Guérin found it 'trop sincèrement élogieuse pour que j'ose vous la transcrire... quelle première émotion d'apprendre qu'enfin ce qu'on a à dire, de l'avis même de ceux qu'on aime, on va pouvoir le dire et que cela vaut.' On the question of the work appearing with Gallimard, Guérin is definitive: 'certes, je veux être édité... nulle part ailleurs cela ne me satisfairait [sic] mieux que chez Gallimard qui réunit la plupart des écrivains que j'estime'. BN, Fonds Grenier.

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Part 2: One *fiction*, a collage of narrative strategies

Parmi... is not a homogenous text. The work consists of four different and self-contained types of narration. Most of the work (Parts I, III, IV and V) is in a third-person style format, with the caveat that narratorial focus is not exclusive to one individual. Part II comprises two discrete sections. The first is the exchange of 106 letters between Monsieur Hermès and Caroline Poujastruc during the year of their engagement, the first dated 5th June 1928 and the last, five days before the wedding, dated 1st June 1929. The second is a first-person monologue (the only time in the whole of *Ebauche* in which Monsieur Hermès speaks in his own voice) composed by Monsieur Hermès on the morning of the wedding. Finally, much of Part IV consists of a travelogue account of three trips undertaken by the characters.

Part 2, Section i) The 'narrative' sections (Parts I, III, IV and V)

The technical approach to '*fiction'* adopted in *Parmi..* is at odds with the prescription of Käte Hamburger.[248] Of course, elements identified by her as critical are present, but the narrative style of *Parmi..*, however, goes well beyond compliance. In its treatment of time expressions, there is, as Hamburger describes, considerable use of the Pluperfect in combination with temporal deictics, but the nature of the phrases used here is one which places emphasis on elapsed time, rather than the placing of the reader in the temporal axis of the characters.The reader is immersed in a series of parcels of time, rendered intelligible by the temporal marker phrases which provide a framework for them:

> Plus d'un mois et demi s'était écoulé .. (p. 113)
>
> Car il y avait déjà plus de 6 mois depuis que.. (p. 435)
>
> Depuis, quatre années s'étaient écoulées. (p. 517)

These markers (re-)orientate the reader, providing a life jacket in what the text itself describes, in a different context, as the sea of time: 'Quelle puissance n'avait pas le temps ! Le temps était comme la mer, il détruisait, minute après minute, comme la mer vague après vague, ce qui avait justement paru le plus indestructible.' (p. 750) [249]

Time in *Parmi...*, whilst linear, is chunked. Time passes between chapters, and between sections within chapters and, as the characters have already experienced time, the requirement is for a form of narration which provides an account of events within the elapsed period (for example, p. 133). The reader is presented with a sequence of tableaux, the creation of which are the focus of a narration which is principally retrospective.

Notwithstanding its declared status as a 'fiction', the use of the Past Historic tense in *Parmi...* is limited. The tense advances the narrative in places, but is generally used to link

[248] Käte Hamburger, *The Logic of Fiction*, 1994. First published 1957.
[249] In the unpublished *prière d'insérer*, Calet describes *Parmi ..* as 'un livre-fleuve qui entraîne et roule tout ce qu'il rencontre dans son cours*'.* The characters' experience of time is matched by that of the reader.

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together narration in one of, or more commonly a combination of, three tenses: the Pluperfect, the Imperfect and the Conditional.[250]

The Pluperfect is used also within interior monologues as characters relive and reassess preceding events. These passages are introduced most frequently with the verb '*se remémorer'* (in the third person singular, pp. 473, 588, 751; in the third person plural, for the shared reminiscence of Monsieur Hermès and Caroline, p. 458), but also '*repenser'* (p. 427) or '*se souvenir'* (p. 516). The Pluperfect is also at times a tense of summary, a useful weapon for the '*feuilletoniste'*.

The Imperfect is rarely the descriptive counterpart to the Preterite (although there are instances, such as the presentation of Poujastruc and its surroundings, p, 30,), but is used to underline the typicality of events over a sustained period, for example in the impressionistic evocation of the growing tensions within the household in Poujastruc (p. 438) In this sense, the term used by Amouroux ('*feuilletoniste*') is especially condign. The Imperfect also complements the Pluperfect as the tense of summary (for example, p. 550)

The Conditional Tense has a number of applications. First, it is the tense used to report a character's references to the future within an interior monologue: Second, it communicates the characters' musings about the possible or ideal future. Third, it is the tense of imagined typicality:

> Mme Poujastruc aiderait Caroline à caler des oreillers dans son dos et à enfiler sa liseuse .d'angora. Et même elle la coifferait et lui tamponnerait les tempes et les paumes d'eau de Cologne. Puis elle s'assiérait sur une fesse à l'extrême bord du lit.. etc (p. 250)

All three main tenses combine to produce fluid sequences of narration within either free indirect speech or interior monologue (for example, the long passage pp. 275-76). The preponderance of tenses other than the Past Historic in combination with the Pluperfect indicate a different type of 'fiction', one centred on recollection and self-evaluation rather than action. This is not a 'fiction' in the Hamburger sense.

<u>Interior monologue, free indirect speech as elements of the '*fiction'*</u>

Under Hamburger's definition, the existence of free indirect discourse and interior monologue are constituent if not essential indicators of fiction. The unstated assumption is that this applies to one consciousness. Guérin's 'fiction' extends this quality to multiple characters, and introduces them without filter into the narrative. The text of *Parmi ..* becomes almost choral, a patchwork of perspectives, overwhelming the reader with an experience of the sheer scale of life rather than offering a discrete and ordered slice cut from the point of view of a single character.

Whilst interior monologue provides the mechanism through which we gain access to the thoughts of Monsieur Hermès, the trope is not restricted to him. Indeed, *Parmi...* begins with the interior monologue of Delphine which accompanies the account (seen primarily through her eyes) of the returning Monsieur Hermès. The text is enriched with access to the interior monologue of all characters, irrespective of their importance or centrality: for

[250] There is one very dramatic use of the Present Tense in the account of the bull fighter in action, p. 704, as well as short but relatively frequent interjections by one of the narratorial voices which use the Present Tense to articulate shared truths.

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example, Madame Poujastruc (p. 496), François Deloulet (p. 499), even the prostitute accosted by Monsieur Hermès following the death of Caroline (p. 599).

At times, the interior monologues of individuals are meshed to form the narrative. For instance, the visit of Marie-Amélie to Olga Molinier, in which Marie-Amélie sees Monsieur Hermès for the first time, and is then seen for the first time by Delphine.

The same breadth of access is true also in the use of Free Indirect Speech. The text bears the words of characters as marginal as the worker offering admiring if sexist comments about Léo ('Eh, il ne s'embête pas, le frère. Trois poules pour un seul, y a pas de justice. Il avait raison, le prolo' p. 228) and the toreador Marcial in the middle of a performance (p. 705).

This infinitely flexible meshing of dialogue, Free Indirect Speech, interior monologue as well as conventional narration gives the text an impression of noise or babble, of intellectual activity, which complements the sensation of the weight of time. This text is egalitarian, in the sense that it offers equal consideration to the life experiences of the most incidental characters (detailed family biographies of the aspiring editors of the review, pp. 89-90; a detailed summary of the individuals submitting writing for consideration by Monsieur Hermès, pp 141-49; a biography of Mme Poujastruc's servant, Ursule, p. 210; a biography of Monsieur Hermès servant, Claire, p. 593), thus creating a cacophony of voices which simulates real life.

At times, Free Indirect Speech openly embodies this. It evolves into a kind of collective voice, articulating the views of an entire group, without attribution. For example, in the growing frustration with the smitten and self-absorbed newly-weds:

> Bien sûr il était touchant de s'idolâtrer à ce point, mais un peu plus de tenue n'aurait pas été messéant. On n'avait tout de même pas besoin de se donner en spectacle. On pouvait fort bien avoir des sentiments très ardents sans en faire un tel étalage. Vraiment, ils bêtifiaient à force de roucouler. Et si l'on voulait voir les choses telles qu'elles étaient, eh bien, ça frisait l'indécence ! (p. 445)

Later, in the midst of the affair between Monsieur Hermès and Marie-Amélie, the individual's interior monologue (?), the meshed interior monologues (?) or spoken conjecture (?) of the couple projects in free indirect speech the imagined moral outrage, the collective voice of the family:

> N'irait-elle pas tout raconter là-bas, dans le pays, à Poujastruc et à Ursule pour commencer ? Claire quittant sa place avec éclat. Pensez donc, une jeune fille ! Impossible de demeurer un jour de plus chez un tel patron ! Sa vertu pas en sûreté. Et quel exemple ! Un homme qui ne respectait rien, qui menait une vie indigne, qui recevait des femmes chez lui, qui avait séduit sa propre tante, une dame qui avait un mari, un enfant ! O perdition ! (pp. 647-48)

The '*fiction'* has moved well beyond the parameters set out by Hamburger. This is a text of a new variety, which contains features which are innovative and offer a different kind of experience to the reader.

<u>The narratorial voices of *Parmi…*</u>

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The numerous voices of the preceding section are supplemented by a plurality of narrative voices. Partly these are the inherited voices of the intertext which *Parmi..* occupies.[251]

The first such is the scene-setter, who details the geographical location and social history of locations ('A un peu plus de cent kilomètres de Portville, sur les premiers contreforts de la haute montagne, s'étendait la propriété des Poujastruc', p. 30) which it then embellishes with asserted 'truths' about the inhabitants.

The second such narrator is the voice of shared experience or understanding, the purveyor of eternal truths. This narrator speaks, using the Present Tense, in familiar maxims ('L'homme creuse sa tombe avec sa fourchette', p. 28), in phrases which link the experience of the character to that of the reader ('Mais il en va toujours ainsi dans les familles ..' p. 28)

A third narrator – the behaviourist or zoologist narrator - also appears intertextual. This narrator sees the actions of a character through the lense of typicality. Individual actions are seen to be those of their status, be that gender (p. 198), marital (p. 500, 501) or professional (p. 28) Individuality may be in the deviation from this norm, or – as in the cases of Mme Poujastruc or l'Abbé Picot, for example – in the compliance with a literary reformulation of this norm ('the sexualised mother-in-law', 'the libertine priest'). This narrator is to some extent inscribed in Monsieur Hermès himself. He is intrigued by the '*espèce'* as he sees it represented by Antoine and Maurille, to which will be added Jo Gibert: the homosexuals.

The remaining narratorial voices, again bringing to the work an air of intertext, are those of knowledge. First, the narrator who knows and can juxtapose the thoughts of the characters, and may use his power can be used to indicate a flaw in the character's response to a situation: 'En cela, l'abbé manquait de perspicacité. S'il avait su mieux analyser les pensées qui couraient dans la cervelle de François..' (p. 509). Often, the presence of this narrator is signalled by the presence of terms such as 'en réalité', 'en fait', which again indicate the need for a corrective of sorts: 'En réalité, Monsieur Papa et Madame Mère admiraient leur fils, mais ils n'auraient jamais consenti à le lui laisser voir.' (p. 24).

An additional narrator has knowledge of the motives of characters even before they enter the work. This is not just the scene-setter, but a narrator who has the capacity quickly to outline the previously taken decisions of new characters. For example, the description of Le Guével, introduced by Olga Molinier as a possible assistant for Monsieur Hermès in developing the literary review: 'Secrètement de connivence avec son ami Marineff, le dit poâte avait déjà envisagé la possibilité de s'implanter dans la place, d'y régner bientôt en maître et d'évincer insensiblement celui qui les y accueillait aujourd'hui', p. 91).

Third, the text bears the traces of the narrator who displays foresight of the future. In part, this is one function of the 'throw-forward' of the '*feuilletoniste'*.[252] This type of

[251] Letter Raymond Guérin to Henri Calet, 9/2/49, in *Calet, Guérin Correspondance,* p. 252 : 'ce sera un long, très long roman d'amour. Et, je vous l'avoue, j'en ai un peu assez de nager dans le sublime et le rococo. […] j'ai dû me pincer bien souvent pour ne pas éclater de rire au nez de mes personnages'.

[252] This is a particular feature of the ends of sections or chapters. For example: '[Marie-Amélie] ses petits yeux bleus et rieurs plongèrent avec un reflet interrogatif dans les grands yeux gris de Delphine. […] elles se rendaient bien compte que ce regard qu'elles avaient échangé les avait liées secrètement beaucoup mieux que n'aurait pu faire un long entretien et qu'il était peut-être le signe d'une future connivence', p. 75 ; 'il ne cessait

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narration diminishes the stature of the characters, who are seen as labouring under misapprehensions which will be quickly exposed. When, for instance, Monsieur Hermès wonders if the chance meeting with Patrick might ever be repeated, the narrator comments:

> Toutefois, ce matin-là, Monsieur Hermès ne se doutait pas que l'occasion était si proche. Il passa une journée à aligner des chiffres dans le bureau paternel. S'il songeait à Patrick Beaurepaire tout en vérifiant ses additions, il était loin d'imaginer qu'il allait le revoir si vite. (p. 175)

Later on, the knowledge of the narrator appears to extend well into the future of the relationships of the characters, to a point at which it comes close to leaving the fictional sphere. When Monsieur Hermès appoints Claire as his housemaid in Portville, the narrator comments of Claire 'Sans doute avait-elle aussi ses défauts...' and he continues, refering to Monsieur Hermès : 'Pendant toutes les années qu'il la garda à son service, [il] sut se contraindre […] à ne lui faire jamais la moindre avance, encore qu'il n'eût pas manqué, bien souvent, d'être tenté par les occasions d'une constante cohabitation.' (p. 593) The style of narration here is moving almost into reminiscence: this is the kind of retrospective evaluation which would not be out of place in a work of biography.

Later, the narrator again appears to have an awareness of what is beyond the reach of the text. As Monsieur Hermès arrives for his first experience of Capri, the narrator indicates its significance:

> De fait cette journée devait rester à jamais gravée en lui. .. Il comprit qu'il avait découvert là, enfin, le lieu rêvé qu'il avait si longtemps cherché... Il s'était opéré, entre l'île et lui, un phénomène de transmutation sentimentale. Choc inoubliable dont sa vie entière serait ébranlée .. (p. 725)

'*A jamais..*' and the final phrase of the above passage creates the impression that the narrator's knowledge of the character extends well beyond the confines of the text, which will not last the length of the character's life, nor '*à jamais'*. This is a locution more consistent with a referential work, not a fictional one.

Similarly, the narrator exhibits some awareness, not just of contemporary events, but also of the course of subsequent history:

> Il faudrait, tôt ou tard, qu'il [Patrick] prît parti.. Les événements qui se déroulaient en Europe depuis deux ou trois ans, comme ceux qui allaient suivre, exigeaient que tous ceux qui pensaient de la même façon acceptassent d'agir de concert. (p. 757)

It is perfectly possible for the narrator within the 'fiction' to know of and refer to contemporary events – one of the distinct features of *Parmi...* is the relative paucity of such commentary – but observations like this place the work in a new context, one which the paratextual notice at the end of the text ('*écrit en captivité*, 1940-1944) reinforces.

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de revoir le divan […] sur lequel, meurtrie, écartelée, troussée, furieuse et confuse, Delphine s'était farouchement débattue comme si ç'avait été, en fait, pour lui qu'elle luttait', p. 246 ; 'There will be further discussion of the 'throw forward' technique with regard to the final two paragraphs of the novel (see conclusion, below).

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Part 2, Section ii) - The Travelogue

Part IV of *Parmi ...* consists in part of the relation of journeys undertaken by Monsieur Hermès in the company of Marie-Amélie and Jo Gibert: two journeys to Italy, and one to Spain.

The itineraries described are based on the trips of Guérin himself: to Italy in July 1934[253]; to Spain in April 1935[254]; in July and August 1936, a visit to Spain and Portugal[255]; and in July 1937, a return to Italy.[256] Throughout the l930s, Guérin used writing about his own travels as an apprenticeship for what he perceived to be his vocation. Amongst his papers are many volumes of description and the personal reflection which these journeys stimulated, one collection of which - *Lettres à Déjanire* – was published in 2006. [257]

The idea of describing the character's journeys and charting their impact on him is as old as literature itself. *Parmi...*, in addition, is the travelogue of a '*feuilletoniste'*, that is it transplants a group of characters from one setting (Portville) and examines the nature of the relationships through the prism of their reaction to constantly changing locations.

The new experience is evaluated principally through the intermediary of Monsieur Hermès, and the writing reflects this. As Guérin himself stated,[258] in order to respect what he called 'vérité romanesque' it was important to equip Monsieur Hermès with the thoughts and words which did not exceed his understanding of the time, hence in his words the 'banalités' of his 'impressions de voyage*'*. This is evident, for example, in his account of the visit to the Prado (pp. 698-99).

This 'dangerous', as Lebesque would have it, stylistic choice inevitably became the focus of critical attention to this section of the work. The reviewer of *Opéra* magazine (23/11/49) dismissed the information it contains as 'gratuitous'; Francis Crémieux (*Europe* January 1950) likened it to the '*Guide Bleu'*; Robert Kemp (*Les Nouvelles littéraires***,** 10/11/49) perceives the travelogue as a pointless addendum to a text which in his view is already in need of abbreviation.

The third journey, the second trip to Italy, represents a watershed for the character. Not only does he receive confirmation during the trip that his manuscript has been accepted for publication, the chance sighting of an image of Bérénice in Naples museum, and its likeness to Delphine Rollin, trigger in him a realisation that this is the partner he has been seeking throughout his adult life. The new sense of direction that this gives him informs the closing sentences of Part IV:

> Et soudain, empli d'une vive allégresse qu'il ne s'attardait pas à définir, crispant son visage, il fixa égoïstement son regard sur la route ensoleillée qui avait l'air de l'appeler vers un horizon, cette fois plein de promesse glorieuses, et appuya davantage sur l'accélérateur… (p. 733)

[253] Kauffmann, 2007, p. 50.
[254] Kauffmann, 2007, p. 51.
[255] Kauffmann, 2007, p. 59.
[256] Kauffmann, 2007, p. 74.
[257] Paris : La Nerthe, 2006.
[258] *Entretiens avec Claude-Henri Rocquet.* Text of interviews conducted by M. Rocquet with Raymond Guérin in 1955, seen by the author at M. Rocquet's residence, Paris, July 1987.

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The journeys are in part a formative literary as well as personal venture. In the period leading up to departure for the first trip, Monsieur Hermès' reported interior monologue describes the course of his evening: 'avant de s'endormir, il continuerait sa lecture des Ecoles Italiennes de Peinture de son cher Stendhal.*'* (p. 613). The first visit to Italy is rich in acknowledgements of the passage of Stendhal through the same places (pp. 659, 667, 670), as well as Nietzsche (p. 658), the character Barnabooth (pp. 657, 717) and, in Verona inevitably, Shakespeare. Strangely, the reference here to Romeo and Juliet does not trigger the Proustian recall of Delphine, a link introduced in the first chapter of the fiction (*'*Elle avait un peu plus de 15 ans quand il était parti. L'âge de Juliette, comme il disait*',* p. 15).

In the visit to Spain, Monsieur Hermès is again consciously re-enacting the narrative of previous writer-travellers: 'A Tolède […] Sans aimer, sans goûter beaucoup Barrès, il voulut se promener comme lui, à l'aventure, la nuit…' (p. 699)

The chassis of the travelogue contains an awkward mixture of verbs, the sign that considerable effort has been made in order to re-present in a new context material already prepared in another. 'Monsieur Hermès dut s'avouer qu'il lui était impossible de détester Ferrare', (p. 667) introduces the impressions of Ferrara ; 'Il se remémorait la hâte avec laquelle il s'était précipité au musée de Bologne pour contempler les Jules Romain et les Guerchin… ' (p. 667) ; 'Il devait se l'avouer, l'Espagne lui procurait des émotions bien plus intenses que l'Italie.' (p. 701) ; 'Il revoyait également cette région de plateaux lunaires… Il revoyait aussi ces petites villes d'Aragon…' (p. 702). These are clues that what Monsieur Hermès goes on to describe, in a language which appears to be his own, are prefabricated chunks of experience, the recollections of another, at times themselves informed by the writing of others.

At some points the appearance of narrative almost disappears entirely, developing into a bald list of the names of settlements (p. 721), the attractions of certain cities (p. 662) and the exploration of others, such as Rome (pp. 729-30) In this section, if the past historic verbs are replaced with imperatives, what emerges is base-level travel writing, of the type Monsieur Hermès consumed in the Baedeker which influences his enjoyment of Florence (p. 668).

In this part of the text, the machinery of autofiction is perhaps too overt. In passages such as those from page 667 cited above, it is almost possible to detect beneath the published text the note in the journal which has been repurposed. The process of transposing material into the 'fiction' is at its most overt.

<u>Part 2 Section iii) - Epistolarity</u>

Part II, Chapter 1 begins with the most cursory of introductions, a title announcing this as the correspondence of the two characters. There is no editorial gloss to contextualise or authenticate the correspondence, nor any attempt to explain how (and indeed why) it came to be incorporated within the text. Despite this, the existence of an editorial presence of some kind is discernible. Letter 50 (Monsieur Hermès – Caroline Poujastruc) is missing '(*cette lettre s'est perdue*)'. The declaration is a conventional one for the embedded editor of a correspondence – it establishes the commitment to absolute transparency of the editor, it acknowledges and justifies on the part of the reader any feeling of incompleteness. But no

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editor exists for this correspondence, so the reader is left to speculate as to the source of the observation.

More puzzling still for the reader is the comment which accompanies Letter 95 (Caroline Poujastruc – Monsieur Hermès): (*Cette lettre, ne présentant aucun intérêt, a été supprimée*) (p. 370). This raises several questions: who has made the decision?; what is it in the content of the letter that is deemed unlikely to appeal? (and given the banality of much of the exchange, the reader is entitled to wonder); why has the act of suppression itself been highlighted?; can the reader be confident that other quiet acts of suppression have not also taken place? The two interventions taken together imply almost a shared knowledge on the part of the reader and the narrator that a correspondence exists, that it consists of 106 letters, and that blemishes in the overall integrity of this corpus of letters must be explained.

The correspondence exists within a timeframe that is both that of the text (the elapsing of another year for the characters) and actual human time. Reference to precise chronological time is a clue to the text's origin, a badge of authenticity. The integrity of the original letters is maintained during the process of repurposing. Even embedded within the fictional work, the correspondence must begin and end at the same point.

Awareness of chronological time seeps in to the letters themselves, but more importantly at a narrative level, time is indicated also by the letter-writer (or perhaps the editor): Letter 1 is dated '*le 5 juin 1928'* (p. 281), Letter 33 '*le 17 août 1928*,' and the final letter, 106, '*le 1er juin, 1929*' (p. 379). This detail could be a conventional editorial ploy, to confer authenticity on the writing through overt use of letter etiquette, part of the suite of weapons available to the editor-narrator. What it does is to insert the correspondence into the sphere of the real, referring to a time lived also by others (including perhaps the reader) and through this enhancing the authenticity of the experience; but also to project the characters into a fixed historical time, locating them precisely at a point in which their relationship with contemporary social, cultural, national and international issues can be evaluated.

The letters either directly (through quotation) or indirectly (through reference) take on a voice which is other than that of the correspondent, an ironic take on the '*mainmise des autres sur soi'* of the epigraph.

In a novel which seeks to allow characters to speak in their own voice, we find that their mouths are often full of the words of others. Caroline's letters are infused with the legacy of her spiritual upbringing and her reading. Twice she copies into her letters the words of Christ (Letter 23, p. 303; Letter 32, p. 309), in lieu of her own message. Frequently, the words she employs are those of writers, usually poets, placed within the text again as the embodiment of her own thinking.[259] As she herself observes in one of the final letters to Monsieur Hermès, 'Je crois bien que vous allez épouser la dernière des petites filles romanesques*'* (Letter 101, p. 375) Such is her influence over Monsieur Hermès, he begins to reciprocate.[260]

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[259] The quotations are multiple. Letter 18, p. 297 unattributed poem ; Letter 67, p. 347, a quotation from Péguy; Letter 87, p. 365, a line from Rostand's *La Samaritaine*; Letter 91, p. 368 which invokes Homère, Ronsard, La Fontaine, Rousseau, Lamartine, Lecomte de Lisle and quotes one line from Verlaine; Letter 101, p. 375: 2 lines of unattributed poetry, then 8 lines of '*Myrto se préparant pour le mariage'.*

[260] Letter 48, p. 327 : 'Ces vers de Chennevière..' ; Letter 78, p. 358 : '.. Henri de Régnier.. Don Juan… Musset; Letter 82, p. 360 : 'Notre longue séparation me fait penser à Tristan et Iseult…' ; Letter 86, p. 364 : 'J'aimerais

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In common with the reviewer in *Opéra* magazine (23/11/49), Kemp (*Nouvelles Littéraires*, 10/11/49) thought the section over long: 'Cent pages ! Gardons-en cinquante, parfaitement réussies…' but considered it one of the best parts of the work : 'On y bêtifie délicieusement, et même ingénieusement […] C'est étonnant de «ressemblance », d'ironie, d'abondance'. Lebesque (*Carrefour*, 2/11/49) perceived the length of the correspondence as evidence of Guérin's overall project, the commitment to tell all: 'Guérin s'accorde au moins le droit de tout user. Il ne nous épargne rien, pas une ligne de la correspondance amoureuse de Caroline et de Monsieur Hermès.'.

Perhaps as a result of the correspondence, Pierre Lesdain (*Volonté* (Bruxelles), 16/6/50) detected the resemblance between Caroline and the wife of Zobain. The insight is helpful: the same base material repackaged in two entirely different ways to produce two entirely different types of writing, one of the essential pillars of Guérin's *oeuvre*.

Part 2 Section iv) - First-person narration

The second section of Part II of the text - an interior monologue - is the only point in the whole of *Ebauche* in which Monsieur Hermès speaks in the first person. There is an immediate change of style – the sentences are short, staccato, at times almost notational in form; the verb tenses are functional: the Perfect, the Immediate Future and the Present – and the language is recognisably that of the street: slang, coarse, blunt, and immediate.

The reader is treated to a detailed, action by action, account of Monsieur Hermès' wedding morning ablutions, but the most striking use of the active Present Tense is in the meeting with Marie-Amélie, aunt of the bride, of whom Monsieur Hermès has been quietly admiring since their first meeting and with whom, in Part IV, he will conduct a passionate affair.

> Tiens, voilà Marie-Amélie qui revient du jardin … Nous nous embrassons. Elle sent divinement bon Marie-Amélie et elle est en beauté, ce matin. Je réalise que c'est elle la première femme que j'aperçois au jour de mon mariage. [...] j'entrevois la naissance de ses seins. Ça me fait tout drôle… elle doit avoir une poitrine ravissante... Nous restons seuls, Marie-Amélie et moi, dans le couloir. Elle me sourit. Content ? Je fais signe que oui. Déjà prête ? Presque... (p. 416)

The whole account is redolent of suppressed desire, the Present Tense adding an extra degree of urgency.

In terms of language, the expression of Monsieur Hermès in this monologue is markedly different from that of his letters. Still bearing some of the traces of the apprentice of Volume 1, Monsieur Hermès' preference is for the colloquial : 'Le soleil est déjà haut, bon sang ! Il va faire une de ces calores, aujourd'hui !' (p. 381) ; commenting on his new in-law, the senator Jacques Ampuis : 'ce pauvre garçon … a tellement pris l'habitude de déconner devant ses électeurs' (p. 383) ; 'Il a la discipline dans le sang, Monsieur Papa. Si l'autre l'interpellait il se mettrait en garde-à-vous illico. Reste le députoche.. avec lui Monsieur Papa sera fort à l'aise, citoyen à citoyen' (p. 384)

être poète pour te dire tout ce que je ressens. Mais je n'ai jamais écrit un seul vers de ma vie. C'est à Samain que je fais appel', quotation of six lines of 'Chariot d'Or' ; Letter 90, p. 367, quotation of 4 lines of Francis Jammes.

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The voice is discernibly that of the apprentice: the irreverently mangled noun-forms, some with their mispronunciation or exaggeration indicated in the spelling (‘*smoquinge’*. p. 402); the sentences which are not fully predicated, the use of the imagined comments of others as part of the monologue (‘Eh, eh, pas mal du tout, l’étalon ! Elle ne va pas s’embêter la mignonne…’ p. 403) ; the disrespectful representation of authority through the selection of inappropriate language (on the idea of Catholic confession : Le petit topo de tout le monde, quoi ! et l’autre qui m’épie derrière son grillage, bredouille je ne sais quoi, me condamne à trois pater et trois ave, tire la bobinette et c’est cuit’ p. 406) and the determination to absolute transparency, whatever the constraints of ‘decency’ : ‘Si j’ai déjà couché, plus ou moins, avec quelques femmes, je n’ai encore jamais défloré une vierge. Il paraît que l’hymen de certaines est corné et résiste aux pires assauts’ (p. 397).

The interior monologue in itself throws new light on the correspondence which has preceded it. ‘Dans ces lettres […] elle évitait d’écrire certains mots, de décrire ou d’évoquer certaines scènes où elle n’était pas, pourtant, seulement une spectatrice passive,’ (p. 387). This opens the window on the reality of their relations during the year of (self-imposed) spiritual commitment to one another, a reality which was omitted from the correspondence, several examples of which Monsieur Hermès divulges. Through the interior monologue, the reader develops an awareness of the unreal nature of Caroline’s self-projection.

It shows more too about the motivation of Monsieur Hermès. The increasing romanticism of his letters is represented to be part of a cynical calculation.

> Enseigner la volupté à Caroline, la soumettre, comme j’avais réussi, aux tentations du libertinage, c’était donc, en quelque sorte, la faire vraiment mienne. Désormais il y avait toute une part de son existence, et qui lui paraissait absolument essentielle, pour laquelle j’étais son dieu. (pp. 392-93)

The interior monologue places an entirely different construction on the meaning of the correspondence that preceded it. The epistolary structure has concealed the true nature of the game being played by one of its constituents. Interestingly, the new narrative bed into which the correspondence has been autofictionally introduced provides a mechanism with which to examine the motivation of the self, and not just at a textual level.

Given its relative lack of size (41 pages out of a total of 780) *Avant de franchir le pas* attracted a disproportionate amount of the critical attention given to the fiction. In a comparison with which Guérin would have been delighted, some reviewers found echoes within it of another famous interior monologue: ‘Et puis, le monologue intérieur d’Hermès avant le mariage, ni moins long, ni moins indécent que celui de Mme Bloom dans *Ulysse* ; et sans alinéas, naturellement ; cinquante pages… D’une forme cursive, mais souvent savoureuse’. (Robert Kemp, *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 10/11/49). This was the impression formed also by the reviewers in *Arts* magazine (11/11/49), who described Monsieur Hermès as ‘un cousin d’Ulysse Bloom’ and the chapter containing the interior monologue ‘un chef d’œuvre en la manière’.

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Part 3: 'Reality' in *Parmi..*

Through a number of chronological indicators, the reader can locate the events of *Parmi…* in the late 1920s, early 1930s. In addition to the specific references within the correspondence[261], there are two references to actual time: 1933 (p. 573), Winter 1935 and the following Spring (by inference therefore, 1936) (p. 691). The attentive reader will have made the connection with the dates of the correspondence (1928) and appreciated without the intervention of the narrator the extent of the elapsed time.

Critically, this step in itself ushers in an entirely new context for the suffocating, introspective world of the characters, which is now shown to be orbiting and to some extent characterising the world beyond it. It is only in Part V of *Parmi…* that the reality of the 'real' world begins to enter the text. In Part IV Monsieur Hermès twice visited Italy without once mentioning the existence of political turmoil or specifically fascism, although he does acknowledge the birthplace of Mussolini (p. 668). His visit to Spain (also in Part IV) takes place as the tension that had been building for three years after 1933 was about to erupt into civil war. Again, there is no acknowledgement of this. The first overt suggestion of the political uncertainty and division of the period in France comes on page 747, with some elaboration on page 757.

The very inclusion of chronological time encourages the reader to see the work beyond its declared status as 'fictional'. However minimal the depiction of the real world of the time, the fact that the characters are placed within it renders them subject to it, in the same way as the reader. This will be of critical importance in receiving the text in the light of the paratextual element on p. 791, that the text itself bears the stamp of its production in captivity, 1940-1944. A reader linking together 573, 691 and 791 will come to conclusions about the work that do not align with the *adresse au lecteur*. This is not just a text about a world – a created world, in line with the notion of fiction - this is a text very definitely within and of *the* world.

The exposition of contemporary mythologies

Parmi… explores the power of religious and political myths in French society of the 1930s. The milieux in which Monsieur Hermès moves are markedly different from that of *l'Apprenti*. *Parmi…* is the picture of his immersion in the regional bourgeoisie, both in the mercantile environment of the city (Portville) or by marriage into the landed gentry of the countryside (Poujastruc). Maintaining both are two apparently powerful forces, religion and organised politics, which when subject to scrutiny are found to be lacking in principle and immediately fragile.

Religion

In *Parmi..*, the belief of all characters who profess faith is found, in one way or another, to be false, convenient or easily overcome by the primitive force of human sexuality. Far from being the monolithic and dominant ethic of Monsieur Hermès' imagination, religion is seen to be as optional and dispensable as any other type of concept. This is revealed to Monsieur Hermès during his first visit to Poujastruc, in which he witnesses within a supposedly *dévot* household a display of paganism, innuendo, indecency and flirtation,

[261] See above, Part 2 Section iii

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especially from the local cleric L'Abbé Chicot (pp. 217-18). His 'learning' (p. 217) is that society's display of religious belief is for appearance, and is a polite cover for the universal human impulse towards sexual gratification.

At the end of the visit, Caroline lends Monsieur Hermès a book by Claudel, *Partage de Midi*, which she summarises as follows: 'il y a dans *le Partage* tout le drame de la créature qui est écartelée entre la passion charnelle et Dieu. A la fin, c'est Dieu qui l'emporte …' (p. 220) In practice, the opposite is the case. Despite Caroline's widely acknowledged purity, her primeval sexual urge, common to all the females in her family, is overwhelming. The reality of Caroline's 'profanation' at the hands of Monsieur Hermès – at least, this is his perception of it – is visible in the evacuation of all literary and ethereal framing of the sexual act: 'Elle n'était plus vraiment, écartelée sur le drap, pantelante ou démoniaque, qu'une femelle comme une autre, qu'une petite bête de plaisir, affamée et insatiable.' (p. 529)

Religion is also seen to be powerless in the face of illness. Initially, Caroline receives the diagnosis of Tuberculosis as an opportunity to emulate the literary and religious heroines of her childhood reading:

> Quel merveilleux personnage n'allait-elle pas pouvoir incarner ! Elle mourrait dans les bras de son mari en prononçant des paroles d'une angélique distinction... Comme ce serait grisant de sentir les siens désespérés, autour de son lit de mort, extasiés par sa sainteté. (p. 518)

The reality is altogether different. The deterioration of Caroline's body is rapid, and the victory of illness is confirmed in her absolute loss of dignity. Her reduction to the state of '*bête'* (p. 529), '*faible animal'* (p. 546) is manifest in her lack of attention to personal hygiene: '[Monsieur Hermès] s'apercevait qu'elle avait souillé sa couche et qu'elle avait dormi dans sa souillure sans paraître s'en soucier' (p. 553).

By the time of her death Caroline has come not only to reflect on the words of the catechism but actively to reject their message. Her interior monologue expresses her sense of the meaninglessness of these words as they are conveyed to her by L'Abbé Chicot: 'Mensonges, mensonges, l'abbé ! Elle n'y croyait plus. Elle se sentait dupe, ridiculement dupe. … Si le mal était le plus fort dans sa poitrine, sa lucidité était pareillement maîtresse de son cerveau.' (p. 547).

As if to underscore the ascendancy of physiology over faith, Monsieur Hermès literally writes the script to be used in the confessional by the next subject of his profanation, Marie-Amélie ('Et demain tu iras voir le prêtre. Et dans l'ombre de la confession, tu lui raconteras aussi tout ce que tu as fait aujourd'hui avec moi', p. 629) The ceremonial of faith itself is subverted by the instruments of passion : the triumph is complete.

Organised politics

In *Parmi...* Monsieur Hermès is introduced into the sphere of organised politics by his first witnessing, and then participating in, the political operation of his in-law Jacques Ampuis, an elected member of the *Chambre des Députés*. The picture of the electorate is one of subservience, of attitudes which have remained unchanged since the *ancien régime*. Representing the case against change, Jacques Ampuis has little trouble securing his own re-election. His opponent, a Communist called Bruno, is viewed with suspicion, first because he rides a motorbike, second because he is perceived to speak aggressively to the locals, but

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mostly because the change that he advocates – which is to their benefit – exposes them to ideas which contradict their priorities: 'Et aussitôt, ils avaient peur pour leurs biens. Loin de les convaincre, ses arguments devenaient, dans sa bouche, autant d'épouvantails grossiers'. (p. 455)

This collective inclination towards subservience ('il faudrait toujours des maîtres pour commander' says Mme Poujastruc's servant, Ursule, p. 440) is exploited by the cynical politicians. To any external judge, the quality of their arguments is at times risible. As his assistant, Monsieur Hermès accompanies Jacques Ampuis on one of his constituency walkabouts, and is enlightened:

> Il semblait que tous ces gogos étaient avides de paroles trompeuses pourvu qu'elles fussent ronflantes.. [...] le plus drôle, c'est que ça prenait. Pourtant, voyons, il n'était pas possible que le paysan n'eût pas aperçu la ficelle. Elle était trop grosse ! Eh bien, non ! .. Que fallait-il croire ? A la bêtise de l'un ? Ou à la rouerie de l'autre ? (p. 470)

This tacit pact is the basis for the status quo, which troubles Monsieur Hermès owing to his innate sympathy towards the oppressed : 'il était avec eux contre la force et l'injustice qui les écrasaient' (p. 456). This is enhanced when he realises that what underlies the attitude of the *député* is contempt, which he further realises is the shared perspective of the family into which he has married. When Jacques Ampuis receives a phone call from a constituent, his disparaging aside ('*imbécile'*) is greeted by laughter by all family members at the dinner table who are listening in (p. 480).

Second, the trajectory of Ampuis' career advertises the fact that politics is about self-advancement rather than serving the interests of the people. Described in the interior monologue of Monsieur Hermès as 'ce malingre petit bonhomme' (p. 471), his shrill falsetto voice draws public laughter. Following a collapse of the administration, this 'garçon sans doute le moins fait pour donner aux autres des leçons de vigueur athlétique et de virilité sportive' is appointed *sous-secrétaire d'Etat à l'Education physique* in the new Government. Rather than perceiving his new role as an opportunity for the noble service of the electorate, the concentration of Ampuis is quite different:

> Monsieur Hermès s'indignait, tout aussi naïvement, de voir Jacques Ampuis uniquement désireux de spéculer sur sa réussite et se moquer pas mal de sa mission. La jeunesse ? Le sport ? Billevesées ! Ce qui comptait seulement, c'étaient les voix qui lui seraient acquises dans deux ans et qui assureraient sa réélection. (p. 480)

Like religion, politics is seen to bestow status on those who are most adept at speaking its language to their own advantage, and its hegemony depends on the consent of the docile masses. *Parmi…* opens up a process of reflection on the extent to which a society whose prevailing myths are this fragile is prepared for a major jolt. What is being exposed is the myth of contemporary French power. The fundamental weakness concealed behind a gloss of rhetoric is not individual to Ampuis, but distributed across politics in general. With politicians and clerics like these, and a supine populace still anchored in the 1790s, the defeat of 1940 is inevitable. The third volume, *Les Poulpes*, shows us that society in microcosm, post-trauma.

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Parmi…: the myth of the writer, and the exploration of textuality

If, in a conventional manner, one of the threads of *Parmi…* is the '*cheminement'* of the apprentice writer, Monsieur Hermès towards a literary career, what distinguishes the *fiction* is the wider exploration of textuality.

The echoes of *A la recherche du temps perdu* are almost too deliberate and overt to require enumeration. Proust is mentioned explicitly in the text[262], and in a chapter entitled *Delphine retrouvée* base time is seen to be resisted or rendered irrelevant by the association of feelings with artistic ciphers. The intertextual pressure on the reader is intense.

This is a text which is overtly conscious of itself as text. In places this is the intertextual voice from the novel of previous centuries, engaging in asides from a narrator aware of itself as narrator to implied reader ('Elle était blonde, naturellement blonde, et si peu qu'on aimât les lieux communs, on ne pouvait ne pas dire d'elle qu'elle était blonde comme les blés', p. 49).

The reflection is of two sorts: on the transformational nature of language in general when issues and events are formulated within it (pp. 201, 581), and on the origin and the machinery of presenting the current project to the reader.

This reflection may be conducted through the medium of the interior monologue of the main character, for example on the idea of transforming experience into fiction:

> Ainsi donc, il avait accompli une foule de choses […] Il en conclut que s'il lui était possible de noter par écrit toutes ces réminiscences, il aurait pu sans doute s'en servir pour analyser mieux son caractère. Ce projet lui procura une exaltation si vive qu'il en vint à souhaiter que le brouillard ne se dissipât jamais et lui permît ainsi de poursuivre plus avant ses investigations mentales… (p. 694)

Mise en abyme: the writer figure within the text shares with the reader the creative opportunities offered by the reworking of events from one's own past. Without ever expressly saying so, the fiction itself invites the reader to place another construction on it.

The writing itself appears conscious of its place within the ecosphere of literature, that is reality. This a cultural artefact like any other, and it will enter a space in which it will be treated as such. In the discussion of the possible contents of *Echafaudages*, the reader of the fiction is reminded of the 'scaffolding' which surrounds all works of literature:

> On ne publierait point d'œuvres proprement dites dans *Echafaudages*, mais les divers états d'un poème, des commentaires confessionnels, des ébauches, des inédits, des repentirs, des laissés pour compte, des textes traitant du style, de la ponctuation, de la typographie, des genèses, des gloses critiques, des plaidoyers, des préfaces, des professions de foi ou des controverses. (pp. 59-60)

The reader of this fiction is reminded that (s)he has a role to play in the production of meaning within the work, which – the text implies – is not fixed but remains subject to

[262] Page 36, and in Letter 58, Monsieur Hermès – Caroline Poujastruc, in which Monsieur Hermès comments: 'je suis plongé dans Proust […] au début j'avais quelques difficultés. Mais […] je me suis fait au style. Maintenant j'en viens presque à croire qu'il n'aurait pas été possible à Proust d'écrire autrement pour donner vie au monde qui était en lui. […] Depuis la révélation de Gide (par Buddy) rien n'avait fait sur moi une telle impression. J'en viens à redouter l'influence que cette lecture va avoir sur mes écrits.' (p. 337).

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constant revision through the exposure of the reader to the kinds of texts generated before and around it. Reading this work on its own is not the end of the process, but only one part of a wider process.

At one point the text is interrupted by what appears to be a direct address from author to reader, embedded within the narrative without attribution to character, nor any narratorial entity.

We quote this paragraph here in its entirety:

> Pour respecter la vérité psychologique, il faudrait donc révolutionner la composition typographique des livres afin d'exposer au lecteur d'une manière simultanée les variations des différents personnages. Outre qu'une réalisation valable de ce genre d'entreprise soit pratiquement impossible, il semble bien qu'on aurait aussi quelque difficulté à obtenir de ce lecteur l'effort de dédoublement indispensable. On est donc réduit à pratiquer avec partialité. On choisit de se placer du côté de tels de ses protagonistes. Ceux-ci deviennent des sortes de privilégiés qui vous habitent et auxquels on peut prêter une existence mentale capable de suivre dans tous ses méandres le cours des événements et de s'analyser de proche en proche, étape par étape, avec la minutie et les piétinements, le pathétique et le ridicule de la réalité. Hélas, c'est à partir d'eux et en fonction d'eux qu'on se verra contraint de juger et de prendre contact avec les faits ou de réagir vis-à-vis de tous les autres comparses comme si, en vérité, on cessait d'être ce que l'on est pour devenir les individus mêmes auxquels on aura voulu donner une incarnation dans ses livres. C'est ce phénomène qui engendre les héros littéraires. D'où un accent de fausseté et comme une imposture à laquelle on ne pourrait d'ailleurs se dérober sans rompre immédiatement l'unité et l'équilibre de l'ouvrage que le lecteur attend de vous. C'est que le lecteur lui-même prétend bien pouvoir se mettre dans la peau de votre héros. Et s'il est heureux de participer à leurs émois, comme de connaître le jeu de leurs ressorts les plus intimes, il lui faut (pour qu'il croie à leur crédibilité) pouvoir aussi (sans être gêné par l'auteur sur ce point) s'en tenir à de simples hypothèses (celles mêmes des héros) sur le compte des autres personnages. (p. 448)

The very introduction of this metatext is in itself remarkable, as is the insertion into the work of the terms '*auteur'* and '*lecteur'* which breaks the tacit pact that neither exists in the world of the text.

Second, the intervention establishes the idea that the text itself is imperfect, by implication that a better version of the same text is technically possible. The 'author' has had to make choices, for example over typographical and focus issues, but recognises that better solutions may exist and that these choices may have had an impact on the nature of the reading experience.

Third, it opens a reflection on the nature of any link between 'votre héros', ces privilégiés qui vous habitent' and the author himself. The very fact that it acknowledges there may be one is tantalising. The fact also that this occurs within a work which contains so many paratextual and intratextual indicators of, for example, chronological time and actual experience ('écrit en captivité'), renders more intense the uncertainty of reading.

Perhaps the revolution of *Parmi...* consists in this, the extension of the narratorial asides familiar from eighteenth-century literature (Fielding, Defoe etc), beyond the conventional introduction of a writer figure *en abyme*, to the overt framing of the work within

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itself as an artefact, a product of choices which are made explicit and explained to the reader. For all that it flaunts the trappings of romantic fiction, this is a modern, self-conscious work.

Conclusion : 'Revolutionary' or not?

'La révolution ? Mais, vue de Poujastruc, elle était une dérision' (p. 439).

In terms of Guérin's 'revolution', the view of the critics is similar to that of the peasants of Poujastruc. The fact that their lives have remained unchanged does not necessarily mean that a revolution has not occurred. It is only with the passage of time that the effects of a revolution will be fully appreciated.

In stylistic terms *Parmi..* is certainly risky, especially if it is seen in its chronological context, that is in entering the field of expectations of readers of 1949 already familiar with *L'Apprenti*. Lebesque sees this, in a positive sense, as 'dangerous', but for Guérin it is an imperative.

This text represents a step in the migration from *L'Apprenti* to *Les Poulpes*. The intertextuality of *Parmi...*, together with the cacophony of voices, prepares the ground for the coalescence of these two qualities in *Les Poulpes*. This 'migration' could be said to be visible also, as we have seen, in the exposition of myth.

New and, perhaps in some ways, 'revolutionary', is the text's awareness of itself as text, and as a product in the hands of a reader. The active paratext and the illusion from within the text itself that it is aware of the processes of its own composition and dissemination maintain the reader's consciousness that this work straddles the boundaries of the referential and the fictional. This is underlined in the concluding paragraphs, which direct the reader towards a paratextual note which completely recontextualises them:

> Ah ! tandis qu'il se laisse aller innocemment à la langueur de l'heure présente, Monsieur Hermès se doute-t-il que ce qui le porte avec cette légèreté à la rencontre des jours à venir, ce n'est pas autre chose qu'une supplémentaire illusion dont il lui faudra inévitablement subir plus tard les méfaits comme si, en dépit de l'allégresse qui l'anime, et qui lui fait supposer qu'il n'a pas encore vraiment commencé à vivre, il demeurait sous la menace des épreuves qui ne manqueront pas de l'accabler encore le long de cette route où il chemine depuis de si nombreuses années déjà, brandissant, perdue dans la foule qui l'assaille, la faible flamme de sa vie dérisoire parmi ce clignotement grimaçant des existences des autres où il ne sera jamais lui-même, quoi qu'il puisse risquer, il le sait, qu'un feu pâle parmi tant et tant d'autres ?...
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> Ecrit en captivité (1940-44) (pp. 790-91)

The dramatic final use of the 'throw-forward', now beyond the temporal confines of this text, underlines the sense that this is not a resolution, but in a reworking of the end of *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, 'sera continué'. More importantly, the tone of the final paragraph ('se doute-t-il', 'supplémentaire illusion', 'la menace des épreuves qui ne manqueront pas de l'accabler') is redolent of knowledge and experience beyond the text, for which the paratextual note may or may not provide evidence. The frontier which separates the fictional and the referential is now so thin that it amounts to one blank line on the printed page. A quarter of a century before Doubrovsky, within an *espace automythologique*, this is an authentically autofictional work.

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Les Poulpes – a unique autofictional experiment

Les Poulpes[263] covers a period of approximately 16 years in the life of Monsieur Hermès. Sparked by an original intuition in July 1939[264], the first draft of what was to become the published volume was begun on 1st August 1940[265] and the broad outline of its subject communicated by Guérin's partner Sonia to Jean Paulhan in a letter dated 5th April 1941.[266] The major part of the text is an account of the captivity of the central character, known in the first two volumes of *Ebauche* as Monsieur Hermès but now identified under his camp sobriquet as Le Grand Dab.

This chapter will argue that this third autofictional work is again innovative in its representation of personal experience in a national and international context. It will also sustain the proposition that, notwithstanding the at times grating self-praise of the writer, the text's compositional invention makes it truly unique.

Les Poulpes – critical reaction

Initial reaction to the work was generally complimentary, although insufficient to meet the expectation of Guérin himself. [267] Correctly identifying the mythological dimension of the work, Robert Margerit[268] stated that it would not be an exaggeration to call *Les Poulpes* 'L'Iliade de notre temps .. effroyable poème.' Roger Nimier,[269] whilst expressing reservations about Guérin's decision to imbue the text with such overt 'parti pris', acknowledged that Guérin 'sait fabriquer un univers, et il est remarquable que son besoin de confession ne le gêne pas dans cette entreprise. […] Ce romancier verbal est aussi visionnaire'.[270]

Writing in *Cahiers du Sud*,[271] A. Blanc-Dufour felt that the whole gamut of post-war literature relating to prison camps had been 'balayé par cette fresque magistrale'. A penetrating, in-depth review by Dominique Aury[272] was one of the first to highlight the collision of literary and spoken language in the narration, and to begin to identify the intertexts. Aury applauded Guérin's '*habileté diabolique'* in terms of his use of a third-person

[263] Paris: Gallimard, 1953; republished by Editions Le Tout sur le Tout, Paris, 1980. All references will be to this edition of the text.
[264] See below: Paratextual Elements – Title.
[265] *Le Temps de la Sottise*, III, p. 68.
[266] 'Il travaille à un nouvel ouvrage, intitulé Les Poulpes, récit dans lequel il décrit la vie des prisonniers..' Letter (5/4/41), Sonia Raymond Guérin – Jean Paulhan.
[267] Letter to Jean Paulhan, (20/6/53): '[…] j'en ai fini avec la fausse modestie. Je sais que j'ai écrit un très grand livre...' ; letter to Jean Grenier, (10/3/53) : '[…] un livre dont j'attends beaucoup. Tout. Trop, sans doute.' BN, Fonds Grenier.
[268] *Le Populaire du Centre* (Limoges) 28/5/53.
[269] *Carrefour* 10/6/53.
[270] Guérin's reaction to this review was incendiary. Letter to Jean Paulhan (20/6/53): 'c'est l'œuvre d'un poète […] c'est la plus étonnante recréation qu'on ait jamais faite d'un univers donné par la recréation totale d'un langage, […] c'est le cri le plus pathétique et le plus farouchement désespéré qu'une créature humaine ait jamais poussé face à l'univers gercé, ou encore (n'est-ce pas évident ?) […] c'est la première grande œuvre romanesque que le Surréalisme ait enfanté depuis sa naissance... Bref, c'est un chef d'œuvre. / Je suis sûr de mon fait. Et si je n'obtiens pas le tribut qui m'est dû c'est que l'on n'aura pas compris, c'est que mon œuvre est trop forte, trop neuve, trop sensationnelle pour être admise.' Fonds Guérin, BLJD.
[271] No 318 September – October 1953.
[272] *La Nouvelle Revue Française* No 9 September 1953, pp. 506-11.

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narration, and asserted that the 'subject' of *Les Poulpes* was secondary : 'Ce qui importe, c'est le mélange étonnant de la vérité et de la violence, et la liberté explosive du langage.'

Amongst the less positive reviews were those of Robert Kemp[273] who complained that Guérin had accumulated 'toutes les fécalités, obscénités, puanteurs, gluances qu'il a pu imaginer…' whilst acknowledging the quality of the last 100 pages ('magnifiques') and Robert Poulet[274] whose assessment was brutal: 'Raymond Guérin vise à la puissance et il la manque : ne s'établit pas poète qui veut.'

Personal reaction received by Guérin was also broadly positive. Henri Calet[275] commended the text as a record of captivity, a view endorsed by Pierre Gascar.[276] The appraisal of Jean Paulhan[277] was, however, qualified : 'C'est un livre d'humeur et il arrive que la théorie où elle affleure agace un peu.'

Les Poulpes as an autofiction *avant la lettre*

An informed reader of 1953 could easily have detected that the material of the text might be derived from personal experience. First, the fact of Guérin's captivity was public knowledge, owing to references to it in articles, such as that by Marcel Arland.[278] This awareness is reinforced by the phrase 'écrit en captivité 1940-44' with which the current text (p. 546) as well as the first two volumes of *Ebauche* conclude. Second, readers of Guérin's articles in *Juin* magazine, and of his preface to Georges Hyvernaud's *La Peau et Les Os* (1949), will know that Guérin had a story to tell about captivity, and was developing ideas on how best to tell it.

The '*affabulation'* understood by Guérin to be crucial to this project, and which in a letter to Sonia he vouchsafed[279], is in places less than effective. His portrait of Capri, with its focus on the writer Carlo Eduarte, would be familiar already to the readers of his 1950 text *Du Côté de Chez Malaparte*. Even the letter of invitation to stay at the Casa Comme Me from Malaparte is used verbatim, in both texts. Less obvious, but still eminently recognisable to those of the milieu, is the depiction of the residence of Jean Paulhan (pp. 534-35).

Guérin claimed that the sketches of the prisoners were based on a combination of several fellow real-life inmates.[280] This may be stretching the point. Both Curatolo and Kauffmann confidently identify Masson, later Minister for War Veterans, as the figure

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[273] *Les Nouvelles Littéraires,* 23/7/53.
[274] *Rivarol,* 23-29/10/53, p. 4.
[275] 'On n'avait pas encore montré ce qu'a été le temps de la captivité d'une façon aussi vraie, aussi précise, aussi écrasante. Quelle pièce au dossier de la bêtise humaine !'. Letter dated 1/1/54, in *Calet, Guérin Correspondance,* 2005. p. 287.
[276] In a letter to Paulhan (11/12/ 53), Guérin recounted a conversation with Pierre Gascar: 'En mai, [il] m'avouait.. J'ai pondu pour m'amuser un petit texte de circonstance sur un épisode de ma captivité.. Ce n'est rien du tout. Mais, bien entendu, aucune comparaison avec vos Poulpes. J'ai même honte d'en parler. Plus tard, il me dédicaça le livre en ces termes *: 'A Raymond Guérin, qui a su* bien mieux que moi *traiter ce même sujet'* [Guérin's emphasis]. Fonds Guérin, BLJD.
[277] Unpublished letter, 24/6/53. Fonds Guérin, BLJD.
[278] In his review of *Quand…*, (*Comoedia*, 9/8/41, p. 2), Arland discloses in an aside the fact of Guérin's captivity. It was also mentioned in Louis Emié's review of the same book in *La Petite Gironde* 29/8/41, p. 2, and reiterated in a text appended to Jacques Chardonne's review of *Quand…*, again in *Comoedia*, 24/4/43, p. 1.
[279] Letter dated 25/8/41, *Raymond Guérin : Lettres à Sonia*, 2005, p. 141 : '*c'est une affabulation pure et simple'.*
[280] Letter Raymond Guérin to Sonia, dated 2/3/43 (2005, p. 246).

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concealed behind the sobriquet 'Le Folliculaire Véreux'; Curatolo further contends that, given time and the inclination, it would be possible to determine the real identities of all of the prisoners who feature in the work[281] ; whilst Kauffmann is confident that the two prisoners nicknamed Bébé Cadum and Le Globule are, respectively, Henri Cartier-Bresson and Alain Douarinou, both subsequently famous in their different fields.[282]

The use of realia extends beyond material already in the public domain. On p. 306, Le Grand Dab receives a letter informing him of a setback in attempts to accelerate his release. This is a repurposing of a letter received by Guérin from Paulhan dated 2/12/1941.

Below is the excerpt from *Les Poulpes*:

> Ses nuits furent hantées par ce mirage jusqu'à ce qu'une lettre, pleine de réticences, vînt réduire à néant ses projets : Il semble malheureusement que vos chances soient moins grandes. On a beau faire valoir ce que serait pour vous la libération, il y a pas mal d'imbéciles puissants pour répondre que votre attitude est incompatible avec l'esprit régénéré qui se forge actuellement, paraît-il, dans les camps. Bref, il est à craindre que nos espoirs aient été vains… Ah, certes, si vous étiez de ceux qui exaltent la Terre et les Aïeux, de ceux qui ont pour devise : Travail, Famille, Patrie, il n'y aurait pas l'ombre d'une hésitation…

The letter on which it draws reads as follows:

> Prix Goncourt : il semble malheureusement que vos chances soient moins grandes. On a beau faire valoir que le prix, ce serait sans doute votre libération, il y a pas mal d'imbéciles puissants pour répondre que votre livre est d'un réalisme grossier, qu'il a baissé la dignité française etc.

The autofictional conceit of creating a work of imagination from real materials is perfectly illustrated here.

Paratextual elements - Title

The title was one of the first elements decided by Guérin, 14 years before the publication of the finished work. The idea occurred to him on the road between Delphi and Thebes in July 1939 when he had a sudden premonition of the arrival of dark times ('*le temps de la sottise'*), an episode recounted in one of the italicised lyrical sections of the text itself.

In his wartime diary, Guérin describes the initial sense the term held for him. At first he understood 'les poulpes' to be 'femmes néfastes qui abîment la vie de certains hommes de qualité', but by the time composition of the text began - his crisis, of what he called his Zobain period, having dissipated - with it went the misogyny. Now 'les poulpes' were to

> symboliser tous les êtres qui nous cernent si dangereusement et nous étouffent et nous sucent le cerveau et le cœur. Je voudrais montrer, peut-être, dans ce roman, un homme et une femme aux prises avec la société et donc avec la sottise et l'incompréhension tyrannique des collectivités.[283]

The new sense of 'les poulpes' is somewhat clumsily introduced in to the Epilogue. Having returned from captivity and rediscovered the balming environs of Capri, Monsieur

[281] Bruno Curatolo, *Raymond Guérin – Une écriture de la dérision (*Paris : L'Harmattan, 1996) p. 76, fn 8.
[282] Jean-Paul Kauffmann, 'Le Monde selon Guérin' in *Le Matin de Paris* 24/10/83.
[283] *Le Temps de la Sottise* III, p. 64.

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Hermès falls prey to physical 'poulpes' whilst swimming off the Faraglioni. In danger of drowning, he escapes only through the prompt actions of Delphine in forcibly releasing him from their tentacles. The physical threat removed, Monsieur Hermès is left with a powerful motif with which to express his feelings about post-war society:

> Ses réminiscences, soudain, s'irradiaient en des sortes de fleurs monstrueuses qui devenaient poulpes. Des poulpes, il avait le crâne plein de poulpes, les orbites pleines de poulpes ! Sa vie passée, présente et à venir était infestée de poulpes gluants aux évolutions reptatoires. La vie elle-même envahissait l'écran de son horizon comme un énorme poulpe s'offrant en gros plan et le fixant de ses prunelles globuleuses. Les autres étaient des poulpes qui nageaient autour de lui, paralysant ses membres avec leurs innombrables tentacules et le vidant de son sang. Le Minotaure enfin se dressait, vivant, affreusement agile … [p. 556]

'Les poulpes' represent the hegemony of society – instruments of power as well as collective incomprehension - over the individual. This is a theme which will be made explicit in the 'foreword' which follows.

Table des Matières

The text is divided into eight parts, with an Epilogue. It is significant that this latter is indicated as part of the main body of the text, rather than – unlike the foreword – assuming its place as part of the paratext.

The untitled foreword

Any expectation derived from the label '*fiction'* - that the reader might anticipate a defamiliarised environment, the locus of a work of imagination - is dispelled in the untitled introduction to the work.

Addressing the reader directly, the author's voice is unequivocal: the text which follows is a *pièce à conviction*, a critique of Twentieth-Century Society for its mistreatment of the individual. Guérin rejects outright the notion that his intention is in any way that of moralising or proselytising, a contention that will be undermined by a substantial proportion of the text.

Guérin reaches beyond the confines of the page to make specific demands of the reader: '*En fait, il faudrait quinze jours pour lire posément cet ouvrage et autant pour y repenser à loisir. Que ceux donc qui n'ont pas un mois à perdre passent leur chemin !* (p. 9). Notwithstanding this act of overt pressure upon the reader, Guérin claims that his leaving the book to stand for itself is evidence of the 'sincerity' of his undertaking.

The writer begins to set out the desired reception. Any failure to perceive the '*dérision'* and '*parti pris*' inherent in the writing would be a mis-step ('*je crois qu'on se méprendra sur Les Poulpes'*). What is to follow is a modern reworking of the myth of Theseus, in which the legendary hero is replaced by a multi-faced Hermes, whose defeat by the Society, his Minotaure, is '*inéluctable'*. In order to tell this story, the writer has had to create an entirely new idiom, the product of acts of violence against existing language and fiction. The reader is required to be on alert for a copious intertext.

The foreword concludes abruptly, reminding us – as we are about to engage with the text itself – of its origins: '*Donc, un livre de dérision totale, dérisoire même dans sa plus abrupte inspiration'* (p. 10). The inclusion of the foreword was a step which Guérin later

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regretted.[284] Nimier described the 'essay' as 'maladroit' and was Guérin at his weakest: 'Sa sincérité est souvent verbeuse, ses idées ont tendance à nous paraître banales*'*. André Dalmas[285] felt it restricted ('délimiter') the scope of the work.

The genesis of a method

Drafted first in captivity, *Les Poulpes* underwent a thorough transformation in the years which followed Guérin's release in November 1943. Major alterations regarding the name and status of the central character were made[286] but in artistic terms Guérin devoted the years between 1945 and 1950 to isolating a solution to the challenge he had posed himself: how properly to communicate the remorseless and despairing Present of the prisoner.

Some clues as to the nature of his deliberation were contained in reviews by Guérin in *Juin* magazine[287], which pre-empt some of his decisions in the final version of *Les Poulpes*.

Recognising the veracity of Jean Malaquais' *Journal de Guerre*[288], Guérin is struck by the limitations placed on the writer by the first-person '*journal'* format, a technical issue with which Guérin had grappled in the first two volumes of *Ebauche.* Guérin argues that this automatically makes the author the 'hero':

> C'est là qu'il faut prendre garde. La première tentation, évidemment, est de voir partout Jean Malaquais derrière les mots. Mais je me demande s'il ne serait pas plus astucieux, pas plus juste, pas plus honorable, de considérer celui qui dit 'je' comme un vrai personnage, oubliant ainsi ce qu'est, ce que pense, ce que désire Jean Malaquais, pour participer mieux à l'aventure intérieure comme aux événements dont ce 'je' fait le témoin. (pp. 21-22)

A refinement of the method adopted for *L'Apprenti,* this was precisely the choice ultimately made by Guérin in his final version of *Les Poulpes*, identified as a strength of the work by Dominique Aury.

Sharing again his own history as a prisoner-of-war (*Chronique*, p. 127), Guérin reviews *Les Grandes Vacances* by Francis Ambrière with similar ambivalence.

> Un inventaire si réussi et si fidèle méritait une transposition (sur le plan de l'écriture) qui en aurait fait autre chose qu'un témoignage bien documenté. Osons le dire : c'est d'art que le livre manque pour être tout à fait valable (*Chronique*, p. 128).

Satisfactory as Ambrière's work is as a record of events, it leaves, in the mind of this critic, room for improvement, perhaps to be provided by another writer:

> Consciencieux procès-verbal, donc, et sérieux réquisitoire même, mais enfin ce n'est, tout au long de gros volume, qu'un entassement de matériaux au moyen desquels il faut espérer

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[284] In *Entretiens* Guérin conceded that he should not have made the '*déclaration en tête de mon livre'*, but instead allowed readers to discover for themselves the '*parti pris*' of which the book was made up. *Entretiens avec Claude-Henri Rocquet*. Text of interviews conducted by M. Rocquet with Raymond Guérin in 1955, seen by the author at M. Rocquet's residence, Paris, July 1987.

[285] *Tribune des Nations*, 17/7/53.

[286] 'Guérin transpose sa propre histoire en la personne d'un peintre, Bernard Marinoli, qui, derrière les barbelés, passe en revue sa vie.*'* Jean-Paul Kauffmann, 'Le Monde selon Guérin*',* in *Le Matin de Paris* 24/10/83.

[287] Raymond Guérin - *Chroniques*, 2015, pp. 20-24.

[288] At the same time providing paratextual information concerning himself : 'Oh, bien sûr, il n'y a pas un lecteur de bonne foi qui ne reconnaîtra que le récit du Journal de Guerre est vrai. Tout cela qu'on nous raconte, nous l'avons vu, nous l'avons entendu, nous l'avons vécu*'* (*Chroniques*, 2015, p. 22).

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> qu'un grand écrivain saura faire le *Livre* que la captivité se doit de provoquer. (*Chronique*, p. 129)

To document captivity is insufficient in itself. To communicate the sensation and emotion of captivity properly, the writer needs to imbue his account with an appropriate '*poétique'*, offering the reader immersion rather than spectatorship. Reading between the lines of the *Juin* articles, the broad outlines of what became the final approach in *Les Poulpes* are emerging.

To complete Guérin's vision, the events needed to be placed within a mythological context. This was fundamental to the project of *Les Poulpes*, as he explained to Claude-Henri Rocquet[289] :

> Eh bien, j'ai donc tenté une récréation presque mythique, du thème de la réclusion, de cet univers fantasmagorique dans lequel nous n'étions plus que des larves. Je me suis efforcé d'échapper à la réalité tout en la rendant tangible ; c'est-à-dire que j'ai voulu que rien ne fût inexact et que, cependant, tout fût, comme ce l'était, irréel.

Construction of the work

Whilst avoiding the pitfalls of the '*journal'* format, it was important to have a central figure to act as the experiential conduit. In *Les Poulpes* the central figure is known as Le Grand Dab.[290] His personal journey through captivity provides the framework for the text. Only during the italicised sections that punctuate the work does the reader make the association of the central character with Monsieur Hermès, the hero of the first two volumes of *Ebauche*, an identity which he dramatically reassumes in the closing sentence of the fiction as he steps off the train in Bérihéa.

Les Poulpes adopts the nomenclature protocols of the prison camp.[291] The forfeiture of individuality, and even any sense of direction or worth, is confirmed by the accompanying forfeiture of the personal name itself, cultural symbol of the individual's potential to operate as a self-determining entity. This practice is explained at the start of Part I:

> Il n'était plus rien que Le Grand Dab, il n'avait plus d'autre identité que celle de ce sobriquet qu'on lui avait collé depuis qu'il était au Camp. C'était une loi générale du milieu. Les autres aussi en avaient. À commencer par les argousins. Ici donc, et pour qui sait combien d'années, pour toujours peut-être, il n'était plus que Le Grand Dab, un matricule, une fiche… (p. 15)

As a narratological tool, despite his sometimes urgent desire to switch off the functioning of his senses ('Il ne voulait en voir ni en entendre davantage. La coupe plus que pleine ! Débordante !' p. 48), Le Grand Dab is the vehicle for an omni-sensory experience of

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[289] Entretiens XI, *Entretiens avec Claude-Henri Rocquet*

[290] The slang name by which Guérin was known throughout his captivity. Meaning 'Grandfather', it is used without the Direct Article by fellow prisoners to address him directly. When the Direct Article is retained, the name acquires further status, this time signifying 'God'. Given the nature of some of the language used in the depiction of the character and his status, this ambiguity is not accidental. On his release, Guérin continued to refer to himself by his prison nickname. It is the name with which he signed a letter to Marcel Arland (dated 2/5/53, cited by Kauffmann (2007) p. 309), and his dedication of a copy of *Les Poulpes* to Henri Calet bears the message: '*pour vous mon cher Calet / ces Poulpes où vous savez tout ce que j'ai / mis de foi et de désespoir. / avec l'admiration et l'amitié du / Grand Dab' 11/5/53*. Cited in Calet, Guérin Correspondance, 2005, p. 285.

[291] Nomenclature is one of the fundamental components in the construction of *'l'irréel'.*

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this unreal world,[292] but it is particularly his visual sense – a detached, almost supernatural perspicacity – which provides the main mechanism of observation and narration.

The character Le Grand Dab had already been introduced to the public in another text, *La Main Passe*.[293] This stream of consciousness monologue, in the voice of Patrick Beaurepaire examines the values of his friend, identified as Le Grand Dab. The latter is represented as indomitable, intractable, a percipient and uncompromising critic of contemporary society.

The character of the same name in *Les Poulpes* is not only based on the camp identity of Guérin, but is, as Kauffmann contends[294], recognisably an idealised projection of the writer. This projection is of a piece with that of another hero, Empédocle, in ancient Greater Greece[295]. Both figures display a form of hyper-lucidity which not only distinguishes them from their contemporaries, but brings them into passive (and sometimes active) conflict with those who perceive them as a threat. Le Grand Dab, despite his urine-soaked garments and barbaric facial appearance, is a Romantic hero for the ages, a visionary insufficiently appreciated in his own epoch.

This impression is underscored in several ways. First, by the insertion of short, lyrical passages, differentiated from the main text by their italicisation, which express the depth, sensitivity, emotion and cultural value of the incarcerated individual. Second, by the values to which Le Grand Dab clings, which differentiate him from all other inmates. These are symbolised by the written word, the abuse of which – for example, the confiscation of his notebooks (p. 36), the deliberate destruction by prison guards of personal copies of works of literature (p. 224) – are an overt violation. Third, by the sense of victimhood which surrounds Le Grand Dab, seen from the very beginning as the plaything of overwhelming forces, at the most fundamental level (for example, the self-pitying account of the demise of a kitten that he had befriended: 'Mais il était dit que Le Grand Dab serait privé même de cette innocente compagnie. Le chat mourut*'* p. 53), to the most elevated (the threat to his personal safety from political machinations led by collaborators within the camp). Le Grand Dab is the archetype of the powerless man who refuses to yield. This is, as Bakhtin might term it, a novel of ordeal.[296]

As a mythological construct Le Grand Dab is 'the martyr', one subject to extremes of torment who nonetheless displays extraordinary, even superhuman, resilience. For example, he declines offers to become involved in escape plans: 'Ce romanesque lui était interdit. […] Plus qu'aucun autre prisonnier, peut-être, il souffrait de la spoliation dont il avait été victime.' (p. 282) The level of his suffering is beyond the ordinary ('Oh, comme il souffrait, comme il savait souffrir durant ces heures de mélancolique macération !' p. 485), and his mythological status is signalled by the progression away from personal to representative suffering *('*il se convainquait qu'il avait du moins été élu entre tous pour témoigner en leur nom,' p. 485).

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[292] Accounting for the physiological is an essential task for the writer, in Guérin's view, and is central to his conception of the *Mythologie de la Réalité*. See my introduction to the section on '*Fictions'*, and *Un Romancier Dit Son Mot*, pp. 129-130.
[293] Paris: Editions du Scorpion, 1947.
[294] *'Double ideal de l'écrivain'*. Kauffmann, 2007 p. 198.
[295] See my chapter on *Empédocle* in the *Mythes* section of this thesis.
[296] See the definition in Bakhtin, M. M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, edited by Caryl Emerson, and Michael Holquist (University of Texas Press, 1987) pp. 11-12.

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The fate of Le Grand Dab is presented within the context of another who suffered on behalf of others:

> Tandis que lui, Le Grand Dab, on l'avait atteint dans son être même. Que de trahisons, de reniements, de fardeaux, d'épines, que de crachats, que de bols de fiel ! Une crucifixion quotidienne ! (p. 350)

Within the camp, this exceptional status is acknowledged ('Tous, cependant, reconnaissaient loyalement dans Le Grand Dab celui qui, le premier, avait su leur indiquer la bonne route', p. 389) and as the period of captivity enters its fourth year is described almost in the same terms as a cult:

> […] les événements, malgré lui, le mettaient en vedette. C'était à qui voulait honorer en lui celui qui, dès 40, avait osé prévoir les trahisons du Vieux Baveux et se dresser contre Le Folliculaire, celui qui, aux heures les plus noires, avait été le premier à réagir, à secouer l'apathie de trois mille moutons apeurés. […] Les plus acharnés à l'ignorer ou à le perdre, hier encore, l'adulaient. (p. 486)

It is the intellectualisation of the process of captivity that distinguishes Le Grand Dab. His hyperlucidity consists of two elements: perceptiveness, and the refusal to disbelieve the evidence of his own eyes. The commitment to lucidity becomes an affirmation of his own worth, and an expression of his passive leadership:

> […] de ces millions d'individus qui, par l'univers, pourrissaient aujourd'hui ou avaient pourri, dans l'épaisseur des temps, embastillés, il était le seul, l'unique, à avoir, gageure inconcevable, systématiquement démasqué et détruit, à mesure qu'ils se proposaient à lui, les travestissements de la réalité. (p. 399)

This afterwards becomes a cause. 'Le Grand Dab avait conscience de défendre ce qu'il y avait de plus noble dans l'individu. […] Dût-il, dans son siècle, être le seul à formuler un tel défi, eh bien, il aurait été cet iconoclaste' (p. 401). The hero becomes, in his own mind, a symbol of something greater than himself, that is, mythological.

His rejection of the collaborationist regime, under the leadership of Le Vieux Baveux (Maréchal Pétain) is reiterated throughout the text, both at the level of principle and through concrete opposition to its representative within the camp, Le Folliculaire Véreux. So unique is his example, however, that in his imagination – in a projection which contains intertextual echoes of Diogenes' confrontation with Alexander the Great – he is a match for even the most important international figures:

> Tout à l'heure, il s'était préoccupé du Petit Caporal Sanglant [Adolf Hitler], avait tenté d'imaginer ses affres ou ses rancœurs. Mais Le Petit Caporal Sanglant ne lui rendait pas la monnaie de sa pièce, l'ignorait. De même que l'ignoraient tous les autres Seigneurs, [...] sans se douter qu'au fond de ce camp, parmi tant d'autres camps et tant d'autres homoncules, l'un de ces homoncules était le témoin attentif de leurs soubresauts, le spectateur patient mais féroce de leurs pirouettes. (p. 465)

The hero is intractable, 'irréductible' (p. 297), 'ferme comme un roc' (p. 513). The commitment to lucidity is absolute, as is its quality, which distinguishes Le Grand Dab, not just as a prisoner ('Il serait, envers et contre tout, le prisonnier, cas unique ! qui, durant toute sa détention, n'aurait cessé une seconde d'en analyser les prodromes, d'en mesurer les ravages et d'en peser les conséquences !', p. 391) but as an intellectual.

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Le Grand Dab's commitment to literature is seen as single-minded and authentic. His baggage is composed largely of books for his own self-development, and their titles and authors reveal much about the interior reflections of the individual.[297] Irrespective of the background noise, cramped conditions or extreme cold[298], Le Grand Dab is represented *en abyme* working at his *oeuvre*.

This idealised, highly Romanticised depiction of the hero-writer is taken a step further still. In a form of reaching out beyond the confines of the text itself, the stance of Le Grand Dab is implicitly evaluated against that of preceding or contemporary intellectuals. Inevitably, the thinkers associated with the values of the collaborationist regime are abruptly dismissed (Péguy in particular - 'Péguy l'exaspérait, c'était un type qu'il ne pouvait pas encaisser' p. 412, but not exclusively) [299], but more interesting is the re-evaluation of the status, through the prism of the captive, of acknowledged masters. First Baudelaire (p. 330), but especially the icons of pre-war literature, Gide, Proust and Valéry:

> Mais savoir comment des petits potes comme Gide, Proust ou Valéry eussent réagi ? Même quand ils avaient trente ou quarante ans ? Auraient jamais connu ce genre d'expérience, eux. Des soucis intérieurs, certes, de nobles inquiétudes, oui, des tourments esthétiques, bien entendu, mais ça, jamais ! […] pour ce qui était de la contrainte bestiale, des ignorants ! Avaient même pas fait la guerre ! Et quant à l'esclavage… Là aussi, plus de commune mesure. De ça, du moins, Le Grand Dab était sûr… (p. 360)

This reflection complements the inflated sense of self-worth evident in Guérin's wartime correspondence. First, his dismay at his treatment: 'Je m'étonne que les Allemands, si perspicaces cependant, et toujours prêts à honorer les artistes, m'aient laissé confondu avec les autres prisonniers … ' [300] Second, in letters to Paulhan, (5/2/42) and Calet (21/7/43) he pointed out his exceptional position as 'le seul écrivain prisonnier sur un million d'hommes', a status which he intended to exploit : 'j'entends bien dire quelle vie fut la nôtre et cela, d'une façon implacable' [301].

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[297] 'Poésie involontaire et Poésie intentionnelle d'Éluard, Stèle pour James Joyce de Louis Gillet, La Famille Brontë de Robert de Traz, Rainer Maria Rilke par Christiane Osann, La Campagne avec Thucydide de Thibaudet, Les Peintres de la Renaissance par Berenson, La Création chez Stendhal de Jean Prévost...'. (p. 281) At an autofictional level, the coincidence of this reading list with the names of writers and titles requested by the captive Guérin in his letters to Sonia is considerable.

[298] 'Ça n'empêchait pas Le Grand Dab de s'installer dès le matin à sa table, devant une fenêtre, abandonnant les alentours du poêle aux figés. Pour lutter contre l'extrême froidure, il écrivait les mains enfilées dans des moufles, rassemblé sur lui-même, le kébour enfoncé jusqu'aux oreilles, le chèche autour du cou. Ou bien, il posait la plume et se laissait entreprendre par tel ou tel qui rôdait, vacant', p. 323.

[299] 'Déjà, Le Grand Dab avait maintes fois constaté que l'intelligence et l'art, dans ce que l'une aurait pu avoir de plus aigu et l'autre de plus raffiné, briguaient le triste honneur de putasser. Tel écrivain n'avait-il pas écrit récemment, se roulant aux pieds de ses vainqueurs comme une chatte en chaleur : J'ai pu vivre enfin dans l'intimité de gens, hier nos ennemis, et dont la délicatesse à notre égard aujourd'hui, me confond ! Tel autre, non moins notable : La Suisse sera le dernier bastion de l'Europe contre la marée slave ! De l'aberration stupide à la soumission écœurante ! Partout l'enflure, l'avilissement, l'imposture'. (p. 513)

[300] Letter dated 17/1/42, in *Lettres à Sonia*, 2005, p. 167.

[301] Letter dated 30/9/43, *Calet, Guérin Correspondance*, 2005, p. 82.

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The 'reality' of *Les Poulpes*

What is observed is the absurd, the unreal, the incomprehensible, the very fact of existence within a prisoner of war camp. In a global sense, reality is absolutely disfigured but recognisable. Albeit detached from the course of international events, the inmates receive news via newspapers and the radio (usually several weeks late, which enables them to appreciate the extent of the misinformation to which they have been subject), and this is then summarised in the vernacular of the camp.

Every thirty pages or so, a précis of external developments is provided. This paragraph is a typical example:

> Pourtant, les journaux distribués au magma continuaient à mentir, à plastronner, à répéter que tout allait pour le mieux dans le meilleur des mondes et que la patrie de John Bull, comme Carthage, serait détruite. À les en croire, les Ruskis étaient sur les genoux, les Amerloques dérouillaient au possible dans le Pacificos et la Victoire Finale était proche. Le Petit Caporal Sanglant ne la promettait-il pas, cette fois, pour le Nouvel An ? […] L'Oncle Sam n'avait-il pas été entraîné par les Youdis et les Maçons dans une campagne désastreuse contre les vaillants et nobles Japs ? (p. 335)

The use of nicknames notwithstanding, the course of external events is clear. This is accompanied by the regular reference to actual chronological time,[302] creating a dissonance as two perspectives – the mythological and the historical – run parallel to one another.

One particularly egregious example of this occurs in the Epilogue. Le Grand Dab becomes privy to information which is not widely known until much later, in this case the existence of concentration camps and the practice of mass extermination.[303] This irruption into the text of time-specific detail is a shock to the reader, not because of its inaccuracy or inappropriateness, but because of the manner of its packaging, the temporary suspension of defamiliarisation.

Although the camp is part of the world, its detachment from ongoing events – symbolised by the fences over which the prisoners can occasionally peep – is not fully fractured until Part VIII with the arrival of bombs dropped by American warplanes (pp. 458-461). The American pilots to whom the prisoners frantically signal are the first residents of the non-mythological world properly to see them, for during their occasional marches through the homeland of the Victors they have passed almost completely unnoticed, save for several instances of gratuitous abuse (for example, p. 35 and pp. 472-73)

Within the camp, what is observed and lived is a quasi-reality, its place in the margins reflected in the nature of its evocation. As we saw above in the case of Le Grand Dab, individuals – both captives and guards - are identified by nickname.[304] Yet, as Kauffmann

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[302] 'mai 40', p. 47; 'hiver 1941', p. 211; 'avril 41', p. 216; 'été 42', p. 367; '42 touchait à sa fin, 43 pointait', p. 443; 'début 43..', p. 448; 'septembre 43', p. 490. In addition, there are repeated references back to the situation in 1940 – pp. 389, 401, 425, 460, 486, 495, and 508 – as well as to the length of Le Grand Dab's captivity, for example pp. 334, 425, 495.

[303] 'C'était son sourire narquois qui devait les cabrer, les exaspérer. Alors, ils en remettaient ! Ils en remettaient tant et tant que ce fut grâce à eux qu'il sut, dès 1941, qu'il existait des camps d'extermination.'

[304] 'C'est ainsi que je n'ai pas donné de noms à mes personnages mais des surnoms, comme tous les prisonniers en avaient et même leurs géôliers'. Introduction to *Le Pus de la Plaie*, 1982.

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points out, these are recognisable stereotypes, mythologising through their degenerate attitudes, language and behaviour the ills of defeated France:

> Dans cette société informe surgissent des figures éternelles: le faux-cul, le démerdard, le ronchonneur, la crapule sympathique, le giton fielleux, etc. Ils symbolisent cette France vaincue, débrouillarde, et trouillarde qui dégoûtait tant Brasillach et ses amis. (Kauffmann, 2007, p. 311)

Notwithstanding the unreal nature of the environment, what Le Grand Dab observes evolving are the very structures of the society of which it is the excrescence. Rather than exploiting the emancipation from that Society and operating according to their own value sets, the inmates recreate it, reaching for the myths which – in his view – have enslaved them.[305] Le Grand Dab's tour of the camp enables this phenomenon to be illuminated.[306]

The first are the political myths, specifically those promoted by Collaborationist / Pétainists, perpetuated in order to create a structure in which officers can enjoy a privileged existence within the camp whilst maintaining camp discipline on behalf of the Germans. Nicknamed '*Les Boas'* by Le Grand Dab, a sobriquet adopted by the rest of the prisoners (p. 106) this group is perceived to be aristocratically removed from the main cohort (p. 356).

The régime of the Boas is repressive, utilising many of the instruments of the despotic state in its own self-preservation (p. 358). Their privilege is perceived to be material (p. 263), and it is they who push their way to the front when the possibility of early release arises (p. 423). Their cynicism extends even to the point of ignoring the implementation of the Geneva Convention to protect fellow inmates (pp. 71-83), a choice which they attempt to pass off as an act of malice (or war crime) committed by the German commandants (p. 81). Le Grand Dab quietly takes stock of them[307] but realises they pose a danger to him, in so far as they perceive him to be a threat to them.

Second, the Society reinstitutes its superstitions.[308] Faith is seen to be parasitically exploiting the 'civic' structures in place in order to establish itself.[309] It is thus enabled to create for itself both an infrastructure and a power network of its own, the integrity of whose designated spaces is respected even by the German commandants.

> Par un comportement inhérent à leur état, et peut-être sans l'avoir voulu, les curetons en avaient rendu l'accès difficile et prudente l'approche. Une crypte à peu près inviolable et où les Tordus eux-mêmes ne pénétraient pas sans un motif décent. (p. 451)

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[305] 'Ce qu'il y avait d'atroce, ce qui rendait tout cela tellement spectral, c'est que cette vie d'autrefois qu'ils prenaient assez au sérieux pour la parodier n'était elle-même qu'une parodie. La parodie d'une parodie !' (p. 358).

[306] 'il découvrait que des hiérarchies subtiles s'étaient instaurées, avec ses différences sociales, ses castes, ses corporations de ronds-de-cuir, de prolos syndiqués, de curetons, de mouchards, de cabots, de mercantis, de politicards et de journaleux' (p. 356).

[307] 'Pion non participant, il écoutait les uns et les autres, pesait les influences, analysait les courants. Jamais la Société ne s'était livrée à lui si nue. Entouré de Rastignacs et de Vautrins aux ambitions aussi forcenées que puériles, il s'interrogeait. Par quel miracle ces médiocres avaient-ils pris la tête ? L'habileté, la ruse, la chance, la corruption, dans quelle mesure les avaient-ils servis ?' (p. 358).

[308] 'Il fallait des Sorciers à cette Tribu de captifs : elle les eut !' (p. 451).

[309] 'Grâce à tout cet appareil, Monseigneur imposait sa loi aux bien-pensants et ne se gênait plus pour réprouver la conduite des mécréants' (p. 357).

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The third element of camp society is the politician / rabble-rouser, Le Folliculaire. Described by Le Grand Dab as the possessor of more power than all the other Boas combined (p. 357), his function is that of brainwashing the inmates into compliance with their status as '*vaincus'*, that is acquiescent collaborationism and wholesale ingurgitation of the orthodoxies of the Vichy regime. He enjoys privileges commensurate with his position (p. 357).

The archetype of the disreputable politician, Le Folliculaire perceives the threat posed by the quiet obduracy of Le Grand Dab, and duly exploits his complicity with the German kommandantur to frame him.[310] The news after his release of Le Folliculaire's elevation to Ministerial rank is greeted with cynicism by the inmates:

> […] ce coup de baguette magique ne faisait qu'accentuer, dans l'esprit des reclus, l'irréalité du destin. […] Total, on se demandait parfois s'il convenait de le [ie Le Folliculaire] considérer encore comme un salaud ou de le juger comme un imbécile. (p. 466)

Society's ability spontaneously to generate hierarchies is observed in two other spheres. First, within the military itself, there is an obvious disparity in the treatment of officers of different rank, this usually determined by chronological age (p. 424). Second, prisoners of different nationalities are treated by the captors according to an identifiable scale, British prisoners at the top, Russians at the bottom, with French prisoners in a second-tier. (pp. 467-68)

<u>The writing of *Les Poulpes* : a new format for the *mythologie de la réalité*</u>

The challenge of expressing the unreal required, as Guérin told Claude-Henri Rocquet[311], considerable invention:

> Il a donc fallu imaginer un langage tout à fait spécial, et essayer de rendre par ce langage ce qu'étaient à la fois les conversations et les rêveries, les pensées de ce groupement humain. C'est ce qui m'a amené tour à tour à employer l'argot, l'argot spécial des camps, à emprunter à la littérature des passages de prose ou de poésie qui symbolisaient en quelque sorte ce que pouvait se ruminer dans l'âme de certains de ces prisonniers à traduire ce que d'autres pouvaient dire sous forme d'expressions populaires ; en même temps je faisais également des emprunts à tous les modes lyriques, aussi bien à la chanson des rues, à la chanson du genre qu'à l'opéra ou à l'opéra-comique, quand je voulais accuser un certain côté parodique. Enfin, pour sauver la part d'évasion mentale, j'ai, dans certains passages, qui sont d'ailleurs en italiques dans le livre, utilisé un langage volontairement précieux, tout à fait inactuel, afin que cela contrastât avec le langage cru, trivial de la vie réelle de la journée du prisonnier. Ce fut, vous vous en doutez, une entreprise gigantesque.

Nimier's review recognised the expression within the text as that of an '*âme collective'*, which he compared to the chorus of classical Greek literature. Guérin's term for the same phenomenon is '*simultanéisme'*, a feat in his belief never before achieved in a work

[310] Guérin described his situation in a letter to Sonia. 'Mais Bouche et Cadillac [fellow prisoners now released] auront pu vous expliquer à quelles maffias [sic] j'avais affaire à l'intérieur même des barbelés et vous montrer quelle fut la difficulté de ma position dans un camp où régnait en despote borné et malfaisant ce mégalomane et ce métromane, ce folliculaire véreux et ce faisan qui, libéré lui aussi, fait maintenant tant de bruit autour de sa personne hideuse dont je continue à subir les méfaits.' Letter Raymond Guérin to Sonia, 2005, pp. 254-55.

[311] *Entretiens avec Claude-Henri Rocquet*. Text of interviews conducted by M. Rocquet with Raymond Guérin in 1955, seen by the author at M. Rocquet's residence, Paris, July 1987.

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of literature, an effect not just of time and space but 'verbal et mental d'une collectivité confinée en un même lieu'.[312] His ambition in *Les Poulpes* is bold:

> [Une] malaxation de toutes les formes possibles qui concrétisent, chez l'être humain, non seulement ce qu'il a l'intention de dire, mais ce qu'il pense aussi, et jusqu'à cette partie informe de ses souvenirs qu'il entretient dans son cerveau par la rêverie.

This is what informs the shape of the text, a mish-mash of interior monologue, free indirect speech, dialogue all woven unsignalled and without punctuation into a third-person narration, into which is mingled a considerable portion of intertextuality.

Narrative structure in *Les Poulpes*

Broadly, this is a text which observes the strictures outlined in the *Juin* article on Malaquais (see above), that is the concealment of the features of the '*journal'* format behind a third-person narration, whilst at the same time retaining the immediacy and freshness of first-person or unattributed interior monologue.

Energy is imparted into the text through the meshing of different forms of narration : the overlapping of third-person narration and interior monologue, sometimes attributed, sometimes not (eg p. 77); the meshing, usually unpunctuated, of third person narration with a number of different first-person voices. The chaos of the arrival in Paris of the liberated prisoners is well communicated:

> Gare de l'Est ! Tout le monde descend. Ils ne se le firent pas dire deux fois.
>
> Poussez pas, quoi ! Vos gueules, on comprend rien ! Qu'est-ce qu'il bave, le mec ? Faut qu'on aille tous coucher dans les dortoirs du Centre d'Hébergement, paraît ! (pp. 526-27)

The absence of punctuation in general is a liberating phenomenon, one which enables the meaning of exchanges to be fully communicated whilst retaining their authentic speed.

Narration is often in the form of interior monologue, usually but not exclusively that of Le Grand Dab. The interior monologue of other characters too is introduced into the text. One striking example occurs in the early pages of the text, in a passage which depends on the perspective of the Prussian woman to whose family the imprisoned Le Grand Dab has been assigned:

> Près de lui, dans le champ, la Prussicote peinait... Du coin de l'œil, elle observait Le Grand Dab, cet étranger qui était tombé, un matin de juillet, chez son père. Il l'intriguait et l'amusait. Comme il était bizarre, inattendu, dans ses façons ! À vrai dire, tout en lui était ridicule. Pouvait-on être plus faible et plus maladroit ? Non, il n'était pas de chez elle, celui-là, pas de sa nichée ! Il n'avait ni la fière musculature de son frère aîné qui servait dans les tanks, ni le toupet trousseur du fils du menuisier pas encore soldat. Elle songea qu'elle devait sortir avec ce dernier, en vélo, le dimanche suivant. Quelle robe mettrait-elle ? La bayadère, bleue et blanche, à plis et à bretelles ? Elle eut besoin de faire un pet mais se retint. Elle s'arrangea, en perdant du terrain, pour l'expulser discrètement. Quant à l'odeur elle était anonyme et pourrait, à la rigueur, être attribuée au vacher. (p. 20) [313]

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[312] *Entretiens avec Claude-Henri Rocquet*. Text of interviews conducted by M. Rocquet with Raymond Guérin in 1955, seen by the author at M. Rocquet's residence, Paris, July 1987.

[313] This use of the interior monologue of another character to provide an external perspective on the central figure (Monsieur Hermès / Le Grand Dab) was the basis of *La Main Passe*.

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Narration may also be by the imagined interior monologues of a group (for example, of crowds greeting liberated soldiers, p. 243; and of German citizens affronted by the parade of prisoners through their communities, p. 221).

As perceived by Le Grand Dab, the auditory environment of the camp is a cacophony, ('Péteurs et roteurs, rigolos ou plaideurs, stratèges ou despotes, atrabilaires ou taquins, tous, selon leur tempérament ou leur humeur, débridaient leurs dadas. Pour la jacte, tous d'attaque…' p. 46) which the narrative format reflects. Often in the form of unattributed direct speech, at other points attribution is included to bring out the individuality of each contributor. [314] In one two-page section (pp. 510-511), the typicality of the barrage of utterances is underscored by the endless repetition of the Imperfect verb of attribution:

> Tante Pitty, en se levant, bousculait Donald par mégarde et disait : J'voulais pas déranger M. le Recteur ! Donald disait : M. le Recteur vous pisse au cul ! Tante Pitty disait : Ah, là là, ces gens ! Pluto disait : Petit, si je me juge, grand, si je me compare ! Thorax d'Ajax disait : Avec mes bottes, cul-rouge ! Tocbombe disait : Cul-rouge, peut-être ! Mais au prix où est le beurre ! (etc)

Curatolo[315] makes the point that, denied liberty and the ability to act, the only available form of self-affirmation is speech. The unrelenting welter of speech, its quantity rather than its quality, reflects this urge.[316] To make oneself heard is to exist.

The pace of narration is enhanced by recourse to short phrases, simulating the patterns of the spoken word. This may be in the form of interior monologue [317], of third-person narration and interior monologue meshed [318], of third person narration in a short-hand format [319] or even of collecting into the narration, raw and unprocessed, elements experienced by the central character. These might be, for example, the first French advertisements Le Grand Dab sees on his arrival back in France (p. 522) or the instructions shouted to the prisoners on their arrival in the centre de triage. (pp. 524-25)

Using the cadences of the spoken word is one element of the narration, but more significant is the deliberate introduction of slang into the narration as a whole. In places the decision to use slang when formal vocabulary might be anticipated is overt, almost a statement. It would be perfectly possible to imagine the following sentence in conventional,

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[314] 'Tocbombe releva le museau : Qu'est-ce que tu f'sais dans le civil ? Moi ? dit Suffisant, j'étais spéhaquère spôrtif à la radio ! Une rafale de rires ! Quelle pourriture cette radio ! Employer des crétins dans ton genre ! Va donc au moins apprendre à parler ! Spéhaquère spôrtif, tu dis ? Eh, les gars, vous l'imaginez en train de dégoiser ! Un régal pour les auditeurs ! Çui-là, il a gagné le sprine d'un mneu ! On se marrait ! C'était à qui l'imiterait. Jésus-qui-se-touche : Les vagues sont môles contre le molle et la roche est viôlette. Putiphar : Tu montes la cotte, côcher, et tu côpies la côte de la Bourse ! Madame-Pipi : Tu fais la pose et tu pôses ton cul ! Tu sais ton rolle mais tu chies dans la côle ! Marie-Madeleine : Môlaire, pôlaire, c'est comme ça que tu côses ? Monsieur ne rote pas, il rôte ; il ne mange pas la daube, mais la dobe !' (p. 469).

[315] Curatolo, 1996, pp. 73-74.

[316] For example, the linguistic inaccuracies and malapropisms of Frisepoulet. (p. 450)

[317] 'Flâner devant les vitrines ? Non mais chez qui ? S'acheter un journal à un kiosque en parlant de la pluie et du beau temps au marchand ? Pas question ! Jouir du paysage, respirer ? Et ta sœur ? Pour pisser ? La semaine des quat' jeudis ! Oigne dû, oigne dû, arche ! Toujours ! Toujours aller de l'avant. Et vers quoi ? Des hommes, ça ? Des individus instruits et civilisés ? Allons donc ! Une tourbe innommable !' (p. 221)

[318] 'Merde ! Un de ses verres était fêlé ! Le droit. De haut en bas. Vingt dieux de vingt dieux !' (p.14).

[319] 'Alors, paré, La Déesse expédia les copies photographiques au colon. Ça allait faire du suif ! Sensation ! Grand fracas ! Conciliabules ! Interrogatoires ! Confrontations ! Aveux ! Larmes ! Mais, pas un écervelé, La Déesse. Avait pris toutes ses précautions' (p. 447).

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formal French : 'Vers le soir, le train stoppa en pleine cambrouze. Les clébards, le long de la voie, aboyèrent dès que les gars cognèrent contre les cloisons pour se faire ouvrir'. (p. 217) The choice of proper nouns and two of the verbs is conscious, a declaration that this text is to incorporate the language current in the environment it describes. This is evident also in the suspension of consistent grammar, for example in the relaxation of rules regarding the negative which is common in spoken language, or the omission of pronouns: 'C'est sur ces entrefaites que le magma apprit la disgrâce de L'Éminence Grise. Elle lui avait pas été favorable, l'équipée aérienne de son grand ami le cinglé !' (p. 245) ; 'Se doutaient pas, les gars du magma, que ça allait camphrer si sec au réveil !' (p. 252).

The incorporation of slang is natural in narration which depends on reported anecdotes, for example of the inmate known as Le Bon Blanc, whose colourful expression is filtered in to the account of his sexual exploits with a female from the German nobility (p. 446). Sometimes, the passage from one register of language to another is indicated. The disgrace of the prisoner officer L'Eminence Grise is reported in full prison slang, after which another slang expression is used to signal a return to conventional French:

> Fini, le bon temps ! Avait dû les remiser, les gants de chevreau noir, les bottes souples, la badine, la cape de Chevalier Teutonique ! Dans le rang ! À la riflette !
>
> D'ac, suffit, car la disgrâce de L'Éminence et son remplacement par Coup-de-Sang n'arrangèrent guère les choses du magma. (p. 245)

<u>*Les Poulpes* and intertextuality</u>

Les Poulpes is the locus of a unique intertextual experiment, the addition of numerous external voices [320] to the cacophony that already exists from within the camp. The extent of quotation or reference may not reach the level claimed by Guérin[321] but it is overwhelming as Aury states[322], and it would be difficult to find a page of text which is not to some degree informed by it.[323]

The first paragraphs of the text contain (unattributed, as are all the quotations used) a line from Verlaine's *Le Ciel est par-dessus le toit*: 'Le Grand Dab s'éveilla. La clarté grise de l'aube s'insinuait. C'était la fin de la nuit. Trop courte. Toujours trop courte. […] Qu'as-tu

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[320] Guérin compared this project to the work of James Joyce : 'Ce qu'avait tenté James Joyce pour le mot, en créant des vocables nouveaux appartenant à différentes langues, je l'ai tenté pour la phrase : mon livre est une tapisserie faite de petits bouts de laine où se mêlent mon langage personnel et celui que j'ai pu emprunter à des poètes, à l'argot, à la chanson populaire'. Claude-Henri Rocquet, 'Entretien avec Raymond Guérin', *Notre Bordeaux*, 18 juillet 1953, pp. 1-10.

[321] 'Le tiers des pages n'est pas de moi. Avez-vous remarqué qu'il s'agit d'un montage, d'une mosaïque de citations'. Comments made by Guérin, reported *by* Pierre Lartigue in 'Le Retour du Grand Dab', *Révolution* no 195, 26 novembre 1983, pp. 48-49.

[322] 'Toutes écluses ouvertes, on voit se déverser la plus stupéfiante coulée de mots où s'entrechoquent et parfois s'amalgament tous les argots et tous les lieux communs, les rengaines populaires, la langue du naturalisme et celle du symbolisme, le langage des universitaires et celui des journalistes, enfin des citations de tous les poètes, de préférence baroques ou précieux, de Sponde à Michaux, de Shakespeare à Hugo…' Dominique Aury, NRF 9, sept. 1953, pp. 506-511.

[323] This author recalls a conversation with Claude-Henri Rocquet in M. Rocquet's Paris apartment, July 1987, in which M. Rocquet stated that he had a copy of *Les Poulpes* annotated by Guérin to identify all of the quotations used. He confirmed that there were annotations on each page.

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fait, ô toi que voilà, paralytique endurci, dis, qu'as-tu fait, toi que voilà, de ta jeunesse?' (p. 13).

No indication is given as to the status of this line. Is it the interior monologue of the waking character? A form of third person narration, ironically in the first-person? This ambiguity is maintained throughout the text. Words which are clearly imported from elsewhere – some not even in French - and therefore loaded with connotation extraneous to the context into which they are placed – appear, unidentified and unexplained, within the flow of narration. One example, taken from a passage in which the prisoners are being transported from one camp to another, a brutal, dehumanising process lasting several days in which the men stand tightly grouped in cattle trucks without food, water or sanitation:

> La neige, le froid, la soif… J'ai bu toute ma fatigue, trempé ma langue de brique dans les acides de l'abjection… Est-ce qu'on a longtemps à arquer ? s'enquit Vassiliévitch. Sotte question ! On verrait bien quand on serait au bout ! Contemple, ô mortel insensé, cette colonne d'éphémères… (p. 321)

What is being asked of the reader here? Some may argue that this is an intellectual game, a challenge to the so-called educated reader to spot the source of the quotation and thereby become a member of the 'happy few'. Certainly, this was to some extent one of the weapons used by Guérin in his counter-attack on those critics who failed to meet his threshold of appreciation for the text.[324] Transporting the reader abruptly from one mindset or context to another, and then back again, sharpens reception of the context of the moment. Even the reader who does not immediately spot the reference nonetheless is sensitive to the transition of register, of person, of mood and so on.[325]

The scope of reference is not restricted to 'high' literature. Quotation may be from popular songs,[326] common sayings or the nonsense rhymes of children.[327] At times, the narration is given over to a form of riffing, Surrealist-style[328] improvisation and word-association on a particular theme or idea. Two examples:

> Septembre 43. Les roses de septembre devaient être en fleurs. Mais, ici, point de roses. Comment était-ce, une rose ? Quel parfum ? La mémoire visuelle et olfactive s'acharnait à retrouver sa forme, son odeur. Ô lamentable, ô pitoyable exercice ! Une rose ! Tenir une rose

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[324] In his first article for *La Parisienne* (October 1953), 'Une critique d'humeur', Guérin launched a personal and specific attack on two critics, '*le petit'* Nimier and Kemp. Guérin mocked Kemp's apparent failure to detect the origin of lines within the text : 'Quoi donc ? Cet érudit, ce plumitif distingué, ce professionnel de la littérature qu'est M. Kemp s'était-il laissé prendre au piège ? Il n'avait pas reconnu des tournures qui traînait dans la Marquise, dans Retz ou Saint Simon, dans Vauvenargues ou Saint Evremond ? Peut-être avancerez-vous qu'il n'avait pas lu très attentivement ce roman ? Eh, eh …'

[325] Dominique Aury articulates the reader's astonishment at finding 'leur insolite éclat de diamant dans la boue et le fait qu'on se dit: c'est trop beau, ce n'est pas de lui. Peut-être bien, mais il se l'approprie et nous le rend, et on peut quand même dire merci'. Dominique Aury, *NRF* 9, sept. 1953, pp. 506-511.

[326] Curatolo (1996, p. 108) correctly identifies the quotation from Léo Delibes' Lakmé in one of the opening scenes of the book, a vivid example of the point made by Aury above: ' [...] Le Grand Dab sentit un délicieux bien-être l'envahir. Lui itou il débourrait. Le meilleur moment de la journée, à coup sûr. […] Lakmé, ton doux regard se voile… Pourtant, ça cocottait dans le secteur ! Sous ses pieds, entre ses cuisses, Le Grand Dab apercevait la fosse dans toute son étendue. Des tonnes et des tonnes de merde, là-dedans' (pp. 16-17).

[327] For example, each time the bugle is sounded, its noise is represented with a different rhyme: 'Cornette-Bif venait de sonner le rassemblement des plantons. La bite à papa que l'on croyait perdue c'était maman qui l'avait dans le cul…' (p. 458).

[328] This was precisely the claim made in the letter to Jean Paulhan.

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> dans sa main, la sentir ! À l'aube, n'était-elle pas perlée de gouttes de rosée ? Rose en bouton, rose ouverte, rose effeuillée… On pouvait vivre toute une journée avec l'image d'une rose devant soi. Oui, on le pouvait ! Douce, belle, amoureuse et bien-fleurante Rose, que tu es à bon droit aux amours consacrée !... Mais de roses, point ! (p. 490)

This passage ends with lines from Ronsard's *Second Livre des Amours*, 1578.

> Pour se persuader qu'il ne rêvait pas, il se tuait à répéter tout bas : Le quai Voltaire, Les Tuileries, Le Louvre, La Concorde, Les Champs-Élysées, L'Arc de Triomphe, les arcades de la rue de Rivoli, Paris ! Ah, qu'il était beau mon village, mon Paris, notre Paris !… Paris, c'était Paris ! Il était à Paris ! Cet asphalte était l'asphalte parisien ! Ce ciel, le ciel de Paris ! La Seine ! Les ponts ! Heure exquise qui nous grise… (pp. 537-538)

In this paragraph, Guérin combines lyrics from the 1925 song about Paris, '*Ah, qu'il était beau mon village!',* by Jane Pierly with an extract from *The Merry Widow*, Act III.

Here, the interaction of free interior monologue and remembered (?), certainly interiorised, language is imbued with energy, and transports the narration far beyond the mundane. The fusion of words and phrases of disparate origin creates an unlikely patchwork, one which enables a particular and specific experience – that of World War II captivity – to be catapulted on to a plain which is cross-cultural, indeed universal. This is the trick missed by Malaquais: what is important is not the story, (as Guérin conceded, all of the stories were true and accurate), but the telling.[329] Difficult, challenging, often unpalatable, *Les Poulpes* through its stylistic innovation demonstrated the full potential of the *mythologie de la réalité* concept.

Epilogue

The Epilogue is absolutely distinct from the main text which precedes it, as is emphasised in the paratextual note at its conclusion which indicate the dates of its composition: (1944-1952) p. 571. It represents a further stylistic change, a reversion to the narrative format of *Parmi…* with its *longueurs* and retrospection, featuring especially the recourse to the Pluperfect.

It begins by signalling its own status in relation to the main text : 'Huit ans plus tard, l'océan démonté de la Sottise n'avait pas encore regagné ses rives. La vie, cependant, avait continué et le sablier du Temps, imperceptiblement, se vidait…*'* (p. 549) The intervening years are summarised through the observations about Monsieur Hermès by Delphine, who is best placed and equipped to evaluate the toll taken on him by the years in captivity ('Mon dieu ! qu'il avait l'air triste, qu'il était lointain, parfois !', p. 550). Following an awkward and relationship-ending interaction with his best friend Patrick Beaurepaire, Monsieur Hermès retreats further into himself. The description of his suffering is of a different register to that within the main text: 'Delphine voyait Monsieur Hermès jouer avec les chats sur la terrasse. […] C'est affreux, se disait-elle. C'est affreux d'imaginer ce qu'il endure, affreux d'être impuissante et désarmée devant cette obscure rétraction !' (p. 551)

[329] 'Ce que j'y disais n'était rien. J'avais la matière toute prête. C'était la façon dont c'était dit qui comptait.' Letter to Henri Calet, dated 6/1/54, in *Calet, Guérin Correspondance*, 2005, p. 287.

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Interposed next is a fictionalised account of the visit to Capri already related in *Du côté de chez Malaparte*. In classic Romantic mode Monsieur Hermès picks his way through the cemetery, and the narration becomes a bald list of those whose eternity he stands to share:

> Within this bit of foreign earth there lies the dust of two who loved this Italy… Selig sind die Toten. Sie ruhen von ihrer Arbeit und ihre Worke [sic] folgen ihnen nach… Ad Annina Pagano Morgano di venticinque anni appen istantaneamente strappata alle promesse della vita. […] All the works praise thee, O Lord… They are no dead… Bertha, loved wife of Harold Trower… Toutes les dates… 1808-1899… 1903-1932… 1895-1925… 1867-1906… 1830-1859… 1841-1914…(pp. 567-568)

In reflecting on himself, Monsieur Hermès is despondent : *Un heimatlos, un insurgé, un inadapté qui, pour échapper aux autres, en était réduit à tricher. Ses illusions ? Mortes ! Ses enthousiasmes ? Glacés !'* (p. 568). In a section beginning on p. 557 with the sentence 'Qu'avaient-elles été, pour Monsieur Hermès, ces huit années ? Rien de plus que le prolongement obscur de sa captivité', the writer sets out his vision of society in the post-war period, an era as he sees it dominated by large and unaccountable political entities. Using the incantation '*Pas morte, la Bête, pas morte du tout*' (first on p. 557, then pp. 559 and 560) he acknowledges the victory of the Minotaur, against which the weapons of the intellectual have proved to be inadequate. That this is the mood of the time of writing is made explicit:

> Il les revivait souvent, ces huit années lépreuses ! Il les avait vues à l'œuvre, ces fausses républiques qui avaient octroyé à leurs maires et à leurs préfets des prérogatives de satrapes et à leurs ministres des pouvoirs de tsars ! Il les avait vus, ces saltimbanques, gonflés de néant … (p. 561)

It is a mood which is underscored by the closing words of the text, again definitive in their appearance: 'Quelle humiliation que de vivre ! Quelle dérision que la vie ! Tout n'était toujours et partout, tout ne serait désormais, toujours et partout, que cauchemar et fantasmagorie…' (p. 571*)*.

The addition of the Epilogue is a weakening of the overall work, a misjudgement. The '*poétique'* on display in the main text is abandoned, not just at a linguistic and stylistic level but equally in the sophistication of the autofictional play, and replaced by a tone which is not dissimilar to that of the foreword, direct and emotion-laden.

Les Poulpes – a concluding appreciation

A commercial failure – sales of approximately 1500 only, to which, depending on his mood at the time, Guérin reacted either with dismay or elite self-satisfaction – *Les Poulpes* quickly became an irrelevance. Always cited in articles in the decades which followed as a text of quality, worthy of rediscovery,[330] its republication and second commercial demise in the 1980s ultimately caused the financial ruin of the publishing house Les Editions Le Tout sur le Tout.

[330] One example, the article by Marc Bernard, 'Chefs-d'œuvre oubliés', *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 28 décembre 1967.

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Perhaps underlying this consistent lack of popular approval is the challenge imposed by the language, or the sheer bulk of the work. Yet novels of this period - for example the work of Robbe-Grillet, Butor and other *Nouveaux Romanciers* - were not necessarily always an 'easy' read.

Another possibility is that presenting content of a dark and unpleasant nature in a way which was at times sanctimonious was unlikely to appeal. The open critiques of quiet collaborationism (the lack of attention in the written press to the plight of prisoners, the continuation of 'normal life', despite the wartime situation, which is vividly portrayed in Part VIII) are difficult for a post-war audience to confront, and with the passage of time inevitably lose their relevance. What is left, philosophically, is a hollow fury. The manifesto bubbling just under the surface of the main text, which increasingly begins to emerge in the second half of the book, becomes in the Epilogue overt and shrill. As we have seen above, this is the moment at which the text loses its head, the point at which a patient, highly skilled exposition of a deeply-held conviction becomes instead a polemic.

Which should not, however, detract from the overall achievement. This is, for all its flaws, a text which offers unique solutions to the challenges facing the writer, and – to return to the Malaquais article – demonstrates what can be done with base material. This is the third-person *journal*, elevating the experience of the individual – the personal narrative which is its ossature – beyond the local and specific, onto planes which are national, international and universal. A work of Surrealism, perhaps, but also a pioneering work of autofiction, taking real events and re-presenting them within an entirely imaginary context, thoroughly defamiliarised and yet instantly recognisable. At a technical level this is an ingenious work, perhaps a commercial failure but nonetheless a glorious one.

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Section 4 – '*Mythes*'

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What is *mythe*?

> Myth is everything and nothing at the same time. It is the true story or the false one, revelation or deception, sacred or vulgar, real or fictional, symbol or tool, archetype or stereotype. **[..]** Myth is about the gods, but often also the ancestors and sometimes certain men. It is 'Genesis' and 'General Strike', 'Twentieth Century' and 'Cowboy', 'Oedipus' and 'Frankenstein', 'Master Race' and 'Chosen People', 'Millennium' and 'Eternal Return'. […] It is charter, recurring theme, character type, received idea, half-truth or just a plain lie.[331]

The definition of the term '*myth'* is no easy undertaking. Strensky pithily expresses the full reach of the definitions of *mythe* in *Grand Larousse*[332] (six) and *Le Grand Robert* [333] (five).

The first entries in both dictionaries contain common elements.[334] *Mythe* is a '*récit'*, which makes it a narrative medium[335] with (probably) a heterodiegetic structure (that is, the continuation of the oral tradition in literature, a narrator telling a story about another person or entity). It is unlikely to include homodiegetic or first-person delivery, although this cannot be completely excluded (for example, within a heterodiegetic narrative, an embedded first-person narration).

The locus of *mythe* is the '[temps] fabuleux', perhaps indicating the primordial time identified by Eliade as being intrinsic to myth.[336] Use of the term 'fabuleux', however, retains the possibility that the time of myth can be actual, lived time, after a 'beginning' but remote from us by having elapsed a long time ago.

As Strensky observes, myths do not necessarily require extraordinary central figures – for example, the myth of the General Strike – but their presence is a conspicuous feature. The precise nature of the central figure emerges with the myth: it could be a human, a supernatural being, a force. If human, the figure may or may not be anchored within a particular chronology, but does have the capacity to be connected with or involved in documented historical events. This figure exists therefore on two planes: the historical and the supernatural.

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[331] Ivan Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth Century History. Cassirer, Eliade, Lévi-Strauss and Malinowski* (London: Macmillan, 1987) p. 1.
[332] *Grand Larousse de la langue française 1971-1978.*
[333] *Le Grand Robert de la langue française 2001.*
[334] Larousse : 'Récit des temps fabuleux mettant en scène des héros ou des dieux, et qui, sous une forme allégorique, traduit une grande généralité, historique, physique, philosophique ou sociale'. Robert : 'Récit fabuleux, le plus souvent d'origine populaire, qui met en scène des êtres incarnant sous une forme symbolique des forces de la nature, des aspects du génie ou de la condition de I'humanité'.
[335] Käte Hamburger, *The Logic of Fiction*. Second Revised edition, translated by Marilynn J. Rose, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1973. Originally published in German as *Die Logik der Dichtung*, Fourth edition, Stuttgart 1994. First published 1957.
[336] 'Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the "beginnings". In other words, myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality. […] Myth, then, is always an account of a "creation"; it relates how something was produced, began to be... *'* Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964; first published in New York: Harper & Row, 1963) pp. 5-6.

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This possibility is expressed in the second Larousse definition[337] which interestingly focuses less on the 'individual' of historical fact than on the '*personnage'* that the myth makes of him/her. It is '*tradition'*, that is the work of generations to re-present the figure, and the new cultural artefact thus obtained, that is important. All myths are palimpsests and ready to be 'transformed', that is removed from being a true and accurate reflection of referential fact and to become a work of literature.

Some figures – as Larousse terms it, '*dieux'* – are clearly supernatural, occupying a terrain which is that of belief or faith, and not objectively provable. It is not however certain that the supernatural beings identified under the term by Eliade all qualify as 'gods'.

The symbolic or allegorical status of myth is central, but not universally acknowledged. [338] Myth is often an act of translation, that is making intelligible in one form something which would otherwise be unintelligible. This process is always a matter of choice, a decision about how to render the event (or custom or other) into language, with the attendant caveat on all translation that the fullest sense or meaning may not be adequately conveyed. Many theories of myth contend that stories emerge and evolve organically. Lévi-Strauss declares that the source of myth is myth is itself.[339]

The processes of myth

Segal[340] distinguishes between the approaches to myth on the one hand of Tylor (who demythicises) and Bultmann (who demythologises).

The former is the practice of seeking empirical and evidential explanation for the phenomena described by myths. Using the example of Noah's Ark, under this approach evidence would be sought of an actual worldwide flood, whilst dismissing the miraculous notion of an ark harbouring all species.

To demythologise, on the other hand, is to read myth symbolically. Under this approach, the mythology is not eliminated or 'demythicised', but on the contrary preserved as its true, symbolic meaning emerges. Segal asserts that 'Demythologised, myth ceases to be about the world and turns out to be about the human *experience* of the world'. The flood would in this model be seen as a symbolic statement about the precarious nature of human life.

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[337] 'Représentation d'un fait ou d'un personnage ayant eu une existence historique, mais dont l'imagination populaire ou la tradition a considérablement transformé le caractère réel.'

[338] J. B. Tylor, for instance, considers myth as the primitive equivalent of Science, and the function of myth as that of explaining observed natural events. For Malinowski, myth explains the origin of a natural event, but contends that nothing can be done about them, even by recourse to magic. Lévi-Strauss' approach is also at a considerable distance from the allegorical one, seeking patterns of opposition within myths which are structural and appear to exist across primitive groups in disparate areas.

[339] 'Thus, our method eliminates a problem which has been so far one of the main obstacles to the progress of mythological studies, namely the quest for the true version or the earlier one. On the contrary, we define myth as consisting of all its versions; to put it otherwise: a myth remains the same as long as it is felt as such.' Claude Levi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth' in *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 68, No. 270, Myth: A Symposium (Oct.-Dec., 1955), pp 428-444, download http://www.jstor.org/ Mon Jul 11 17:20:01 2005 (Section 4.11.2 p. 435).

[340] Robert A Segal, *Myth: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP 2004, second edition 2015) pp 37-38.

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Neither of these two approaches fully matches our reception of Guérin's *mythes*. Whilst references to real events are embedded in the texts, the 'explanation' as such is of a different nature. Equally, whilst Guérin's *mythes* do certainly examine human experience, they do so in the context of a particular type of human rather than generalising about the fate of humanity.

In an article in *Quinzaine Littéraire*[341] Claude Murcia introduced a third term, '*démythification'*, for the process of stripping the mythical stories of their mythical elements, by transforming them into – for example, as in the case of Empédocle – human stories of unrealised love. Murcia sees this as an inadvertent by-product of a form of narration – the treating of a mythical subject in a Realist way – but in fact it seems to be the conscious principle underlying it. In this study, to describe the process of adopting small-scale or human explanations for inexplicable or supposedly supernatural circumstances we adopt the term '*demythification'*, but in the work of Guérin two other processes seem also to be operating.

The first we propose to call '*remythification'*. This will be used to describe the action of presenting, through the prism of the central *personnage*, a narrative by proxy about the writer, a projection which incorporates the writer's actual experiences and world view embedded within an entirely mythological context.

The second, '*metamythification'*, is a device by which the myth foregrounds the processes of its own formulation. It actively explores (and exposes) the development and deployment of the mythemes which underpin it.

Guérin's corpus list and the 'mythical'

In the liminary pages to *Les Poulpes*, the corpus list comprises six *mythes*, of which only two were ever published. [342] Other than their appearance here, nothing is known of *Fini L'Opéra* and *Hermès Blues*. The intention to produce *Les Arlequins* was evident in its appearance in corpus lists from 1945 onwards. Claude-Henri Rocquet remembers Guérin's describing it as a Renaissance-style drama, very dense and with an extensive character list, and likely to last 8 to 10 hours. There was also some reality to *Diotima.*[343]

Of the published works, it would be difficult to assert any commonality at a structural or enunciatory level, and certainly neither could be described as bearing the recognised features of a narrative as articulated by Käte Hamburger.

In *La Confession..* a homodiegetic narrator uses the experiences of his own life to present as truths observations about contemporary France. The inclusion of the term '*confession'* within the title contradicts the narratival expectations of the '*récit'* format inherent within the myth. Unexpectedly, we are confronted with a homodiegetic and autobiographical style of narration, importing into the reader's mind issues surrounding *pacte* and authorial sincerity.

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[341] 'Diogène parmi nous' in *Quinzaine Littéraire* 368, 1/4/82, p. 13; article reproduced on p. 13 of *Présence de Raymond Guérin.*

[342] *La Confession de Diogène (1947)* – hereafter referred to as *La Confession…, Empédocle (1949), Les Arlequins, Diotima, Fini l'Opéra, Hermès Blues.*

[343] On *Diotima* and *Les Arlequins* : 'Avec Raymond Guérin, Propos recueillis par C-H Rocquet' in *Guérin, Bordeaux, La Tête Vide* ; Association La Tête Vide, Bordeaux : Mai 1985.

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Empédocle, on the other hand, functions ostensibly as a drama.[344] Preceded by an authorial preface, the text is presented in script form with detailed directions for a production and is therefore not a '*récit*' in any sense, containing neither narration nor narrator.

A review of the 'individuals' ('*héros'*, '*dieux'* or '*personnages'*) might better enable us to define Guérin's conception of 'the mythical'.

Hermes, messenger of the Gods, is recognisably a supernatural being, a 'God' of Greek mythology possessed of powers beyond the comprehension or attainment of the ordinary man.

Diogenes, Empedocles and Diotima are marginal figures, at best, in any putative hierarchy of Greek mythological figures. Empedocles may, or may not, have had some 'supernatural' characteristics. Even then, Guérin is careful – within the preface – to identify the character as the child or product of the geographical location in which he is writing the text [345].

Empedocles enjoyed some notoriety in Sicily. The story about the finding of his slippers on the slopes of Etna fomented local legends that were sufficiently widely known to have found their way into the *The Lives and Opinions of Famous Philosophers.*[346] These tales were the probable source of the mystical embellishments, bestowing on Empedocles powers that in the mind of the citizens took him to the level of the gods.

Diogenes is a figure on the margins of society, conspicuous through the manner of his rejection of the precepts of the Greek state and (in)famous for his displays of anti-social behaviour. His sayings and deeds are reported by Diogenes Laertius[347], and he was also the subject of at least one monument. Nonetheless, this is a curious 'hero'.

Diotima is known only as a character in Plato's *Symposium*. The information about her is unreliable: it is not possible, for example, even to be certain if Diotima really lived or was simply a creation of Plato.[348]

'The mythical' thus appears in the main to be a collection of worthy lives lived by the insignificant, a saints' catalogue in the traditional sense. Madelénat [349] has suggested that these lives of saints constitute one primitive form of what later evolved into the biographical format, whilst containing – inevitably – an element of the hagiographic or mystical.

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[344] Guérin declined all requests to bring the play to the theatre, for example that of Louis Jouvet, the theatre director, reported in *Combat* magazine (12/6/1951). Guérin reportedly replied: 'je ne suis pas de ces auteurs qui se prostituent pour se faire jouer. Je ne changerai pas une ligne à mon texte.' Jouvet decided against the production. In the August-September 1951 edition of *Contemporains*, the critic B.F. described *Empédocle* as an 'essai sous forme de pièce de théâtre'.

[345] '*Agrigente le 23 juillet 1935* / C'est donc là! / Là, sur ces hauteurs, un peu à l'écart de la ville autrefois somptueuse où il a longtemps vécu, qu'Empédocle vient de nous apparaître. […] c'est comme si l'éclatante lumière qui émanait de lui continuait encore, aujourd'hui, à transfigurer le paysage*'*. (Guérin, 1950), p. 9.

[346] Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives and Opinions of Famous Philosophers:* Book VIII.

[347] Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives and Opinions of Famous Philosophers:* Book VI, *The Cynics*.

[348] Recent scholarship has argued that Plato uses the fiction of Diotima to appropriate a feminine form of philosophical inquiry. Such a *dédoublement* or bi-gendering would appeal to Guérin: this is one of the aspects of self-exploration that is seen in *L'Apprenti*, for example.

[349] Daniel Madelénat, *La Biographie* (Paris : PUF, 1984) pp. 32-33.

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On the basis of the two published works, Guérin's *mythes* could be said to correspond broadly to '*légendes'* under Larousse definition 6, or Robert II, 1.[350] Intriguingly, the *espace auto-mythologique* could be held to contain no '*mythes'* [351]

What underlay Guérin's fascination with these particular figures?

The attraction of Diogenes is obvious. An outsider, quick-witted, unafraid to speak (a version of the) truth to power, capable of both the most ethereal and the most base forms of behaviour or utterance and possessed of a commitment to sincerity, all of these are qualities admired by Guérin. The same is true of Empedocles, at least the aspects of the individual most illuminated by Guérin: sporting prowess, initially the victim of intellectual isolationism by a current orthodoxy, later to become labelled by Aristotle as the inventor of rhetoric, a 'champion of freedom' and a disrespector of rules. [352]

The coincidence of the writer Guérin and the qualities of the two heroes is not accidental. Guérin's *mythes* are the locus of a repurposing of myth, its transformation into a form of autonarration, a text about the self in a new guise. At the same time the impression of the self is enhanced by its elision with that of a figure from classical tradition. Guérin as Diogenes, Guérin as Empedocles, these are provocative and exciting representations of the writer in contemporary society.

The two published works are clearly not in the 'primordial time' of Eliade but embody a legendary past, distant from the present but nonetheless elapsed time. What is being presented to the reader is a work of fiction which incorporates a 'character', the events of whose life are broadly reflected in the text but only as a starting point for a new narrative. *Empédocle* explores a particular moment in the character's life; *La Confession…* creates '*a Life*', respecting its typical cadences and chronology whilst incorporating the mythemes of two specific lives – that of *Diogène*, and that of the writer.

The time of 'the mythical' is seen to be a constant: 'the mythical' is all around us today just as it was in this distant past. There is no need to resort to the '*temps fabuleux*' since we too are living in one.

In terms of an allegorical reading, whilst *La Confession…*'s overt didacticism largely excludes this, *Empédocle* could be represented to be an allegorical study of outsidership, a reflection on the repercussions of a society's uninformed, opinionated short-termism. This, however, is only one of several threads rather than its predominant feature.

Conclusion – what are '*mythes"*?

In terms of scale, neither *La Confession..* nor *Empédocle* communicate 'une grande généralité'. Guérin's 'mythical' is rather a quasi-legendary treatment of the lives of particular

[350] *Larousse* 6. 'Représentation, souvent flatteuse, mais plus ou moins déformée par l'imagination, de faits, de personnages réels'. *Robert* II 1. 'Récit populaire traditionnel, plus ou moins fabuleux, qui a souvent un fondement historique'.

[351] In the journal *Europe*, dated July/August 1951, J. Gaucheron quotes Guérin as declaring that *Empédocle* 'n'est qu'une rêverie spéculatrice autour d'une légende'.

[352] Ironically, other recuperations of Empedocles – the accusations of *hubris* – coincide with perceptions of Guérin, for example after his death by Paulhan.

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individuals, reflecting the work of the popular imagination or tradition in expressing their deeds and sayings and the consequent reworking of their identity.

More pertinently, myth permits considerable latitude to the teller. As the following chapters will substantiate, in Guérin's *mythes*, the relevant mythemes provide the base material for autonarration of an innovative kind, the repurposing of one *Life* to tell a story about another ('*Remythification'*), whilst at the same time exploring and exposing the processes at the heart of myth itself ('*Metamythification'*).

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'La Confession de Diogène*, un livre-étape'*.[353] What made this such a water-shed text?

Conceived in the 1930s, first drafted in 1939, revised throughout the writer's period of military service and captivity 1940-3, and revised again following Guérin's release in 1945, *La Confession de Diogène*[354] was finally published in 1947. These are the bare outlines of a project which preoccupied Guérin for over a decade. The result is a problematic text which challenges the reader constantly, not at a conceptual or thematic level but in terms of how it ought to be received. Whilst ostensibly offering the imagined reflections of a Greek figure on his life and times, this text bears any number of readings, and overtly flaunts it.

Identification with the Cynic

As the peritext informs us, the first draft of *La Confession..* was completed in the summer of 1939.[355] It was during his period of military service and captivity that in the writer's mind the parallels of his own experiences and those of Diogenes became more compelling. Guérin's wartime journal, *Le Temps de la Sottise*, is littered with references to Diogenes. Almost from the moment of his mobilisation he looks to Diogenes as an example, a mechanism by which Guérin perceived the possibility of surviving his ordeal and constructing his own personality. In the face of slavery and wars, Guérin comments, Diogenes 'a su sauver le meilleur de lui-même'. He continues : 'je me félicite donc de prendre contexte de ces épreuves pour me rapprocher un peu de cet état de sagesse auquel était parvenu Diogène le Sinopien … *'* [356]

'Becoming' Diogenes is part of an ongoing process : *'Pour ma part, je me surprends en ce temps de sottise à faire quelques pas vers cet état de perfection et de sagesse auquel Diogène était parvenu'* (Vol I, p. 59). Diogenes provides the template for behaviour ('Tel Diogène enfin, je m'efforce de faire bonheur de tout.' Vol III, p.27) as well as a stable point against which to measure oneself ('quel mauvais Diogène je fais actuellement', Vol III, p. 61).

Using Diogenes in this way sustained Guérin throughout his incarceration. In an entry dated 5th May 1943 (six months before his release), Guérin reminds himself that, in order to become, like Diogenes, a citizen of the world, he would need to extend to all men 'cette indifférence et ce mépris lucide' (Vol VIII, p. 202). The desire to be the 'other' is manifest. Guérin is determined to move towards 'ce détachement suprême, ce visage hautain et sarcastique de Diogène' (Vol VIII, p. 99).

As Guérin observes, he and Diogenes are brothers in arms ('je n'évoque pas sans un sentiment de fraternité le destin d'un Diogène', Vol III, p. 100). In fact, consciously, Guérin has begun to treat their ordeals as equivalent: 'Je continue à rédiger La Confession..., comparant son destin qui fût d'être esclave au mien qui est de l'être aussi sous une autre forme' (Vol I, p. 122 ; entry dated 22nd November 1939).

In a later entry, following the completion of revisions to the initial text on which he had been working in captivity, Guérin comments: 'Et à ce moment, je ne pus m'empêcher de penser au

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[353] Raymond Guérin, interviewed by Martial Bardinet, *Nouvelle République du Sud-Ouest (Bordeaux)*, 8/10/54.
[354] Paris: Gallimard, 1947. All references will be to this edition of the text. Hereafter the text will be referred to as *La Confession…*
[355] '*Corinthe, Mykonos, Delphes (Eté 1939) Le Pyla (Eté 1945)*', p. 314.
[356] *Le Temps de la Sottise*, Vol I, p. 30 ; BLJD.

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sort de Diogène dont j'avais peu de temps avant commenté les aventures sans imaginer que j'aurais l'occasion de les vivre à mon tour.' (Vol III, p. 54).

Sources

The major source for information on Diogenes is the entry in Diogenes Laertius' *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* (Vol VI, Section 2). Rambling, repetitive, diffuse, this is one of the longest entries of the entire work. To compose the 'life', Diogenes Laertius relies principally on a vast number of '*chreiai'* (apophthegms or witty retorts) which are attributed to Diogenes, although in many cases the attribution is disputed. Sayre [357] contends that the origin of the *chreiai* is extremely suspect, and that many were written at least a century after the Cynic's death. According to D.R. Dudley 'few or none of these stories are likely to be authentic. Some are obvious inventions for setting in opposition the Cynic and the evil tyrant : or the man of common sense and the 'sophist'; others involve chronological impossibilities'.[358]

In terms of biographical facts, there are actually very few. Sayre [359] contends that we only have three verifiable pieces of information about Diogenes, Navia puts this figure at four.[360] Everything else that is asserted to be a fact about Diogenes is suspect. The 'Diogenes' that is depicted by Diogenes Laertius is thus absolutely mythical, a product of several centuries of voices, each introducing to the narrative its own emphasis or direction. In transforming this 'Diogenes' into the *Diogène* of *La Confession…*, Guérin is actually composing the confession of an idea, a literary construct.

R. Bracht Branham echoes the view expressed by Bakhtin, of Diogenes as 'a deeply novelized figure'[361]. 'Diogenes' is an available and almost empty rhetorical mould, ready to be filled in whatever manner the writer wishes.

'Filling the void' – the first hints of autonarration

A number of critics identified the detail of 'information' within the text as one of its strengths.[362] The elaboration of this work was not without its dangers. Some contemporaries, a number of whom, through their correspondence with Guérin, were aware of the writer's identification of himself with some of the experiences and many of the attitudes of the Cynic,

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[357] Farrand Sayre, *The Greek Cynics* (Baltimore: Furst, 1948) p. 45.
[358] Donald. R. Dudley, *A History of Cynicism - From Diogenes to the 6th Century A.D*. (London: Methuen, 1937) p. 29. In a footnote Dudley adds: 'Perhaps some of the apophthegms, however they have later been 'contaminated' in detail, did originate with Diogenes; no doubt his reputation served as a magnet which would attract to itself a good story; lastly, the source of several such stories may be Bion of Borysthenes, who himself possessed a pretty wit'.
[359] Sayre, 1948. p. 50.
[360] Navia, L.E., *Diogenes of Sinope: The Man in the Tub* (Westport, CT, 1998, p. 84) quoted by Will Desmond *in Diogenes of Sinope* in: *Early Greek Ethics*, Edited by: David Conan Wolfsdorf, (Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 651-679, endnote 5.
[361] *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and Its Legacy*, Edited by R. Bracht Branham and Marie-Odile Goulet-Caze (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) p. 86.
[362] For example Maurice Nadeau on *La Confession…*, in *Littérature présente* (Paris : Corrêa, 1952) : 'on louera même Guérin de sa reconstitution patiente et documentée ..' ; Claude Murcia, 'Diogène parmi nous', *Quinzaine Littéraire* 368, 01/04/82, p. 13 : 'Guérin fait l'impossible pour conférer à son Diogène une valeur de vérité historique : le récit des guerres, l'analyse de la situation politique, la présence des figures historiques et intellectuelles, tout est là pour authentifier la narration.'

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were able to see immediately the process that Guérin had put in train, and began to receive the text in a quite unanticipated way. The first hint of this had come in a letter to Guérin from Jean Grenier:

> Et vous reconstituez un homme entier, vivant, et de quelle vie ! Cette vie n'est si intense d'ailleurs que parce qu'elle est la vôtre, et que votre modèle et votre autoportrait se rapprochent au point de coïncider parfois. Nous sommes plutôt dans les temps modernes avec les autres personnages dont j'ai reconnu facilement certains.[363]

The fact that certain characters ('personnages modernes') were 'recognisable' intrigued Guérin - 'vous m'intéressez' - and he sought clarification from Grenier over which 'portraits' may need to be removed 's'ils risquent d'être tendancieux'. Whilst we do not have Grenier's reply, we can judge from Guérin's next letter (dated 26/04/47)[364] that Grenier had thought many of the models for the characters described in the text were contemporary French writers. Guérin dismissed this: 'Ni Jean Paulhan, ni Jouhandeau, ni d'autres ne sont modèles.. les coïncidences sont involontaires'.

The capacity for *La Confession…* to bear this kind of reading was real. As Kauffmann states: 'Arland, Paulhan se reconnaîtront dans certains portraits – Etiemble est persuadé d'avoir servi de modèle à Xénocrate.' (Kauffmann, 2007, pp. 206-207). An informed reader of the period, already aware of Guérin's previous work, would have been able to receive the text in the same way. The observation of Jean Paulhan, ostensibly commending the depth of the scholarship underlying the representation of Diogène, is characteristically arch: '.. vous le [Diogenes] connaissez mieux que moi. Et l'on sent très bien, que vous le connaissez).' [365]

Building the '*autoportrait'* – autonarration through *remythification*

That Guérin continued in the postwar period to perceive the two entities, himself and Diogenes, as almost interchangeable, is clear from the correspondence. In a letter to Paulhan, dated 23/11/1946, whilst accepting Paulhan's objections to aspects of his depiction of *Diogène*, Guérin maintains that his own representation ('Diogène devait être, en réalité, un bonhomme assez simpliste, bonimenteur, tantôt farceur, tantôt grognon, mais presque toujours sentencieux et solonnel'), at odds with the familiar picture of the Cynic, is nonetheless valid. 'C'est ainsi que j'ai voulu qu'il se peigne, dans sa Confession' he continues, using a phrase full of significance, (Diogène will express himself, but only in the manner of my choosing; in a confession which, albeit in his name, is produced under my control), 'et d'autant plus que je ne me suis pas sans me connaître des travers presque identiques.' Having lifted the veil, Guérin goes on to make the point absolutely explicit:

> Au fond, il devait y avoir autant de différence entre un rouspéteur verveux comme Diogène et des esprits subtils et universels comme Platon, Aristote, Plotin etc…, qu'il peut en exister aujourd'hui entre un primitif comme moi et Jean Paulhan, Groethuysen, Jean-Paul Sartre (le philosophe) ou Maurice Blanchot. Je vois d'autant mieux les limites de Diogène que je sens mieux les miennes.

[363] *brouillon* of letter received Spring 1947; reply written by Guérin 12/3/47. BN, Fonds Grenier.
[364] BN, Fonds Grenier.
[365] Letter Jean Paulhan – Raymond Guérin; received by Guérin 24/1/47, and to which Guérin replied the same day. Fonds Guérin, BLJD.

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A similar point is made a month later (26/12/1946) in correspondence with Jean Grenier. Guérin says of his portrait of *Diogène* 'je l'ai fait tel que je le sentais'. In a subsequent letter, Guérin compliments Grenier on his intelligent reading of the draft sent to him:

> [Vous êtes] le seul à avoir su voir ce que j'avais tenté, en réalité. J'avais en effet constaté plus d'un point commun entre le destin de *Diogène* et le mien, entre ses conceptions de la vie et les miennes. D'où l'autoportrait esquissé, avec les artifices commodes du changement d'époque. Et puis il est/était amusant de mettre en jeu, grâce à lui, le mythe de l'homme libre qu'aucun de nous ne peut être aujourd'hui. Du reste, tout cela n'est, au fond, qu'un divertissement (que jadis j'aurais rêvé plus souriant et moins hargneux ; mais l'époque est si ignoble, la vie réduite à une farce si honteuse que j'en ai subi l'influence).[366]

Guérin is effectively stating that the picture of the Cynic would have been different if he, Guérin, had not been living in such troubled times. Notwithstanding the ambivalence of the term '*autoportrait'*, it is now confirmed that the subject of the confession is depicted according to the mood or experiences of the writer at the time. This is not referential integrity. The relationship of subject and writer is symbiotic, and remains susceptible to change.

On the basis of the initial insight - Guérin surviving his ordeal in the manner of Diogenes, by implication Diogenes surviving his fate in the manner of Guérin - by extension, re-sorting and re-presenting the events of a life to complement the chronology of another life becomes conceivable, if it is considered that the events in themselves contain equivalence. The logic of myth (the 'mythemes' identified by Lévi-Strauss) begins to overlap with the logic of autonarration, to create a space in which it is possible to talk about the self using the events of another life, or meshing the chronology. This is *remythification*.

In a 'confessional' text, this 're-sorting' is problematic. First, in its deviation from a putative commitment to accuracy; second, in its inconsistency in the treatment of time, no longer scrupulously attentive to its passage but flexible. In this, however, *La Confession…* is betraying its mixed parentage, the dalliance with myth: as Lévi-Strauss observes, providing the 'mythemes' are incorporated, in whatever order, the integrity of a particular myth is satisfied. Given that the 'mythemes' of the Diogenes myth are principally anecdotes, witticisms, gossip - the writer uses as 'fact' pertaining to the life of the Cynic the narration of events based on '*chreiai'* which he himself knew to have been subject to the distorting processes of legend [367] - they offer the teller a high degree of latitude in the relating of the myth, the flexibility to incorporate mythemes where his/her narrative permits.

The existence of acknowledged 'content' – 'mythemes' - and an available rhetorical mould provides an opportunity, an empty space to be filled. In order to 'create' Diogenes, the basic details of the myth needed to be almost literally fleshed out. To do this, whilst maintaining the conceit that narration was in the hands of Diogenes, Guérin incorporated a vast amount of himself. The 'self' that emerges from *La Confession …* is an autonarrational *remythified* self,[368] a self possessed of mythical and enduring qualities.

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[366] Unpublished letter dated 12/3/47. BN, Fonds Grenier.

[367] 'Il y a évidemment une légende de Diogène qui traîne partout [...] de même que ses apostrophes (qui sont tout ce qui nous reste de lui)'. Unpublished letter to Jean Paulhan, 21/11/46, Fonds Guérin, BLJD.

[368] 'C'est évidemment en filigrane Ray, ou tout au moins un Ray qui aspire à une représentation idéale' p. 205; Déjà se dessine la figure de Guérin, écrivain urticant, solitaire, peu fréquentable'. p. 206 ; 'Ce Diogène

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Broadly observing the sketchy outlines of Diogenes' lifespan (born Sinope 412 or 404 BC, died Corinth 323 BC, with a total life of approximately 90 years), the detail of *La Confession …* is drawn from Guérin's own experiences and views. Guérin's take on the critical incident of the Cynic's childhood - his father Icésius' alleged counterfeiting [369] - is idiosyncratic. Guérin's Icésius is held to be motivated by personal financial gain, and that as a result of his misdemeanour his son was condemned to a life in exile. This representation of Icésius echoes that of the fathers in *Quand…* (1941) and *L'Apprenti* (1946). Icésius is recognisably a creature of Guérin's world.

The same is true of *Laïs*, the partner of *Diogène*. The Cynic's initial encounter with *Laïs* contains strong echoes of Guérin's account of his first meeting with Sonia on the beach at Le Pyla in 1937. The Lais of antiquity was described in uncompromising terms by contemporary sources,[370] but in this manifestation she is the very incarnation of purity and ethereal beauty.[371] Guérin's narrator acknowledges the popular rumours surrounding *Laïs* and refutes them vigorously:

> Laïs, la charmante Laïs, quelles sottises on a répandues sur son compte. A force de légendes et de potins, n'avait-on pas fini par faire d'elle une courtisane, et même une courtisane célèbre.
>
> Je veux bien, alors, que Laïs ait été ce que les messieurs de bonne vie ont dit d'elle. Laïs, dont la sincérité, justement fut sans égale.
>
> C'était à qui se vanterait d'avoir eu de ses faveurs. Si peu les eurent, au demeurant, que les vantards furent légion. (1947, p. 56)

The last line quoted will become familiar to readers of *Parmi Tant d'Autres Feux* (1948), in which the same is said of Delphine, another projection of Sonia.

Given that the life 'borrowed' exceeded the length of the life lived, and by a considerable margin at the time the text was written, *La Confession…* provided an opportunity for an autonarrational experiment, a kind of speculative autonarration in which the self is projected forwards in a manner which respects the reported biographical trajectory of Diogenes whilst incorporating idealised views about the developing self. In the description of the evolving *Diogène* lies a fascinating speculation by the writer about his own ageing. Youth was prized by Guérin and he made every effort to retain its appearance. His consciousness of age thresholds was acute, as seen not just in his published writing (*L'Apprenti* – 20; *Zobain*, *Parmi Tant d'Autres Feux* – 30; *Les Poulpes* – 40) but also in his

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autodidacte, bourru, querelleur… n'est autre que Guérin, un Guérin qui juge d'ailleurs sans pitié l'ambiguïté de son personnage,' p. 207 ; all quotations from Kauffmann, 2007 ; letter from Henri Calet to Raymond Guérin, (12/2/40): 'J'aime beaucoup votre Confession. C'est une œuvre pénétrante, de très précieuse qualité où votre personne apparaît partout en filigrane d'une façon bien sympathique.' in *Calet, Guérin Correspondance*, 2005, p. 55.

[369] The whole concept of the counterfeit, of debasing the coinage, became a central tenet of Diogenes' 'thought'. Metaphorically, it described his attack on convention in all forms, moral, religious, political and linguistic.

[370] See the entry in *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman biography and mythology.* By various writers. Ed. by William Smith. Boston: Little, Brown and co., 1867. Online at University of Michigan Library, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=moa;idno=ACL3129.0002.001

[371] 'dès cette minute, celle qui devait par la suite prendre tant d'autres personnifications, semblait être Thétis elle-même sortant de la mer…' (1947, p. 60).

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private correspondence [372] and especially throughout *La Confession …*. At 50 (p. 219); at 60 (p. 246); at 76 (pp. 288-289) and finally at 90 (p. 304), the writer makes suppositions about his own physical development, creating as it were an autonarration based on predictive typical experience.

It is in this section of the narrative that the scrambling of the time frames becomes most problematic for the reader. Is it, for example, the ancient *Diogène* or the contemporary one who asserts his relevance to fellow free-thinkers of the future: 'je n'ai cessé de correspondre silencieusement avec ceux des siècles futurs, quels qu'ils fussent, en lesquels revivraient sans défaillance les instincts qui m'avaient animé et qui embellissaient chacune de mes heures corinthiennes' (p. 233).

The ability of the ancient *Diogène* to justify himself ('des notions que j'aurais pu aujourd'hui encore exposer et défendre sans avoir trop à rougir', p. 230) is equally that of the contemporary voice, projecting his own future reception.

The main text

As the reader enters the '*première partie'*, (s)he is greeted with a declaration which will shape the whole narrative:

> On m'a appelé Diogène le cynique, citoyen de l'univers, chien royal, que sais-je encore ? et je suis né à Sinope, mais je crois que j'aurais tout aussi bien pu naître à Paris si cette ville avait existé de mon temps. (1947, p. 11)

The single sentence is encompassing of three levels of narrative about Diogenes. First, that of legacy, a weight of labels and interpretations that come together to create the mythical identity. Second, the voice of the 'real' Diogenes, the one (at least, so it is said) born in Sinope. Third, the perspective of the imaginary, revived and/or eternal Diogenes, a contemporary aware of not only the existence of a city called Paris but possessed of understanding of the reality of life in that city. '*Je*' in this sentence has two referents, potentially three if that of '*que sais-je'* is treated as independent of the 'contemporary' '*je'*. On the surface we may be in receipt of the first-person narrative of our confessional expectations, but in reality this text at most pays it lip service.

The text continues:

> Avoir été contemporain de Denys l'ancien ou d'Alexandre, avoir commencé ma route avec l'un, l'avoir achevée avec l'autre, ne change rien non plus à l'affaire. Je n'aurais pas été mieux servi par le destin, que je sache, si j'avais dû subir les aimables caprices des tyranniques croque-mitaines du XXe siècle. (p. 11)

By the end of paragraph one, the direction to be taken by the narration is established. Rather than simply documentary of ancient Greece, the discourse of this text is always potentially ambivalent in its reference. The fact that the narrator(s) intend to share subjective opinions is clearly signalled in the final line quoted above. The sarcasm of 'aimables caprices', the ridicule and disdain contained within the words 'tyranniques croque-mitaines' cannot be in any way received as neutral. The contemporary '*je*' is not an objective time

[372] Letter to Sonia Raymond Guérin, 15/10/43 : 'Le visage est le même qu'en 39. Mais on se voit mal hélas ! le trouverez-vous vieilli, ridé. Mais la lèvre est toujours sensuelle, l'œil vif, le teint clair.' in *Raymond Guérin : Lettres à Sonia*, 2005, p. 305.

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traveller, recently arrived and untouched by current affairs, but clearly a member of the society which he is attacking, with defined opinions. The sincere, unexpurgated expression of opinions which '*confession'* appeared to promise is to be delivered, but not exclusively from the source which the title suggested.

Who is '*je"*?

Indecision over the identity of a first-person narrator is not generally the terrain of myth. It is, however, that of *La Confession …*. A perception that doubt existed in the mind of the writer is detectable in the attempts towards the end of the book to contain it. Twice the narration includes the phrase '*moi, Diogène*' (pp. 203, 278), as if the reader needed to be reminded of its source.

'*je'* in this text is a crowded concept, often infused with a tone which goes beyond the asides of an imagined narrator. First, there is the conspiratorial aside from narrator to reader which at times does not register as the voice of a returning *Diogène*. 'Et qui donc n'est pas bête, une fois ou l'autre, dans sa vie, je le demande humblement ?' asks the everyman narrator appealing to our everyman (p. 83).

Second, there is the '*je'* which appears or purports to be that of the returning *Diogène* but, to an informed reader, simply cannot be. For example, in the discussion of sexual practices, '*Diogène'* expresses his open advocacy of masturbation, but does not stop there : 'je ne sais pas un homme, en dehors de moi, qui ait eu le front de défendre par l'écrit cette honorable et universelle pratique du plaisir,' (p. 88). This utterance is problematic: not only is there no record of Diogenes having published a work on masturbation, his very status as a 'writer' at all is questionable. In addition, the informed reader of 1947 will be acutely conscious of the furore of 1946 surrounding the publication of *L'Apprenti*, the first volume of Guérin's *Ebauche*, in which the leading character's addiction to masturbation was a central (and widely discussed) theme. This would support an entirely different reception of the utterance.

Those with a knowledge of Guérin's recent publications and public utterances would place their own construction on his comment on Xénophon (p. 186) [373]; the commentary on spectating on sports (p. 191) would come as a surprise to those familiar with Diogenes – for whom the concept of sport itself was alien, and who advocated a regime of just sufficient exercise to maintain the body but no more - but less so those with an acquaintance with *L'Apprenti* ; whilst it is difficult to sustain an argument which would reliably connect an observation towards the end of the text with *Diogène*: 'toutefois, j'ai plaisir (défaut de vieil homme de lettres qui ne se résigne pas à lâcher sa plume)..', (p. 299). In these instances the project, the coalescence of two lives or the narration of one life through the intermediary of another, becomes detectable.

In places, it is hard to isolate which authority is responsible for the narration. The two *Diogènes*, ancient and contemporary; the received narrative of history; the narrator of shared experience, usually referred to as '*on'* but occasionally as '*vous'*; the mysterious voice emitting views which cannot reasonably be considered those of either *Diogène*; and another, perhaps the same, voice, which conducts a running commentary on the diegesis itself. The

[373] J'aurais voulu le [Xénophon] voir un peu dans le pétrin, réduit à merci par un de ses vainqueurs. [...] J'en avais connu des généraux qui avaient été faits prisonniers. Ils auraient voulu m'apitoyer. Ils me faisaient seulement sourire'.

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reader is placed on the shoulder, as it were, of the producing artist, and becomes an associate, albeit passive, in the development of the text. At numerous points [374] the inscribed narrator gives way to an actual narrator, reminding the reader of the artifice involved in the production of the text. In addition, this 'new' narrator refers to the documentary evidence which he may have consulted in preparing the narration of events in which another narrator, the ancient Diogène, is claimed to have participated, or to have at least observed:

> tout de suite, je sentis que cette journée historiquement mémorable, le resterait aussi par sa perfection atmosphérique. [..] Je ne vais pas ici jouer à peu de frais les Thucydide ou les Hérodote en brossant le tableau d'un carnage qui ne devait manquer d'exégètes. (p. 274)

Later, when contemplating the various accounts of Diogenes' death, we are made aware of the speculative nature of the overall narration: 'En même temps que moi, la même année et (selon la petite histoire) le même jour, Alexandre mourut. A 33 ans !' (p. 308). 'Selon la petite histoire': through the process of *metamythification* the source is openly identified, as is the logic by which the narratorial decision was made for the inclusion of this particular detail. The documentation which has brought the attention of the narrator to '*la petite histoire*' is also acknowledged: 'Si j'en crois les malheureux textes que j'ai eus sous les yeux à ce sujet' (p. 306). The reference to '*mon personnage'*, as opposed to '*ma personne',* is a further indicator of the textual nature of the identity.

Switching time frames

Myth is typically achronological, free from an awareness of time and its passage, or simply immersed in primordial time. The very structure of *La Confession…*, by contrast, foregrounds the concept of time. In its regular references to the year (in places an exact date) it attempts to fix in time the 'lived life' and, however tenuous and unreliable the documentary evidence underlying it may be, Guérin has concocted 'a life'. Second, through the use of age-related qualifiers, it establishes the living of the life, respecting chronological order. Third, through repeated allusion to the notion of the 'century', it establishes that this is the timespan of humanity itself, as distinct from any supernatural (non-time) or original epoch. 'Supernatural' is, however, the status of the eponymous character, who is seen through the resilience of his ideas to defy the nefarious impact of time.

The conceit is maintained throughout the text, sometimes foregrounded, sometimes discreet. Three perspectives are adopted: at times the narrator is contemporary and looking back [375], at other times a narrative based in the fourth century BC is made relevant to today [376] or the narration is heavily conscious of the passage of time in between [377]. Often contrived, these utterances at times become a puerile and obtrusive reminder of the premise : 'Si Xénophon était revenu sur terre, comme moi, aujourd'hui…' (p. 188).

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[374] 'Il ne me déplaît pas de suspendre ici mon gribouillage..', p. 131 ; 'A ce point de ma confession, …. j'éprouve le besoin de changer de ton ….', p. 219 ; '..ce ne fut jamais qu'avec l'intention de pousser à leurs extrêmes mes différentes tendances, par une suite de démarches et de scrupules, voire de turlupinades ou de cabrioles dont cette confession est le procès-verbal…', p. 229 ; 'Depuis le début de cette confession, je vais mon train, tantôt vantant, tantôt raillant sagesse,' p. 236 ; 'Et c'est parce qu'il y a très longtemps que je suis mort, parce que les siècles ont achevé d'effacer les traces que j'aurais pu laisser sur cette terre, qu'il m'a été loisible de lever un peu le masque en entreprennent cette inoffensive confession,' p. 311.

[375] Indicated through the use of certain locutions, such as 'avec le recul' p. 85; 'au siècle où je vivais' p. 125; 'de mon vivant' p. 161; 'de mon temps' p. 272 or by invoking time with a phrase such as 'comme il y a vingt-trois siècles', p. 81

[376] 'on a revu au XXème siècle …' pp. 103-105; p. 258.

[377] 'plus de vingt siècles ont pu se passer', p. 66; 'vingt-cinq siècles s'étant écoulés', p. 183.

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Many clues are provided to ensure a reception of the text as a commentary on contemporary France, and by extension a reflection of sorts of the views and experiences of the writer. This is discernible in the terminology used to describe individuals or movements, which are recognisably those relating to the twentieth century. [378] The text also appeals directly to the experience of the contemporary French reader. For example, the attraction of the sea is explained as a common value:

> quiconque aime la mer comme je l'aimais comprendra cet instinct de fuite, cette soif de haute solitude. Je ne sache pas qu'en ce siècle où j'écris un homme de mon espèce ne préférerait pas d'abord Marseille ou Alger à Paris, puis encore mieux Capri ou Port-Cros à Marseille ou Alger.' (p. 222).

The text contains obvious anachronisms which appear designed to bring attention to the artifice. 'Je n'y ai jamais mordu, moi, à ces fables sur les lycanthropes ou le loch-ness,' (p. 15) comments the contemporary Diogène on the stories he received from his mother, the name 'loch-ness' of itself appearing so incongruous in the setting even before the reality of the story being shared is considered. Later, the narrator comments: 'Il n'y avait plus qu'Athènes pour croire encore au père Noël,' (p. 256), whilst the reference to 'le rouge des tomates…' (p. 178) attracted a range of reactions from the written press, much of it hostile to such an obvious apparent lapse in research. [379]

In addition, the text is heavily impregnated with references apparently designed to appeal to the culturally aware reader of French literature. Four examples of many:

'je me sentais lié par le contrat social,' p. 61

'je devins, pour ces hommes de bonne volonté, pour ces révoltés, pour ces irréconciliables…' p. 73

'j'ai maintes fois pensé que si chacun avait toujours été dans une disposition sexuelle analogue à la mienne, des catastrophes aussi désolantes que la guerre de Troie, par exemple, n'auraient pas eu lieu..' p. 88

'j'eusse eu la plume de quelque conteur persan, que j'eusse dépeint les Lacédémoniens comme des maniaques absurdes,' p. 182.

Ironically, the last extract with its nod to Montesquieu in part summarises the current project of Guérin: *Diogène*, citizen of the (ancient) world, is in many ways a type of visitor, transported to an unfamiliar location, but whose comments are designed to be applicable to the place of their consumption.

It is not just in the use of proper names that *Diogène* speaks like a Frenchman of the 1930s. The incidence of contemporary slang or popular usage is widespread and too frequent to warrant selecting examples. This is, in one sense, the slaying of idols. Figures of genuine

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[378] 'Plus d'un me prenait pour une manière de défaitiste, de désespéré, de nihiliste', p. 61 ; 'Pourquoi s'engager ? Rien n'y obligeait. Sympathisant, certes, mais non militant,' p. 62 ; 'On avait la bouche pleine de congrès, d'accords, d'entretiens, de traités..', p. 119 ;'Selon Hypsias, j'étais devenu, moi aussi, un lamentable et ridicule patriotard, un revanchard de la plus basse espèce..', p. 146 ; 'Tout à fait le style Europe Nouvelle. Athènes : travail, famille, patrie, triomphe de la politique réactionnaire sous le signe de la capitulation et de la honte' p. 259 ; 'Entre les capitulards et les revanchards...', p. 261.

[379]On the other hand, Maurice Nadeau (1952, pp. 236-40), called the presence of such anachronisms '*savoureux'*.

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historical stature, who have themselves often received the gloss of legend (Aristotle, Plato, Alexander the Great) are all accorded the same status in front of the twentieth-century French audience. Partly iconoclastic, in the spirit of the Cynic, partly strategic in terms of bridging the cultural gulf, this narrative choice is a persistent reminder to the reader of the artifice at work.

Although not strictly anachronistic, allusions to the current epoch as such chime when embedded in a narrative about ancient Greece. The identity of the contemporary *Diogène* at times appears to slip a little, and that of another narratorial voice behind him is perceptible. This narrator places in the mouth of *Diogène* the observations that 'à l'époque actuelle, despotes et peuples souverains font mieux encore…' (pp. 231-32), showing an understanding and perspective on current international relations that bring into question the integrity of the overall narratorial conceit. The same combination of voices later comments on 'cette époque bestiale où nous vivons…' (p. 302). At times it becomes very difficult to sustain the pretence that the voice is that of *Diogène*. In one section, *Diogène* describes his disdain for *Anaximène*:

> Je me suis moqué d'Anaximène […] Mais je pense que je ne me serais pas moins moqué des théâtrales mondaines des temps modernes dont on m'a assuré qu'elles prenaient leur bain dans des baignoires remplies de lait ou de champagne, qu'elles se faisaient photographier sur un chameau devant les pyramides d'Egypte ou qu'elles dépensaient le salaire annuel de toute une famille de rétameurs pour un souper fin (pp. 157-158).

The extent of the cultural immersion into the twentieth century claimed by this comment strains the credibility of the premise.

La Confession... and 'Writerliness'

The relationship to the written word in *La Confession…* is complex. The fact that the texts of Diogenes are presumed written but missing enables a whole mythology to be developed about the corpus. The list contains a kind of magical power, a suggestion of value or alternatively another hollow concept to be filled with conjecture or surmise. In addition, and perhaps more powerfully, nothing is definitively ruled out. The nature of Diogenes' writing style (if indeed he did actually write at all) may or may not be inferred from the delivery of his '*chreiai'*. The corpus is open to recuperation, in the same way as the life.

Within *La Confession…* there is a sustained meditation on the status of the writer: its vulnerability, its exposure to the unreliable reception of the time, and especially its vulnerability to the judgements of the future. Guérin's *Diogène* is represented as very much a literary figure. He asserts as fact the existence of *Diogène's* writing ('de toutes parts, accouraient des néophytes, excités par mes livres, soucieux de m'assurer de leur fidélité' p. 50) and represents the Cynic as one conscious of his following. On his return from enslavement he is astonished at the reaction to him:

> … je fus étourdi par l'empressement que chacun mettait à m'avoir dans son jeu. Ma vogue était telle que je ne pouvais plus faire un geste, manifester un goût, prononcer une parole, sans qu'aussitôt mille trissotins[380] ne s'enorgueillissent de m'imiter. Moi qui n'avais pas pondu une ligne depuis mon départ, il suffisait que je griffonne vingt pages de confession anodine pour

[380] A reference which stretches the reader's credulity: a returning inhabitant of 4th century BC Greater Greece with knowledge of Molière and full cultural appreciation of the application of the term.

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> que cette poussière fasse l'effet d'un gros pavé dans la mare. C'était à croire que je ne pouvais plus prendre la plume sans ébranler les assises les plus solides. (p. 129)

This is a description which finds parallels in Guérin's recollection of his return to Paris society in 1943.[381] Like the writer, the ancient *Diogène* is ambivalent about this attention. On the one hand desperate for attention from the public, on the other desperate to protect the image of himself from its judgement. There is a Sorelisme[382] about his reflection on it all: 'Ainsi, ce n'était que cela, la gloire. Ce petit frisson agréable, ce sourire qui fait fleurir vos lèvres sous l'hommage' (p. 145).

The disappearance of the written works is welcomed by the writer as a protection against the perceived threat of the future:

> La totalité de mes écrits s'est donc perdue. Je me félicite de cette chance. Ainsi, les critiques m'ont laissé dormir en paix et se sont abstenus par force de faire assaut de sottises sur mon compte, de m'inventer quand mes œuvres n'avaient rien d'ambigu et, au contraire, de me prêter les intentions les plus sordides quand j'avais justement enrichi mon texte de sous-entendus. Enfin, j'avais un langage assez cru, une plume plutôt vive et cela n'aurait pas manqué d'exciter les secrétions haineuses de ceux qui se refusent à voir les choses telles qu'ils sont. (pp. 48-49)

Ironically, given the current project, the disappearance of the written word denies the future the power to 'invent' Diogenes, whilst at the same time leaving a ready structure – a corpus list – for such invention to take place. The status of 'writer' persists (by way of the existence of the list), without the requirement for it to be justified, and immune to the threat of future evolutions in reception.

A text about an ancient 'philosopher' offers clues on the putative direction of Guérin's literary output. Emerging from these pages of introspection is an impression of insecurity, a determination to assert once and for all the control of the producer over the meaning of the cultural artefact. This is evidently the position ascribed to *Diogène*, who discovers, for example, that one of his tragedies has been performed without his permission:

> Et puis, pour tout dire, j'avoue que ce qui me gâtait la perspective d'être joué, c'était cette dépendance dans laquelle tout auteur se trouvait, une fois son ours au point. […] J'aimais mieux n'écrire que des livres où j'étais sûr de n'engager jamais que moi et où je pouvais prendre mes aises sans avoir à tenir compte d'autrui.
>
> Toutefois, puisque Pétécyde avait monté ma pièce à mon insu, il était vain de rechigner. […] J'assisterais à la représentation avec des yeux neufs et comme si je n'étais pas l'auteur. (pp 211-12)

To be creative artistically is to court danger, leaving the self vulnerable. For the writer, saying what one thinks is an imperative, but once the message is released it contains the potential to harm its producer. For all the daring and bravado displayed by Guérin in his determination to express his ideas, his final position represents a retreat, or at least the adoption of a posture of resigned self-defence:

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[381] Described in *Retour de Barbarie* (Bordeaux : Finitude, 2005).

[382] Julien Sorel, central character of Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le noir*. Stendhal's influence is discernible throughout Guérin's work.

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> La vie intellectuelle … c'est bien pourquoi j'avais fini par me désintéresser totalement de ce genre de carrière. Si je gribouillais encore quelque peu, c'était seulement dans la mesure où cela m'amusait, où je pouvais exprimer ce qui me passait par la tête, employer les mots les moins convenus et ne faire aucun cas de l'opinion. (p. 236)

Such misgivings notwithstanding, the premise of the time and place-traveller narrator offers Guérin an excuse to cast his eye critically over contemporary (i.e. twentieth-century) French writing. In a phrase which is deliberately ambiguous, *Diogène* derides 'les plumitifs actuels*'* (p. 161) for their failure to abandon consensus and speak honestly about the challenges facing man:

> Pourquoi ne pas le [l'homme] placer plutôt devant les difficultés et les absurdités de son existence ? […] Une littérature à l'eau de rose, moralement lénitive sans doute, mais socialement paralysante accroît son malaise. Elle développe en lui la lâcheté et la sottise qui l'empêchent de songer à sa triste condition et de s'affranchir des tabous que les plus mesquins et les plus corrompus de ses semblables ont inventés, de tout temps, pour le mieux briser. (p. 162)

'*De tout temps'* – this has always been, and thus will remain, the struggle faced by the intellectual. An attentive reader of 1947, attuned to the contemporary debate on '*engagement'* in literature, can identify the 'saviour' envisaged in the middle sentence above, and draw an inference. The 'saviour' Guérin has in mind is obviously himself.

Guérin uses the same premise a little later. This comes in the middle of a lengthy philosophical discussion with Xénophon, dismissed by *Diogène* as 'ce reître' (p. 180), culminating in a number of observations about the place of the writer. Xénophon's position is to make the writer subject to the control of temporal authority, Diogène's is the reassertion of the 'droit de tout dire, d'exprimer sa vérité sans entraves'. History knows the outcome:

> Et pourtant, je dois cet aveu à Xénophon, sa position devait être la plus forte puisque des centaines et des centaines de générations, depuis lors, se sont escrimées contre, en vain. Si Xénophon était revenu sur terre, comme moi, aujourd'hui, il aurait eu beau jeu. Il aurait pu me dire : hein ! Que vous avais-je annoncé ? (pp. 187-88)

The clumsy locution which clinches the point serves to underscore the eternal value of the artist, the individual tasked with speaking truth to power. Implicitly, it suggests that such a situation is permanent, and inevitable in generations to follow. To oppose this dominant current requires exceptional qualities possessed by only a very few. To continue to oppose it despite the weight of history is in the power of fewer still. *La Confession…* documents these exceptional qualities.

Exceptionalism

The essence of myth is to tell stories about exceptional acts or qualities, often beyond the comprehension of the teller. In some cases, the exceptional nature of the subject is evident from the outset, but generally it emerges through the course of events, to be confirmed in the conclusion to the tale and any lessons drawn. More problematic is a narrative in which the subject asserts his own exceptional status and does so from the very beginning. Such is the hero of *La Confession….*

The singular status of *Diogène*, at least from his own perspective, is emphasised from the opening pages, in which the hero is seen to reject the precepts of his father and elect to

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become a citizen of the world. [383] Early in the text, the hero is conscious of his exceptional position amongst men : 'Aussi, est-ce sans la moindre sollicitation que la plupart de ces discuteurs d'occasion s'éprirent [sic] du régime de vie que j'avais adopté, imitant qui, mon langage, qui, mes mœurs, qui, mes rigueurs, qui, mes penchants' (p. 96).

Armed with this sense of his own status, *Diogène* elaborates its features: as a 'slave', possessed of '*ce petit trésor intérieur que j'avais amassé..*' (p. 103) he is one of the few who resist (p. 104); even during his enslavement to Xéniade, he is able to exert his own influence on his 'master' rather than accept the will of the other (p. 139) ; and not even temporal authorities have the capacity to control him (p. 166). Such is the independence of his mind, that he considers himself a 'cas unique dans l'histoire de l'esprit humain,' (p. 229). Equipped with this sense of self-value set out above, '*Diogène'* is represented, or represents himself, as an equal of Philip (pp. 275-76) and of Alexander the Great (pp. 291-95).

The text's continuous play with chronology and subject referentiality is evident in the consideration of thinkers more or less contemporary to the ancient *Diogène*. Here, the action of time is seen as justifying the postures attributed to the ancient *Diogène*, perpetuated by the contemporary *Diogène*, but in reality apparently bestowed by a third authority, the inscribed narratorial voice itself. This is particularly true in the lengthy critique of the thought of Aristotle. This passage follows the interaction with Philip, after which – Quixote like – *Diogène* sets off on his donkey:

> Je préférais m'en aller seul, selon mon caprice, ne rien devoir à un personnage si redoutable et si sûr de soi. Surtout, je tenais à mon âne. / Je pus donc m'entretenir à mon aise avec Aristote. [...] Prophète-philosophe des religions à venir, Aristote l'était aussi des régimes qui allaient triompher par la suite. Lourde responsabilité que la sienne ! Mais n'allait-il pas de soi que ce fétichiste fût en même temps l'apologiste de l'esclavage et des porteurs de grosse galette ? (Guérin, 1947, pp. 277-79 passim)

In this section, the voice (ancient *Diogène*, contemporary *Diogène*, inscribed narrator) occupies a status which rivals that of one of the founders of western culture. Aristotle's ideas are held to be flawed, and the root of many of the ills of the civilisations which followed. The ancient *Diogène* is equipped with foresight ('je prévoyais trop bien..'), and his intuitions are confirmed by the retrospect of the contemporary subject of the same name. An informed, attentive reader of 1947, however, would perceive a further layer. '*je'* is superior to Aristotle, and the weight of history is there to prove the case presented by '*je'*. For all the '*moi, Diogène*' ballast provided by the text, the reader suspects that '*je'* is not '*Diogène'* but another source, which considers its own arguments more compelling, and certainly more justified by events, than those of Aristotle. And it is this voice, one not *returning* to the fourth century BC but being *transported to it for the first time* for the purposes of the comparison, which establishes its own supremacy over Aristotle. In a classic case, the *autodidacte* (p. 230) comes out on top in the battle of the philosophers:

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[383] A reworking of what little we know of the 'facts'; and certainly the Greek notion of *a-polis* and the construction placed on it by Guérin's *Diogène* are very different indeed. '*Polis'* was the Greek conception of 'society', describing a self-governing community (a central urban area and surrounding farm lands), in which citizens shared laws, religious beliefs, and a voice in government. To declare oneself *a-polis*, as Diogenes did, was to position oneself overtly outside (and by implication as hostile to) this shared understanding. Diogenes also declared himself '*a-oikos* ('without a home') and '*kosmopolites'* (citizen of the universe'), whilst at the same time inhabiting the main square and begging for food in order to survive. The gulf between the rejectionist Diogenes and the elevated principles of Guérin's *Diogène* is thus considerable.

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> Ce n'était pas si mal pour un autodidacte. / Comme tout un, j'avais gentiment potassé les divers systèmes philosophiques à la mode et je peux dire que je n'avais pas reçu de grands éclaircissements sur ma propre condition. [...] N'importe quel bambin, aujourd'hui, en sait plus, à dix ans, que Pythagore et Anaximandre réunis en ont jamais su. (1947, pp. 230-31).

Myth in this instance lies in the power of the present, the weight of history assisting the demythification of the past. Today's child is more than a match for an ancient philosopher. The instrument of demythification in the past to be demythified is *Diogène*, but the informed 1947 reader able to make the appropriate assumptions is equipped to infer whom is being endowed with legendary status.

Identity

In a text with multiple narratorial standpoints, *La Confession…* is somewhat inevitably the locus for a reflection on the nature of identity. The modern *Diogène* acknowledges that many of the actions of his ancient persona were susceptible to misinterpretation ('on pouvait se tromper sur le sens de mes apostrophes', p. 61) and one aspect of his 'confession' – in keeping with the expectations of that genre – is to elucidate the reasons behind some of his gestures ('c'est ce que je voulais signifier avec ma lanterne,' p. 68).

The threats to identity are contemporary – misinterpretation, deliberate misconstruction of actions or words, false assertions – and retrospective. Here, the text performs a self-analysis, questioning the source of the depictions it makes whilst at the same time making them.

Some aspects of contemporary misrepresentation are harmless. Given the nature of the oral exchange of stories, the story itself can be subject to modification ('de cancans en chuchoteries, de bouche en oreille, mon odyssée avait subi de fortes alterations,' p. 136). Often, however, reception of the self is held to be in the hands of people with assumptions ('les gens vous cataloguent,' p. 131), the major part of whom are perceived as having some kind of agenda. [384]

Creating the identity

The steps taken in the creation of the self are heavily signposted by the text. The Cynic first describes his adolescent self, 'sur ma felouque, bâtissant à l'avance le personnage que j'ambitionnais de tenir au pied de l'Acropole. Je me disais tout bas : mon petit Diogène, il faut que tu conduises à l'avenir ta vie de telle sorte qu'elle serve d'illustration à ce que tu as résolu …', p. 23.

Whilst some constraints are imposed upon the self by external agencies, especially education (p. 86), *Diogène* claims quickly to have found a way not only of accommodating the contradictory impulses within him (p. 176) but of affirming their various manifestations:

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[384] 'les faiseurs d'opinion m'avaient donc vite dédaigné, incapables qu'ils étaient, dans les milieux où ils trônaient, de rendre justice à des sincères de mon acabit comme de démasquer les ruses de charlatans' p. 36 ; 'On se contentait, pour m'annihiler, de me tourner en ridicule. Les potentats de l'information excellent à ce petit jeu sournois et ignoble. Ils n'en sont pas à une infamie près. Tout leur est bon. Tout ce qu'on a pu dire ou écrire leur sert de mauvais prétexte. Ils fouillent votre vie privée pour y trouver des justifications mensongères. Et lors même qu'hier encore ils saluaient votre valeur, votre talent, votre sincérité, les voilà subitement qui vous couvrent de leur boue.' pp. 73-74.

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> l'évidence était là : mon être était tour à tour et simultanément fait pour Pan, pour Minerve ou pour Orphée, pour la paix et la révolte, l'humilité et l'orgueil, la parole et le silence, le facile et le difficile, la bienveillance ou l'outrecuidance, l'habileté ou la maladresse, la courtoisie ou la rudesse.. 'Connais-tu' affirmait Apollon, c'est-à-dire, : 'Accepte-toi', 'Sois celui que tu dois être ! un et tous en tout, tel Protée !' (p. 210)

The modern *Diogène* is more than aware of the extent to which his identity has been reassigned or determined for him, unwittingly or for specific ends. In part this is a function of his frankness, otherwise recuperated as naivety, in freely expressing himself in the manner of his choosing. It derives also from a decision not to take himself seriously, 'me tourner volontairement en dérision,' (p. 156) More importantly, it is a reflection of the multiplicity of personae that he was projecting ('on me montrait du doigt en disant : voilà Diogène ! Mais qu'est-ce que cela voulait dire ? N'y avait-il pas cent Diogène en moi ?, p. 176). These qualities leave him open to the misconstructions of posterity. For example : 'ceux qui, ayant eu plus tard la prétention de raconter ma vie, prirent ma boutade pour argent comptant,' (p. 110). This is a fate to which Guérin was particularly sensitive.

Identity can be commandeered by another agency and re-represented to its own advantage. One of these is religion. Notwithstanding the Cynic's rejection of '*superstition'* (p. 124) and his unequivocal view of the Gods ('les dieux n'étaient pour moi que pantins obscènes et j'avais fait mienne la formule : le cléricalisme, voilà l'ennemi !' p. 124), he is surprised to find the later recuperation of his acts and utterances as that of a kind of a Christ figure, his commitment to *askesis* ('training', or 'practice') misconstrued as asceticism, and his determination to live a life without ornament or possessions recuperated as the self-denial of another Jesus (p. 125). [385]

Through *metamythification*, within the *mythe* we witness a legendary figure becoming conscious of his status as a legendary figure. The *mythe* itself highlights the very processes of myth intrinsic to its evolution, and its subject expresses bewilderment at the process to which he has been unwittingly subjected:

> J'étais loin alors de me douter qu'une légende se ferait sur mon nom. Comment aurais-je réagi si j'avais su, de mon vivant, les privautés que prendrait avec moi la postérité ?
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> A tout prendre, si le temps n'a légué à la postérité qu'une caricature de ce Diogène que, de bonne foi, je croyais être, où est le mal ? Peut-être la caricature vaut-elle bien l'original ? Ou bien on voudrait se survivre, travers très humain, et alors que l'envers ne vaut pas l'endroit ? Ou bien on se moque de survivre et on se moquera aussi de l'apparence qui sera sauvée. Me survivre, bah ! je ne le nierai pas, il y avait eu un temps où je l'avais envisagé…' (pp. 249-250)

At times, the impatience of the Cynic with the action of legend is detectable, despite protestations to the contrary ('*on pensera de moi ce qu'on voudra')* (p. 152). One example is the stories surrounding the origin of the name, 'Cynic'. The narrator, the contemporary

[385] It is possible to read into the title *La Confession…* itself a reference to the recuperation of Diogenes, or at least many of his attitudes and postures, by one of the Third Century groups almost as another Christ. In addition, it contextualises the observation of a modern scholar of Diogenes, Will Desmond, who briefly reviews *La Confession…* as follows: 'Guérin works many of the ancient sources into a fictional autobiography *Confession de Diogène* (Paris, 1947) whose title at least would range Diogenes with St Augustine, Rousseau, and Yourcenar's Hadrian.' Will Desmond, 'Diogenes of Sinope' in *Early Greek Ethics* (2020), pp. 651-679. Footnote 5.

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Diogène, uses the occasion of a visit to the Cynosarge gymnasium and grove as a pretext to expand upon the supposed derivation of the name :

> c'était le Cynosarge et c'est à cause de ce nom, à en croire certains, qu'on nous appela tout d'abord, mes compagnons et moi, les cyniques. Il faut bien peu de choses pour enfanter une légende. Je traîne après moi depuis une éternité cette réputation de cynisme à laquelle les dictionnaires de tous les pays ont fait un sort péjoratif […] Moins encore toutefois que cette autre légende qui s'accrédita sottement dans les cerveaux étroits et qui ne visait à rien moins qu'à nous traiter de cyniques sous le prétexte que notre genre de vie pouvait s'assimiler à celui des chiens. (Guérin, 1947, p. 33).

The passage is eloquent of many of the competing tensions within *Diogène*-Guérin: the ease of the fomentation of myth; the lack of rigour in determining the facts behind statements; and especially the existence of pejorative (unwarranted, perhaps) judgements in posterity. Survival, the nature of that survival and the treatment of posterity, these are important considerations for Guérin. The fate of *Diogène* is one he fears for himself.

Conclusion

This is a singular project. To relate one life whilst ostensibly portraying another is a bold undertaking. The fact that much of the narrative about the self is speculative, and that this autonarration is essentially a projection, makes it even more inventive. At least in conception.

To what extent was the project successful? The critics were divided. Writing in *Dernières Nouvelles* (21/5/56) J-C Marrey described *La Confession…* as *'*[un] livre admirable et méconnu… jouant avec le masque de Diogène, Raymond Guérin peint l'homme qu'il aurait aimé être [et qui] vivait comme il aurait aimé vivre'. On the other hand, less receptive to (or perhaps cognisant of) the premise deployed, Claude Murcia was dismissive. Arguing (correctly) that Guérin had attempted to mesh two incompatible types of writing, Murcia mis-diagnosed the outcome, offering the conclusion that *La Confession de Diogène* is an example of what happens when myth is given the gloss of realism. [386]

Within the '*espace automythologique*', this work uniquely presents a Guérin of the future. Through the voice of *Diogène*, it explores his speculations on the potential trajectory of the writer, the place of his writing and possible future receptions of it. This is characteristically bleak, and reflective of the writer's point of view post captivity:

> Même vieux, je m'abstins de rédiger aucun testament. Pourquoi aurais-je fait part à qui que ce soit de mes dernières volontés. Je n'avais ni famille, ni serviteurs. Quelle postérité même avais-je à préserver ? J'avais depuis longtemps renoncer aux singeries de la littérature. Ma disparition ne causerait aucun vide, n'arrêterait rien, ne romprait rien. (p. 307).

His speculation includes the possible receptions of the current text.[387] In addition, in an aside, he comments with considerable irony on one of the established practices of the man of letters:

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[386] Claude Murcia : 'Diogène parmi nous' in *Quinzaine Littéraire* no 368, 1/4/82, p. 13; article reproduced on p. 13 of *Présence de Raymond Guérin.*

[387] 'Ceci n'est qu'un reflet bien imparfait, à demi magique, à demi caustique de mon existence. […] Je ne désire pour lui aucun destin glorieux ni aucune considération. Il n'est, au fond, qu'une pochade née de ma fantaisie, que le fruit bon marché de ma vacance. Il me plairait même assez que les docteurs et que les courtiers des Lettres esquissent autour de lui je ne sais quelle danse de l'opprobre. Sans plus attendre, je les en avertis (au cas

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> Et si l'on est littérateur (à défaut d'embêter ses petits enfants, comme un simple citoyen, en leur racontant des fadaises sans relief du temps passé) on en arriverait peut-être à faire ce qu'il y a de pire au monde dans la fonction : à écrire ses mémoires. (Guérin, 1947, p. 219.)

It is to be imagined that a mature Guérin would have envisaged these as an important addition to his corpus, in the manner of Gide.

The metaphor of the lantern is attractive. In the same way that the lantern of the Cynic has illuminated his (Guérin's) present, so Guérin appears to wish to be the conscience and protector of posterity. He recognises in the enduring nature of the appeal of the Cynic the possibility of his own relevance:

> ma mort, au contraire, allait prolonger dans le temps ma survivance. Déjà, d'autres étaient nés, prêts à assurer la transmission des expériences qui m'avaient guidé. Du sein glacé du néant, je pouvais nommer par anticipation tous ceux qui (conscients ou non de me continuer) orienteraient leur vie à mon exemple… (p. 309).

Repackaging the idea of autonarration by proxy from *Quand*…, as the first published *mythe*, *La Confession…* established a template for *Empédocle* three years later. This is a work of stunning originality and complexity, an autonarration which borrows and speculates its way towards creating a myth of its own producer by proxy. The '*incompréhension'* with which it was largely greeted in 1947 is both unsurprising and understandable: this text lies somewhere on the continuum *myth – legend/vie romancée – confession – 'first person biography'*, and indeed often in all four places at once.

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où, dans une légitime impatience, ils jetteraient d'abord les yeux sur cette fin) : mon ouvrage n'est pas plus fait pour leurs bibliothèques à cadenas que pour leurs classiers à fiches, mais d'abord pour mourir et pour disparaître comme il est né' (pp. 313-14).

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‘L’auteur ôte au mythe grec sa dimension transcendantale et universelle, le vidant par là-même de sa substance’[388]. *Empédocle*[389] –Repurposing a mythological mould to tell a story about the self.

Guérin’s fascination with Empedocles was long-standing. It prompted his visit to Sicily in 1935 [390] in the course of which he wrote the text which later became the preface to *Empédocle*. Guérin returned to Italy in 1938, and composed the first draft of *Empédocle* in three weeks during a stay in Capri. This text was revised during the 1940s, following Guérin’s release, and as late as December 1948 he was still rewriting it.[391] The published work was thus informed by the evolutions in the writer’s thinking over a fifteen-year period, whilst all the time the original affinity with ‘Empedocles’ remained intact.

The first signs of autonarration by mythological proxy - *remythification*

The development from interest in to identification with ‘Empedocles’ extended further at an early stage into the possibility of an autonarrational project. The idea of this fusion was one which Guérin shared with his wife in a letter dated 11th October 1939 [392]:

> l’idée qui a mené ma plume ? […] elle est tout dans le destin d’un homme qui, malgré lui jeté dans la politique à cause de son amour pour ses semblables, s’en trouve automatiquement rejeté par la médiocrité des uns et l’hypocrisie ou l’ambition des autres. Meurtri, il trouve enfin dans la fuite et l’anonymat le secret qui lui permet de sauver les valeurs les plus sûres de sa vie. N’est-ce point mon propre destin ? N’est-ce pas le mythe éternel de l’homme en lutte contre l’Homme ? N’est-ce pas le mythe de Diogène ? de Montaigne ? de Goethe ? de Gide enfin?

That his own and Empedocles’ struggles were interchangeable, the letter suggests, implies that the mythological status belonging to Empedocles could equally be attached to both of them. This was still evident in the 1955 interview with Claude-Henri Rocquet:

> j’avais été très longtemps attiré par la personnalité d’Empédocle ; non seulement parce qu’il était une sorte de Protée, l’homme multiple entre tous, qui est cher, vous le devinez, à celui qui a fait son emblème d’Hermès. Attiré par la destinée aussi d’Empédocle qui, après avoir pu tout prendre, s’était dépris de tout ; et, enfin, par la mystification de la mort…

The *dérision* of Guérin now more than ten years after his release from the Stalag is seen in his sense of the possibilities of the ‘Empedocles’ story *(‘la destinée’*) as a metaphor for his own journey.

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[388] Claude Murcia, *Quinzaine Littéraire* no 368, 1/4/82, p 13.
[389] Paris: Gallimard, 1950. All references will be to this edition of the text.
[390] *Guérin, Bordeaux, La Tête Vide* (Bordeaux : Association La Tête Vide, Mai 1985) p. 23 ‘Avec Raymond Guérin, Propos recueillis par C-H Rocquet’ : ‘*C’est en partie pour courir sur ses traces que je fis dans l’été 35 mon voyage en Sicile’.*
[391] Unpublished letter to Jean Grenier (13/12/48) : ‘je suis en train de mettre la dernière main à mon Empédocle déjà écrit en 1938, soit il y a dix ans… ’BN, Fonds Grenier.
[392] *Raymond Guérin : Lettres à Sonia*, 2005, pp. 35-36.

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Sources

Guérin acknowledged two principal sources – Romain Rolland[393] and the German Romantic playwright and poet Hölderlin [394] – as well as the work of 'universitaires étrangers'. It is clear that he consulted the description of Empedocles by Diogenes Laertius [395] and he may also have been aware of Horace's allusion to Empedocles in *Ars poetica* (ll. 463–66) and the more substantial treatment of him in Lucretius's *De rerum natura* (Book I, ll. 714–829).

The influence of Romain Rolland

In a manner which prefigures Guérin's treatment, Rolland's text actively relates Empedocles to the thinkers and events of later generations, introducing the contemporary in an overt manner. Rolland perceived in Empedocles parallels with Goethe (pp. 14, 15 and 32), Leonardo (pp 14, 15), and Michelangelo (p. 32), as well as detecting a similarity of thought between '*le sicilien*' and German romantics 'Schlegel, Novalis, et surtout Schopenhauer' (p. 14). In Empedocles' melancholy and personal exceptionalism he detects more than a trace of Rousseau and Châteaubriand (p. 18 footnote 1). Unlike Guérin's Empédocle, that of Rolland is willing to be politically engaged. 'Empédocle' aide à détruire les Bastilles de son temps' (Rolland, 1918, p. 10).

In a society in need of guidance, Rolland's Empedocles enjoys a status which is denied to Guérin, in the latter's opinion unjustifiably. One can only speculate as to the impact on Guérin of Rolland's quotation of *Fragment 112* by Empedocles:

> Quand j'arrive dans les cités populeuses, les hommes et les femmes me vénèrent et me suivent en foule ; ils demandent, avides, la voie qui mène au salut ; les uns veulent des oracles ; les autres, innombrables, que transperce longuement l'âpre douleur, implorent la parole qui guérit les malades.' (Rolland, 1918, p. 40)

This elevation to the status of visionary is for Guérin a projection of his ideal about himself. The contrast with his account of his own return to Paris in 1943 is stark. *Empédocle* is the representation of what in his view could or should be, but never will.

Hölderlin

In terms of the action of the play, Guérin's work owes little to Hölderlin. In all three versions of *Der Tod des Empedokles*, there is no question that the teleology is that of the leap into Etna. What varies is the status of the act – is it engendered by an excess of melancholy, or is it a politically-motivated self-sacrificial gesture made on behalf of the populace? In all three versions we see the interaction of temporal and religious powers, with subtle variations in their respective predominance. Guérin's debt to Hölderlin lies mainly in the dramatis personae and some details, especially the family relationships introduced into Hölderlin's third version.

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[393] Romain Rolland, *Empédocle d'Agrigente et l'Age de la Haine* (Paris : La Maison Française, 1918).
[394] Edition used in the preparation of this text: Friedrich Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedokles – A Mourning Play A New Translation of the Three Versions and the Related Theoretical Essays with Introduction, Notes, and an Analysis* by David Farrell Krell (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008).
[395] Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives of Ancient Philosophers* (Vol VIII, II, 51-77); this account was described by Rolland as '[une] absurde compilation où s'enchevêtrent les renseignements historiques et les ineptes cancans.' (Rolland, 1918, p. 16).

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Paratextual Elements

The work is dedicated to Curzio Malaparte. Guérin had developed a friendship with the Italian writer and associate of Fascist politicians in the late 1940s. Guérin's *Du côté de chez Malaparte* (1950) documents the friendship, and the visits to Malaparte's property in Capri by himself and his wife. In 1950, Guérin was invited by Malaparte to produce the French subtitles for his film *Le Dernier Jour*. An informed reader of 1950 would be familiar with the personal story of Malaparte,[396] and might be surprised to find the name attached willingly by the writer to one of his texts. At a thematic level, like Empedocles, Malaparte – one of the undoubted pariahs of the post-Mussolini period - represents another form of outsidership.

Preface

The text is preceded by a lengthy (five page) preface. In itself this is singular: since no indication is given as to how it is to be delivered to an audience, the preface's function appears to be that of guiding and informing the reader of the text.

The preface begins by anchoring itself firmly in terms of its own production ('*Agrigente le 23 juillet 1935*'). Assuming the text is in its original form, for a reader of 1950, equipped with 15 more years of experience, it appears capable of expressing ideas curated from a prelapsarian epoch. '1935' becomes more than a mere moment in a text which throughout examines the impact of time, most powerfully on the reception of an individual's actions and utterances. In the same way that Empédocle the character is shown by Guérin to be a creation of successive waves of recuperation and mythology by the masses, so the text – preface 1935, main text 1938, publication 1950, all facts which are brought through the paratext to our attention – also bears the marks of shifting conceptions of the world.

The preface provides some context for the ensuing drama, in terms of location, characters and preceding events. The insistence on '*Agrigente'* is reinforced by a description of the precise geographical location of the drama. Reference to the real appears to rule out a supernatural element to the myth, bringing it into the realms of the human / actual rather than the fantastic / primordial. In an early hint of the demythification to come, the preface establishes the identity of the place as one suitable for the genesis of myth. 'Et l'on est irrésistiblement tenté de l'imaginer, sur ces pentes...*'* (p. 9) Here, the impulse to imagine is 'irresistible' on the part of all of us, but especially the writer – the purveyor of myths. Myth begets myth, and in this landscape, over the centuries referred to elsewhere in the preface, the process of myth-creation has been active.

The conditions in which the original myth of Empedocles originally grew persist still, which is one of the reasons that it remains an evolving entity, like all myths. Even in 1935, the writer, like the locals, can be subject to 'l'aveuglante clarté des midis siciliens si propres aux mirages' (p. 10), the dazzling illumination which both facilitates vision whilst blurring and distorting its contours. The imminent version of the Empedocles myth from this writer may retain traces of this.

[396] Guérin's article in *Juin* on Malaparte, 'Curzio Malaparte – *Kaputt* !', asserts : 'Tout le monde a plus ou moins entendu parler de Curzio Malaparte…' *Chroniques*, 2015, pp 101-07; this quotation p. 102.

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In terms of the characters and preceding events, a summary is offered:

> A Agrigente, Critias règne. C'est un tyran sans prestige. Et, depuis la victoire d'Himère, depuis que ce triomphateur orgueilleux a entrepris la construction de cet excessif Olympeïon qui ne sera jamais achevé, il n'a cessé de se griser de sa puissance, servi par une populace qu'excite la promesse de nouveaux butins. (pp 10-11).

In this skilfully constructed paragraph, the reader is both immersed in the time of the action through the use of the Present Tense, yet through the use of the Future Perfect accorded the advantage of retrospect, knowing the outcome not only of this story but also of those which follow it. In a sense this simulates the status of the reader of the current work, the perspective of 1950 informing the reception of a text composed in 1935 and 1938. The reference to real historic events such as the Battle of Himera reaffirms the scale of the myth as human.

In its presentation of Empédocle, the preface prepares the terrain for the nature of the depiction to follow. He is introduced 'entouré des principaux acteurs et des comparses de son drame, faisant fi une dernière fois de sa gloire pour rester fidèle à soi-même' (p. 11). '*Gloire'* contains not just admiration but also the idea of amplification, extension or accretion within the popular voice of stories about Empédocle. Importantly for Guérin, however, there is seen to be a disconnect between the stories and their foundation in reality, most pertinently in the eyes of Empédocle himself. In addition, Empédocle is prepared not just to reject the status given him, but consciously to act in a manner which accords with his own principles.

The preface continues: 'Instruit par de nombreux voyages, Empédocle sait bien que le pouvoir est lâche quand il repose sur une attente.' (p. 11). This is an Empédocle who is a product not of Agrigento but of his numerous travels, an outsider in some respects but also the possessor of fresher and broader perspectives. This character is different, itself a stepping stone towards 'exceptional':

> Ce n'est pas qu'Empédocle mette Agrigente au-dessus de tout au monde. Il a été reçu déjà un peu partout dans toute la Grèce et fêté à Olympie. Il a eu l'occasion d'apprécier et d'aimer d'autres contrées. Peut-être son cœur s'émeut-il un peu plus quand il aperçoit sa ville natale … (p. 11).[397]

The myth of Empedocles is here intermingled with that of the prodigal son. Outsidership is a positive – it has enabled a legend surrounding Empedocles to develop, events occurring far away from Agrigento which have then been recuperated and ascribed new value by the natives. At the same time these events have shaped the individual who is returning. But outsidership can also come at a price, as Empédocle perceives. The divergence in world view, and especially in the sophistication of his own when seen against that of those who have never left Agrigento, is reflected also in the mismatch of the language they use. Whilst the locals will be roused by Empédocle's rhetoric, they will fail crucially to recognise and respond appropriately to the nuance of his utterances. In this lies the source of his fate.

[397] See the introduction to the thesis for a discussion of Guérin's sensitivity on the '*home town'*.

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The use of the Present Tense throughout the major part of the preface enables the writer and the central character to occupy the same temporal space. This intimacy is enhanced with the access apparently granted to the interior monologue of Empédocle:

> Pourtant, il n'y a aucune démence en lui. Il sait bien que les hommes ne changent pas aussi vite que les lois qui les forment ni que les passions qui les stimulent. Il sait aussi la fragilité des empires. Ce qui l'épouvante, parfois, c'est la complaisance aveugle de la masse, la rapacité des maîtres qui la flattent pour mieux l'asservir et les atrocités toujours à craindre du tyran. (p. 12).

Two sentences beginning with '*il sait'*, following on from the previous '*Empédocle sait bien que..*', contain assumptions about humanity and history which are implicitly attributed to Empédocle. The status of '*il sait'* is problematic. It appears that what we are reading is actually '*je sais qu'il sait que ..*', owing to the implied coincidence of voices between character and narrator. These are presented as facts which are understood by the two fellow travellers, which in turn makes the declaration almost '*je sais qu'il sait .. parce que je sais*…'. We are reminded of the narrator's access to Empédocle's inner thoughts through the use of the word '*parfois'* in the following sentence.

This implication is revived in the final paragraph of the preface:

> Aussi, là, ce matin, recueilli en lui-même, appréhende-t-il avec angoisse les délires de cette faveur populaire. Bientôt ne va-t-il pas être poussé à commettre des actes dont il pressent à l'avance la stérilité et l'outrance ? Doit-il mépriser les scrupules qui l'assaillent ? Se risquer hors de sa retraite ? Ou repousser farouchement les offres qu'on lui fait ? (p. 13)

Our access to the inner thoughts of Empédocle is seemingly unfettered which makes ambiguous the status of the questions which end the paragraph: are they in Empédocle's head, posed by an external narrator, or indeed both?

In purely textual terms, the preface imparts substantial detail to inform our understanding of the characters and their actions. At a narratorial level, however, it hints at an enigma which we take with us into the play, that is the possibility that voices of the narrator and the eponymous character are indistinguishable.

<u>Setting the scene</u>

> A quarante ans, après avoir exercé son esprit à l'étude des sciences et des arts, Empédocle commence, malgré lui, à voir se former autour de sa renommée tous ceux qui sont las des brigandages et des scélératesses de Critias. Chaque jour accroît le nombre de ceux qui aspirent à le suivre. On fait cas de ses avertissements. Si peu qu'il ait parlé publiquement jusqu'ici, on l'a écouté avec enthousiasme. (p. 12)

Again preparing the reader for the demythification of the text, the final section of the preface opens by setting out two of the cruxes of the drama : the age of Empédocle, and his resistance to involvement in political matters. Empédocle enters this drama with a reputation, '*une renommée'*, over the creation of which he has had no or little control, and which – '*malgré lui'* – others seek to turn to their own advantage. This begins the representation of the eponymous 'hero' as the plaything of those around him, an undermining of the conventional status of the mythological hero.

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> On sent qu'il vient à point pour exprimer une volonté qui n'avait pas encore su se définir. Sa dialectique est rigoureuse, son verbe incisif, ses reparties cinglantes, son indignation communicative. Bref, il s'avère que lui seul est de taille à renverser et à chasser Critias. (p. 12)

This is the *être d'exception*, the outsider who has been able to provide the vehicle for the expression of popular discord. '*À point*' communicates the perfect nature of the timing of his arrival. His uniqueness ('*lui seul'*) is unquestioned. But this is not a uniqueness based on physical prowess or attainment, it is a more ephemeral and intellectual one. For Guérin post-captivity, this summary of Empédocle's traits is the absolute articulation of heroism, and coincides perfectly with the representation of Le Grand Dab of *Les Poulpes*.

Empédocle – the main text

The play consists of three '*Moments'*, occupying a three-month period. Its focus is the political struggle of the masses against the archon Critias, despotic ruler of Agrigento. Empédocle, having returned from extensive journeys during which he has achieved renown across greater Greece, becomes, wittingly but with misgivings, the stimulus and mouthpiece for this revolt.

In the First '*Moment'*, Empédocle is approached by the political leader Manès and the priest Hermocrate, and encouraged to assume the leadership of the movement. He is urged by the two authority figures to exploit his popular support, obtained through his charisma and oratory, to precipitate the change needed for the good of his beloved fellow citizens. That he agrees is wholly as a result of the presence of a young woman, Panthéa, with whom he becomes quickly infatuated.

The second '*Moment'* shows Empédocle's solitude, and his regret at the new tyranny which the act of revolution has engendered. In the third '*Moment'*, the unscrupulous leaders of the new tyranny, Manès and Hermocrate, perceiving Empédocle as a potential threat, force him to leave Agrigento, using as a pretext the inflammatory words uttered by Empédocle during the revolution which some represented as an insult to the Gods. The play ends with the departure of Empédocle, with uncertainty – created by the hero himself – as to whether or not he is intent on fulfilling his destiny of leaping into Etna in order to prove his status as a God, or more prosaically is proceeding to Syracuse to resume his journeys.

Empédocle – demythification in action

Several aspects of the text contribute to the sense that, in relating the myth. Guérin is attempting in the same instance to expose the scaffolding on which myth is erected. Myth is demythified, and its constructive forces laid bare. To enable us to appreciate the work of myth builders, Guérin strips away the embellishments and exposes the raw material which lies beneath.

First, considerations of time are at the centre of this work. The treatment of time conflicts with any conception of atemporality as a base feature of myth, that these events are 'primordial' or outside the span of human time. From the opening scene the audience is made aware of the status in time of the hero.

> EMPEDOCLE [...] as-tu seulement idée de ce que ce jour représente pour moi ?

.

> PAUSANIAS Tout l'Agrigente le sait, forcément ! Vous allez chasser Critias, le tyran, et libérer la Cité.
>
> EMPEDOCLE Non, ! Mon secret à moi est mieux gardé. Un seul être le partage – ma nourrice. Fils, écoute ceci : j'ai eu 40 ans à l'aube. Et tu peux me croire, c'est là une échéance qui marque un homme ! (p. 22)

With an ironic acknowledgement of the mytheme – this is the day of Empedocles' destiny, and the nature of that destiny is common knowledge – the audience's attention is returned emphatically to the personal insecurity of the human. *Empédocle* is at this level one man's struggle to understand his place in the world at a watershed moment. [398] The impetus behind his action, it is inferred, is not heroism, but a striving to prove something to himself, a very human impulse.

This insecurity leads Empédocle to wish to surround himself with younger people. He seeks the affirmation that Pausanias, a follower for some time, and Panthéa, newly arrived, bring to him. A second explanation for his action thus lies, rather than in a legendary commitment to democracy and liberty, in the psychology of an individual wishing to appeal to a younger generation.

> EMPEDOCLE Cela t'étonne ? La grâce d'un sourire fait souvent plus que bien des discours. […] à la vue de Panthéa, j'ai réalisé que refuser de marcher avec Manès serait un aveu d'impuissance. En un éclair, je me suis figuré que vous alliez peut-être vous détourner de moi et que j'allais ainsi croupir dans mon coin, seul, comme un vieux. …. Quelle chance t'avoir rencontrée, Panthéa ! Tes seize ans ont effacé mes quarante. (pp. 55-56)

To act is to delay the action of time, to remain relevant and admired by the young. This leads to an act of bravura, a rash act with consequences which were calculated but in the moment are disregarded. In this sense it could be construed as a play for immortality, an attempt to arrest the movement of time. Ironically the possibility of the attainment of godly status (i.e. immortality) is unintended, but Empédocle will be accused and judged on one overt claim, the one made to the masses at the removal of Critias, the basis of which is pure emotion. [399]

This vulnerability is in sharp contrast with for example Manès. We can measure the distance between on the one hand Empédocle's sincerity and nascent self-awareness, and on the other the detachment of the cynical political operator in their perspectives on reaching this milestone:

> MANES […] je me souviens de mes 40 ans aussi bien qu'un autre. Je peux même t'avouer que je les ai franchis d'un seul bond et sans me soucier de ce que je laissais derrière moi !
>
> EMPEDOCLE Moi, à l'inverse de toi, je me sens devant cet âge, plein de gaucherie et de désolation. […] Ce qui me déchire, c'est que j'ai l'impression d'avoir vécu jusqu'ici la portion la plus insouciante de ma vie. Et de n'en avoir eu qu'à moitié conscience. (p. 37)

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[398] 'EMPEDOCLE - C'est que j'atteins le moment le plus propice à la juste pesée d'une existence. Du haut de mes 40 ans, je peux dominer à la fois mon passé et mon avenir. Ce qu'on a fait ou manqué, ce qu'on fera encore, bien ou mal, et ce qu'on manquera, tout est là, autour de soi, sous le regard.' (p. 34).

[399] The desire to appeal to and be surrounded by the young will be seen in the eponymous character of *La Confession de Diogène*, and could arguably be said to have been a feature of Guérin's own life in the final decade before his death, with C-H Rocquet as Guérin's Pausanias.

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The events of the three-month period covered by the play if anything reinforce Empédocle's determination to use his powers, but this time for his own benefit.

> EMPEDOCLE Ne plus tergiverser, ne plus augurer, ah ! et surtout, ne plus servir de point de mire, ne plus m'exposer aux coups ! Si j'en ai la force, je rassemblerai amoureusement tout ce qui peut me rester de jeunesse et je le consacrerai à l'exercice de mon bonheur personnel ! (p. 186)

This point of view elides fully with the position reached by Guérin post-Stalag. Both in his letters home and the wartime diary *Le Temps de la Sottise* we read a man pained by the waste of his declining years in confinement, and yet seeking – like Empédocle – some shelter from the 'bruises' inflicted by others. This is not the declaration of a man possessed with supernatural powers.

Demythification is evident also in the emphasis on Empédocle's passion, or covetousness. Again, the emotions displayed are human and certainly not supernatural. Empédocle is captivated by Panthéa, who arrives in his presence unconscious in the arms of her father, Jaïre. The stage directions provide psychological information on the state of mind of the philosopher: 'Empédocle, à Pausanias, *tout en tapotant les joues de la jeune fille, dont la beauté altière l'a tout de suite émerveillé*' (pp. 48-49). Empédocle expresses this attraction through questioning of Jaïre about his daughter.

> EMPEDOCLE C'est un nom qui semble fort bien lui convenir.
>
> JAÏRE C'est un nom qui signifie une pleine soumission aux choses de la nature. C'est pour ça qu'il lui convient.
>
> EMPEDOCLE C'est aussi un nom plein de prémices… (pp. 50-51).

'*Prémices'* is brimming with ambiguity, indicating either or both of a sense of destiny and repressed lust. The gloss provided by Jaïre on the origin of the name confirms that this is an individual in whom Empédocle will find merit.

The presence of the girl has an immediate galvanising effect on Empédocle, up to this point melancholic at the prospect of his imminent birthday. [400] Having resisted the overtures of Pausanias, Manès and Hermocrate, Empédocle finds the motivation to assume leadership from his attraction to Panthéa:

> PANTHEA […] demain, vous aurez oublié la petite sotte d'aujourd'hui.
>
> EMPEDOCLE Les petites sottes comme toi, tu sais ce dont elles sont capables ? […] De vaincre mes appréhensions ! De réussir là même où l'important Manès, ici présent, avait lamentablement échoué. […] Et il a suffi que tu paraisses, que je te voie, que tu daignes me sourire pour que tout se métamorphose. Non, il n'est pas possible que j'abandonne des filles aussi charmantes que toi. Si je chasse Critias c'est pour toi que je le ferai, pour que tu sois heureuse et libre, ensuite. (p. 61)

Empédocle's departure – for Syracuse, with Etna evoked ironically by Empédocle to deride his critics – at the end of the play is again recuperated in terms of human passion, this time as management of romantic disappointment. Panthéa opens the eyes of Pausanias to the possibility of Empédocle's infatuation and his need for solitude to manage the consequences of rejection.[401] This revision of the myth introduces a completely new dimension. Rather than

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[400] EMPEDOCLE. - … Ah ! ma belle, tu ne peux te figurer combien tes paroles m'ont ragaillardi. Des créatures comme toi rendraient courage aux plus désespérés des hommes. (p. 58).

[401] PAUSANIAS – Il t'aimait donc ? / PANTHEA – Je n'en suis pas absolument sûre parce qu'il ne me l'a jamais dit. Mais ce sont des choses qui se devinent. (pp. 225-26).

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an exile enforced by the masses, or a conscious mission to challenge the authority of the Gods at Etna, Empédocle's departure now becomes a tale of one with a distressed heart in search of solitude in the purest Romantic tradition.[402]

The requirement to act, therefore, is not the same as a political *engagement* of the 1930s. That form of activity is dismissed in the character of Manès as shallow and self-interested. Action must follow a period of introspection, is only to be undertaken if the results of the action are desirable for the community, and must be aligned with the values of the self. The 'tragedy' of Empédocle, as Guérin termed it in his personal dedication of a copy to Henri Calet [403], is that his action is stimulated, against his better judgement and conscious of the likely damage it will bring him, by human factors.

Metamythification

Empédocle exposes the processes active in the creation of myth. First, the miraculous cure of the 'sick woman', here the cure of Panthéa. Guérin's Empédocle detects a case of teenage unrequited love, which with counselling he is quickly able to remedy. The audience witnesses the speed with which this is translated into popular myth. [404] Later, when the conversation returns to the event and Jaïre's publicity of it, Empédocle becomes impatient:

> PANTHEA Cependant ne m'avez-vous pas rendu à la vie alors que j'étais là, sur l'herbe, étendue, comme morte ?
>
> EMPEDOCLE Eh là, Eh là, Panthéa, tu veux rire ! Je n'ai absolument rien fait. …
>
> EMPEDOCLE Irais-tu, pour si peu, prétendre que j'ai accompli là un miracle ?
>
> PANTHEA Pourtant, mon père en avait l'air convaincu.
>
> EMPEDOCLE Ton exaltation m'effraie. .. Allons, je t'en prie, Panthéa, cesse d'enfler à l'excès mon mérite. … J'ignore ce qu'ont les gens, depuis quelques temps, à mêler toujours le surnaturel à chacun de mes actes. (p. 70)

Two points emerge from this dialogue: myth is the product of the people discussing Empédocle's acts rather than an intrinsic part of the acts themselves; and second, the very fact of the supposed mythological hero holding up and questioning the mytheme itself, and his choice of the verb 'mêler' to emphasise how extraneous the supernatural is to his actions, is a powerful anti-mythical statement.

Society's dependence on myth is irresistible, and beyond Empédocle's capacity to control it: '*PANTHEA* – Que vous le vouliez ou non, il y a quelque chose de miraculeux dans la façon avec laquelle vous avez agi' (p. 70). The propensity of the population to create stories about him is too established for Empédocle to overcome. The opening scene of the second '*Moment'* emphasises this. The exchange between the two shepherds (pp. 95-98), rehashing and re-interpreting the events of the first '*Moment'*, show at work the society's willingness to believe stories about Empédocle, to accrete or to amplify.

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[402] Claude Murcia accused Guérin of 'réduisant ainsi le mythe à une anecdote romantique conventionnelle' (*Quinzaine Littéraire* no 368, 1/4/82, p.13; article reproduced on p. 13 of *Présence de Raymond Guérin).* Writing in *Cahiers du Sud (Marseille),* No 304, 01/07/50, pp. 522-23, A. Blanc-Dufour felt that Empédocle's change of mind was not clearly motivated, unless it was to please Panthéa. 'A quoi tiennent les révolutions !' observed the critic.

[403] '*à Calet, cette tragédie du refus'.*

[404] 'JAÏRE - .. j'ai hâte de raconter à la ronde le nouveau miracle d'Empédocle. / EMPEDOCLE – Si miracle il y a, c'est à ta fille qu'en revient tout le mérite, ne l'oublie pas' (p. 63).

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The shared story is '*la dernière en date*', so part of a sequence which is anticipated to continue. Even though the stage directions tell us that the shepherds are sitting in blazing sunshine, the Second Shepherd is prepared to claim that Empédocle may have stopped the action of the sun. This underlines the facility with which the population accepts stories about Empédocle, even when they contradict obvious facts or states of affairs. All the acts of Empédocle are susceptible to being received as exceptional when in reality, in this instance, a simple case of lovesickness has been identified and resolved. This then is the environment of myth.

Third, myth is seen to be a helpful tool – and therefore promoted by – political and religious entities. Those who wish to discredit Empédocle are quick to exploit the population's credulity. The exchange between the political and religious figureheads at the end of the play is revealing: '*MANÈS – Allons, vite annoncer aux Agrigentins la dernière défaite d'Empédocle ! / HERMOCRATE – Et sa piteuse fuite !*' (p. 212). Here the narrative of myth is shown to be the product of sources of power, and its impact and durability dependent on a disposition to believe. The 'defeat' to be shared with the people is that of Empédocle's supposed leap into Etna. The audience knows the reality of Empédocle's plans ('Je n'en fais pas de mystère. Dans 4 ou 5 jours, sans me presser, je serai à Syracuse où j'ai l'intention d'embarquer,' p. 197) and is reminded that he has deliberately been bluffing when he shares with Pausanias and Panthéa the reality behind the exchange they have just witnessed:

> PANTHEA Empédocle, nous expliquerez-vous enfin ?
>
> PAUSANIAS Cette histoire de l'Etna ?
>
> EMPEDOCLE Fausse, mes amis, fausse ! Fausse, du début à la fin ! Ah, la divertissante bouffonnerie ! Je ne supposais pas que le destin m'accorderait une revanche aussi savoureuse ! Vous avez vu : ils m'ont cru aussitôt sur parole, les lourdauds. Et comme ils se rengorgaient ! Et comme ils se félicitaient de m'avoir confondu !
>
> PANTHEA Vous avez voulu les mystifier ? Pourquoi donc ?
>
> EMPEDOCLE Les mystifier ? Même pas ! Leur crédulité est à fleur de peau. A peine si on l'éveille elle prolifère.
>
> PAUSANIAS Et ils vont aller partout répétant la fable !
>
> (pp. 213-14)

The central supernatural mytheme is thus discarded. Instead, it has become a mechanism through which the *dérision* of the intellectual-philosopher can exact its ultimate revenge. The conditions required for the proliferation of this myth, and myth in general, are contained in the final two lines above: '*crédulité … fable'*. It is a product, which is either generated or exploited for specific purposes, and those using it for their own ends are aware of the ease and depth of its absorption.

Many of the stories that are told about Empédocle today, it is implied, are ones which have been concocted by contemporary authorities. This raises the critical question of identity – who is Empédocle? Is he the totality of stories told about him? Is his identity made for him by others, or does there exist, as he wishes, a space for self-invention?[405]

[405] We are reminded of the final words of *Zobain* : 'mais qui ne s'invente pas?' The answer to that question may be 'the mythical hero' whose identity is defined by all consumers and recyclers of myth.

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Identity – who is Empédocle?

Empédocle is the locus of a struggle for the identity 'Empédocle'. Ironically, the title is exposed as counterfeit, referring to an entity (the myth) which pertains to an individual but which – as the text shows – is independent of him, existing in the minds of those who interact with him and those who disseminate narratives about him. The legendary hero is shown in a battle, perhaps, it is implied, the one battle, he cannot win, that of controlling his own identity.

Empédocle's desire to be authentic to himself is real. He opposes the overtures of Manès to lead the revolution which his words have accelerated (MANÈS – *Réfléchis aux espoirs que tu as fait naître* !, p. 44) with reservations that it may force him to behave in a way which does not reflect him: (EMPÉDOCLE – *Il m'importe davantage d'être fidèle à moi-même*., p. 44). Later, as Empédocle understands the narrowing field of action open to him, he appreciates that the only options are acts of *dérision*, self-mockery:

> EMPEDOCLE [...] Il vaut bien courir un risque si ma vérité est au bout.
>
> PANTHEA A quoi cela vous avancera donc ?
>
> EMPEDOCLE A profiter de l'hostilité et de la trahison des autres pour me moquer un peu de moi-même et pour en arriver à ne plus vraiment rien prendre au sérieux, ni mes actes, ni mes regrets, ni surtout ma fierté ! (p. 151)

The search for personal truth is thus reduced to acts which protect the self by exposing it to further incomprehension. At the end of the text this realisation is confirmed. The only solution for the individual lies in self-protective isolation:

> EMPEDOCLE Je m'étais figuré que la liberté était dans l'action. Mais j'ai découvert qu'elle était dans le rêve. Ce sont les contemplatifs qui possèdent le monde. Mais il y faut un peu de sorcellerie. C'est pourquoi je n'ai pas hésité à maquiller les cartes. (p. 215)

This is the role to which the eponymous legendary hero is reduced. His identity as such is formally abandoned and left in the hands of others, with as protection only silence and occasional game-playing. There is, however, one thing of which we can be sure. The above extract continues as follows:

> PANTHEA Comme un dieu ?
>
> EMPEDOCLE Oui, Panthéa, comme le dieu que je ne suis pas !

In asserting the absence of the supernatural in his tale, Empédocle further undermines the future myth which will surround him.

The entity 'Empédocle' has now become an empty mythological structure which other forces are seen to inform. Empédocle is imprisoned by his previous actions and words, in the hands and at the disposal of others to be used to their own ends. In the opening scene of the first '*Moment'* Pausanias refers to the stories surrounding Empédocle when imploring him to act against Critias ('Respectez bien du moins la réputation qu'on vous fait ! … Ne les décevez pas !', p. 27). The loss of control of Empédocle over his own reputation is underlined in Pausanias' subsequent line: '*Que vous le vouliez ou non les plus nobles ambitions vous habitent' (p. 27).* Not only are Empédocle's actions out of his own control, so too is his supposed motivation. Both become attributed to the eponymous hero through external imposition. When Empédocle attempts to protect himself against this, he is powerless:

> EMPEDOCLE … je me suis toujours efforcé de respecter l'intégrité de mes adversaires, prends-en note ! J'ai voyagé un peu partout à travers les terres et à la surface des mers. J'ai

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> soigné mes semblables et les ai souvent guéris. J'ai inventé des machines, calculé, prédit. J'ai composé des odes et des hymnes. Je me suis diverti à éclairer les foules et à enchanter mes auditoires et l'on s'est figuré que j'accomplissais des prodiges..
>
> PANTHEA Oseriez-vous donc renier ce passé ce fabuleux ? En auriez-vous honte ? (pp. 33-34)

Pausanias will not allow Empédocle to resist the forces of narrative which have transformed his actions, simply related in the Perfect Tense, into 'prodiges … passé fabuleux.' Failure on Empédocle's part to act, according to Pausanias, would be 'la négation de tout votre passé' (p. 42), despite the fact that the nature of this past is precisely contentious.

The same external constraints on Empédocle's identity are placed by the appropriation of his previous utterances. This leads indirectly to the accusations against him perpetuated in the myth. In the first *Moment*, Empédocle is aware already that his identity in the popular domain is vulnerable to this: 'Trop parler nuit! L'abus des mots désoriente les hommes,' (p. 77). Nonetheless he will continue freely to engage with the revolutionary cause and use his rhetorical powers to achieve its goals.

Owing to an excess of enthusiasm, Empédocle goes too far when addressing the crowds, but his words, when reported '*textuellement'* by the shepherds (p. 100), are not in themselves blasphemous. Nonetheless, once the words are spoken, ownership of them passes beyond the speaker and they are subject to the vagaries of misrepresentation or inappropriate reception. Thus the accusation of Hermocrate:

> Et j'ajoute à ces dons celui que tu as de subjuguer les foules. Ainsi, poussé par l'orgueil, tu as fini par te prendre pour oracle et te figurer que les malheureux que tu endors si bien de belles paroles allaient te suivre jusqu'au bout de tes extravagances. Reconnais-le, Empédocle, cette fois, tu as dépassé les bornes. Hier, grisé par ta gloire nouvelle, tu as renié tes os et ta chair. Tu as insulté nos dieux. Tu as insinué que l'homme pouvait être son propre dieu. N'était-ce pas insinuer en même temps que toi-même tu étais l'égal de Dieu ?
>
> (pp. 132-33)

Guided by the priest, the judgement of Empédocle by the masses is of his guilt. The popular view is thus both that Empédocle has supernatural qualities (which he denies and mocks), and that his expression of this, which he also denies, is a dangerous affront which must be punished. The fate of the mythical hero is in the hands of the drunken Jaïre and his peers, by definition an unpredictable state of affairs which is, as Empédocle and Hermocrate both recognise, always subject to reversal. Such is the nature of myth, and this element is the key one in the constitution of the myth of Empedocles.

The third factor at play in the battle for identity is the receiver of the myth's propensity or indeed need to believe. This is clear in the facility with which Manès and Hermocrate are able to manipulate public opinion and create the myth of Empédocle which has come down to us today. Panthéa (p. 147) reports the absolute reversal in perspective towards Empédocle of her father Jaïre. Formerly one of Empédocle's biggest admirers (he set off with alacrity to spread the news of Empédocle's miraculous cure of his daughter, for example), now he reproduces the new authorised version which the priests have distributed:

> PANTHEA Je crois qu'il [mon père] avait bu… C'était après vous, Empédocle, qu'il en avait. Il racontait à ma mère, qui n'en croyait pas ses oreilles, que vous les avez tous trompés, qu'il faut en finir avec vous, que vous nous ferez avoir la guerre, que vous avez puisé dans le

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> denier public pour vous enrichir et je ne sais quoi, encore, que vous pervertissez les mœurs et que vous corrompez la jeunesse par votre exemple … (pp. 146-47).

Empédocle is aware of the forces at work against him, and approaches them with his habitual *dérision*. As the subject of the myth, he is interested more in the conditions which have facilitated its propagation: 'ce qui commence à me préoccuper, à m'intriguer même, c'est de voir de quelle manière les Agrigentins vont avaler la pilule,' (p. 146). Later (pp. 176-77), when looking directly into the faces of the inhabitants of Agrigento, he will see for himself not only the effectiveness with which the creators of the myth have worked but also the readiness of the audience to receive their message.

Fourth, as we indicated above, identity is in the hands of those who control the instruments of power and communication. Manès, the political leader and Hermocrate, the priest, are able to direct the narrative surrounding Empédocle for their own temporal purposes. Empédocle recognises this from the beginning: 'Au fond, je ne suis qu'un banal instrument entre tes mains..' (p. 46) he tells Manès.

Fifth, the identity of Empédocle is in the hands also of those who admire him. Information about the hero is presented by the young acolytes Pausanias and Panthéa, whilst the two shepherds exchange details about Empédocle's childhood, character and experiences overseas. The set-piece discussion (pp. 83-85) of the two acolytes is a sustained panegyric to an isolated, exceptional and sensitive being, in which the hero emerges as superhuman.

In challenging the growing myths about Empédocle, other myths are promoted. The identity 'Empédocle' which emerges at the end of the play is ambiguous. Shed of the mythological elements inherited from antiquity, the hero is shown to be human, with human passions and vulnerabilities. Yet he is in addition the subject of a new mythological garb, in terms of his new status as a kind of Romantic hero, possessed of supra-normal powers of emotion, sensitivity and humanity. This is the myth of the outsider, the unrecognised saviour, the purveyor of unwanted truths and intolerable sincerity. This is the inventor of rhetoric whose words have suffered misrepresentation, the product and ongoing victim of unfairness. Empédocle has become Le Grand Dab, another representation of the Guérin of the 1940s. The final scenes are the manifestation of a decade of personal and professional self-projections, scenes which were impossible to choreograph in real life but become feasible in myth: the face to face dismissal of temporal and religious power, the adulation of the young, the public recognition of the hero's exceptional qualities. Ultimately, however, rather than being a '*tragédie du refus'*, this is a '*tragédie de l'impuissance'*:

> EMPEDOCLE *Il faut se résigner au désert. Il faut accepter l'outrage. Car c'est à qui vous jugera. A qui vous diminuera. A qui voudra vous défigurer*. (p. 150)

This is the acknowledgement that, whatever defences can be set, the writer's reputation and the fate of his work is beyond his control.

Empédocle and the '*espace automythologique'*

Kauffmann[406] evaluates the character of the eponymous hero as follows:

> Empédocle incarne non pas un Guérin idéal mais un Guérin effectif, tel qu'il se voit : désabusé, 'trop las pour souffrir', persuade qu'il faut 'ni trop espérer en la vie ni trop désespérer d'autrui'.

[406] Kauffmann, 2007, p. 283.

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> Empédocle exprime le désenchantement d'un Guérin clos sur lui-même, revenu de tout, dénonçant l'esprit d'orthodoxie et les petitesses de l'engagement politique.

To take the second aspect of Kauffmann's view first, as we have seen the work itself reflects the development in the thinking of Guérin over a period of 15 years. *Empédocle* does embody the enmities resident in Guérin with which his private writing, notably his correspondence, is teeming.

Kauffmann's first point is, however, more contentious. In my view, *Empédocle* presents not Guérin 'tel qu'il se voit', but an idealised picture of what the writer would like to be considered to have become in the 15 year period of the work's gestation, a projection which incorporates the writer's actual world view within an entirely imaginary context. Demythification becomes *remythification*, autonarration through the medium of an existing mythological construct.

In its impossibility, that Guérin can never become an Empédocle, lies the writer's current malaise. The fact that in addition Guérin knows that he will never attain the lasting fame of Empédocle is the enduring injustice with which, throughout the post-war period, he was unable to come to terms. *Empédocle* is the locus for the settling of scores that Guérin would never settle, at least not in the manner of the hero of the *mythe*. The Empédocle of *Empédocle* is an idealised Guérin, adored by the young, revered but misunderstood by the masses, an individual confident of posterity's appreciation of his value.

There are clear signposts within the text that a reader of 1950 should see the myth as an exploration of contemporary issues.[407] First, owing to the fact that the language they use is infused with contemporary slang, the characters sound like members of 1950s society, dealing with the concerns and debates of their era. Second, the issues themselves are recognisably modern. The notion of '*engagement'* as understood by a 1940s audience is discredited through the experience of the hero, a victim of reluctant political commitment. In the collision of brute politics and intellectual integrity the temporary victor is obvious, but in the longer term – the text appears to contend – the true value of the intellectual's stance will be universally accepted. What *Empédocle* appears to present is the fate of a modern *uomo universalis*, victim of the unfairness displayed towards an individual of exceptional intellect and sensitivity subsequently forced to live a life in exile. The informed and careful reader of 1950 would have been able to make the inference.

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[407] The *mythe* was certainly received as such by a number of critics. The reviewer in *Bulletin de la NRF, 40 (October 1950),* described the hero as 'un garçon de notre temps'; writing in the *Nouvelles Littéraires* 26/10/50, p. 3, René Lalou praised *Empédocle* as '[une] interprétation toute vibrante à notre actualité'; J.P., the critic of *Bulletin des Lettres (Lyon)* in his article of 15th October 1950, saw the *mythe* as 'plutôt [une] histoire romancée d'Empédocle'. He went on to describe it as a satire of Sicilian democracy, 'ou de la nôtre'.

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Section 5 – Conclusion (& Bibliography)

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Conclusion

The ambition of this thesis was to provide a framework for a first comprehensive reading of Guérin's corpus, a conscious effort to allay the *incompréhension* which had hung over and disfigured it. Working within the post-Doubrovsky climate of *écritures intimes* described by Colonna, taking and redirecting the ideas of Gasparini, Lejeune, Schaeffer and Genette, I posited the need to see each of Guérin's individual works as blocks in the creation of an *espace automythologique*. This I contended was a global project with the design of endlessly re-presenting the self, a modern *Essais* but deploying a range of genres and modes of writing.

A critical feature of the project, I argued, was the writer's active presence within the paratext, using the space beyond the text itself as a locus of interaction and negotiation with the reader. In this, as well as other aspects of its construction – the use of real events, letters, documents within a fictional setting – I suggested that the technical accomplishments of the project pre-dated by decades many of the supposedly revolutionary ideas of Doubrovsky.

The identification of the global project – the *espace automythologique* – resolves much if not all of the enigma of Guérin's work, the main pillar of critical *incompréhension*. A search for order informed the immediate critique of Guérin's apparently disparate and incoherent work. The failure or refusal of the writer overtly to provide such a context served to amplify the negativity of reception in many reviews. Almost as a defence mechanism, a reflex he had refined in the Stalags, Guérin in turn perceived the (often unintentional) misrepresentation of his writing as malign, and proof of the rectitude of his inclination to withdrawal from society and silence. In this sense victim of his own *incompréhension*, the writer became remote, leaving his isolation only to conduct acts of self-harm via his destructive columns in *La Parisienne*. Perhaps the hints contained within the carefully constructed corpus list were inadequate, or needed to be made more explicit. We can only speculate as to the potential impact of an awareness of the environment of the *espace automythologique* on contemporary responses to the texts.

Without ever divulging the details of the wider project, in the post-war period Guérin did intervene directly in defence (as he perceived it) of his work. His contributions to *Juin* and *La Parisienne,* mostly obliquely but in one instance explicitly[408], offered a perspective on his own writing, and he was an occasional speaker at literary gatherings such as the Colloque de Royaumont.

Guérin himself was certain that this thesis would eventually arrive. His confident references to the reception of the future[409] were indirectly to us: we are the readers he had in mind. The fact that Guérin made the same claim twice is a measure of his faith both in the value of his project and in the inevitability of a proper reception. The closing section of *La Confession…* underscores this idea, there being no doubt, in Diogène's projection, as to the reality of the *happy few* of his acolytes of the future.

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[408] 'Les égarements de la critique', *Juin*, 40, 19/11/46 (in *Chroniques*, 2015, p. 163).

[409] Two comments in letters to Anne Heurgon. On *Parmi…* 'C'est un livre qui ne sera compris que bien plus tard' (10/3/1950). On *Empédocle*: 'C'est un ouvrage qui sera compris plus tard' (27/2/1951). Cited by Kauffmann, 2007, p. 263, and pp. 282-83.

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This is a corpus distinctive for its stylistic range, a reflection of a desire to explore and express the multiplicity of the self by creating a multi-form prose collage. In some cases, in which no published text exists, there is evidence of progress towards one, for example the work post-captivity on *La Sottise du Temps*, the missing '*journal'*.

Whilst unlocking the door to Guérin's *oeuvre* and providing a framework for its reception, this thesis does not claim to be an exhaustive study of the richness of his work. Guérin's commitment to innovation is evident in works which, unfortunately, there has been insufficient space to describe in detail here. Some comments might nonetheless be added in relation to other work.

La Main Passe (1947), in all likelihood originally a fragment of *Ebauche*, is a first-person stream of consciousness monologue heavily influenced by Guérin's reading of American novelists of the period. In the voice of Patrick Beaurepaire, his long-time friend, this is a panegyric to Le Grand Dab, an implementation of a conceit to see the self from without. The work made a considerable impression on Henri Calet[410]:

> j'ai été très bouleversé par cette confession ; il me semble que si je me mettais à parler vraiment je dirais à peu près ce que vous dites […] il y a chez vous encore une force de révolte que j'ai perdue aussi. / Encore un livre qui vous vaudra les critiques des bien-pensants, l'estime des autres.

In *La Peau Dure* (1948), the polymorphous Guérin explores his feminine side, with three novellas containing the first-person confession of three sisters. Paulhan (letter dated 22/11/48) praised Guérin's ability to assume the female voice: '*Merci de la Peau Dure. C'est très prenant ; c'est à la fois puissant, et (comment dire ?) gentil.*'

Un romancier dit son mot (1948) offered readers a comprehensive autonarrational package. The book begins with short homages to Arland, Paulhan and Grenier, that is the identification of the writer's literary 'family'. These are followed by a series of texts in which Guérin articulates his view on specific issues: sincerity, obscenity laws, the role of critics and so on. The major essay, *Contre une terreur des faits*, sets out Guérin's particular approach to fiction. As a clear expression of a standpoint, this is as close as the published corpus comes to a personal manifesto.

Du côté de Chez Malaparte (1950) is a hagiographical account of Guérin's new friend and associate, a study in (shared) outsidership. When Guérin rails against the grotesque nature of the 'legend' that surrounds Malaparte (p. 38), the self-referentiality is powerful: 'J'en veux donc à ceux qui sont responsables de cette malveillante déformation, à ceux qui l'ont mal lu et ont prêté une oreille trop complaisante aux potins'. This text is Guérin seen through the prism of Malaparte. Book-ended by the conspicuous presence of the writer (the personal dedication from Malaparte at the start, the portrait photograph of Guérin in Capri at the end), we are reminded that Guérin is one of a distinguished list of house guests of Malaparte, including Rommel, Le Corbusier, Churchill, Togliatti and Moravia.

Composed during the same stay in Capri (March-April 1950), *Fragment Testamentaire* (1950) is a short address to 'Delphine' – the inscribed cipher for Sonia – in which Guérin contemplates his future as he approaches his 45th birthday. Despite the evidence which would justify withdrawal into silence, not only the brutal reception of his

[410] Letter dated 1/8/47. *Calet, Guérin Correspondance*, 2005, p. 223.

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own books, but also that accorded the work of Molière, Stendhal, Nietzsche and Dostoïevski, Guérin re-commits to producing the texts which he has in his head.

Generically a confession, *La Tête Vide* (1952) is a collection of different types of texts – eye-witness accounts, family statements, ballistics reports, investigating officer's statements, correspondence, diary entries – presented without editorial summary, which demonstrate the processes at play within the creation of myth. Assimilated into the text is a real document, a piece of evidence from an actual police inquiry, underlining again the permeable nature of the boundary of referential and fictional spaces.

In an *œuvre* as under-appreciated as Guérin's, it is important to highlight the successes. *Quand…* is perhaps the corpus' outstanding work, a very readable yet intensely problematic exploration of the subject, which raises many theoretical questions about biography and *témoignage*. Had it secured the Goncourt which it probably deserved, it may yet still be widely read. All of *Ebauche* is innovatory, its most successful volume commercially – *L'Apprenti* - also the text that would be most accessible to modern readers. At a technical level, the other two volumes boast qualities that pre-date autofictional developments of two decades later. The least original work of the corpus, *Zobain*, albeit flawed in its conception and prone to *longueurs*, contains some of Guérin's most poignant and reflective writing.

Guérin's project was founded on a commitment to experimentation. This carried with it risks, as identified by one contemporary critic, Morvan Lebesque, in his perceptive review of *Parmi…*[411] : 'Raymond Guérin est, de tous les romanciers français d'aujourd'hui, celui qui se livre à l'expérience la plus dangereuse. […] Dangereuse pour lui : il travaille sans filet. Qui pourrait, au surplus, porter dès aujourd'hui un jugement définitif ?'

Lebesque's observation (and metaphor) are powerful: first that the writer is exposing himself to danger; second that this is witting; and third that, as he himself knows, there is no guarantee of a safe landing. As early as 1949, Lebesque detects that a definitive judgement of this work in progress, with its own apparent direction ('Raymond Guérin sait où il va : il ne s'agit plus pour nous que de le quitter ou de [le] suivre'), must be postponed.

To some extent, the inconsistent quality of the *œuvre* is an inevitable result of this choice. As with all experiments, many fail, some are near misses, and only a few may produce results. What is important within the failures and near-misses, however, is the nature and merit of the attempt, that what is revealed by the experiment is a method rather than an outcome. With its stylistic and conceptual innovation Guérin's *œuvre*, as we have shown, embodies precisely this characteristic.

[411] *Carrefour*, 2 novembre 1949, p. 8.

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